



**TITLE**

Student-Institution Fit Adopting a Faith-Based University Case Study

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# STUDENT-INSTITUTION FIT ADOPTING A FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

Thesis submitted by

Cindy Croucher-Wright

For the award of Doctor of Philosophy

Institute of Education

St Mary's University, London

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## Acronyms:

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>BAME</b>	Black and Minority Ethnic
<b>BIS</b>	Dept for Business Innovation and Skills
<b>DfES</b>	Dept for Education
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HEFCE</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for England
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Educational Institute
<b>HEPI</b>	Higher Education Policy Institute
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Statistical Agency
<b>KEF</b>	Knowledge Excellence Framework
<b>NCOP</b>	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
<b>NSS</b>	National Student Survey
<b>OfS</b>	Office for Students
<b>OIA</b>	Independent Office of the Adjudicator
<b>REF</b>	Research Excellence Framework
<b>TEF</b>	Teaching Excellence Framework
<b>UCAS</b>	University and Colleges Admissions Service
<b>UKRI</b>	UK Research and Innovation
<b>UUK</b>	Universities UK
<b>WP</b>	Widening Participation



## Abstract

Student-Institution Fit, Adopting a Faith-Based University Case Study  
Cindy Croucher-Wright  
St Mary's University, London  
For the Award of Doctor of Philosophy  
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The research reported in this thesis took place at a time of unprecedented challenge and financial uncertainty for universities. Challenges came following the introduction of tuition fees (1998), Brexit, Covid-19 and declining birth rates. Such issues have resulted in the establishment of an increased competitive market that has seen institutions utilise incentives and unconditional offers to students to ensure recruitment targets are met.

Against this background, this PhD research concerns student belonging and fit with an emphasis on cultural capital, and the congruency of students' personal values and those of the institution. The enquiry asks whether students considered 'fitting in' when applying to university and ascertained if institutional values matched their own, and so explores areas that have hereunto been under-researched. Unsurprisingly, extant research indicates that students who fit with their university are more satisfied, and conversely, those who do not are more likely to misfit resulting in unhappiness, stress and withdrawal.

The PhD had three phases, and incorporated longitudinal and mixed methods approaches. Phase One scrutinised the findings of the UKES survey between 2018 and 2019, which asked students why they chose to attend St Mary's University, a faith-based institution. In Phase Two, 22 students and alumni were interviewed to explore the rationale for student choice; thematic analysis was used to establish St Mary's unique differentiators. Phase Three explored photography within the undergraduate prospectus to establish whether it was representative of students' experiences and how the brand or *St Mary's Way* was communicated.

Drawing on models proposed by Gilbreath, Kim and Nichols (2011), Schwartz, Cieciuch, Vecchione, Davidov, Fischer, Beierlein, Ramos, Verkasalo, Lönnqvist, Demirutku, Dirilen-Gumus and Konty (2012) and generic HR theory, the research culminated in the creation of a Holistic Student Fit Model which highlights the importance of congruent personal and institutional values.

Of the many recommendations drawn from the findings, institutions are encouraged to ensure their social environments accommodate the increasingly diverse student population and their expectations. Universities are urged to re-evaluate how they communicate their culture to non-traditional students, allowing these learners to decide whether the institution has similar values to their own. Various examples of how the Model might be used to good effect in these matters are presented.

It is also recommended that faith-based institutions articulate to students what a faith-based university is and how they differ from secular universities. Faith-based universities tend to market themselves based on their principles but do not explain how these principles translate into the everyday student experience. Examples of appreciation, mistrust and misinterpretation of St Mary's Catholic ethos, as experienced by students, are presented.

Taken together, this research has created new theory in the field of student-fit and presents new realms of future practice for those in student recruitment and retention.

## Acknowledgements

This body of work has taken nearly five years to complete, and has at last reached its final destination. I have a number of people to thank who have guided and supported me along my journey.

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I would like to thank St Mary's University for allowing me to utilise the UKES survey and for access to the student records systems to allow me to analyse it. I am also grateful for compacting my working hours to allow me time to study. I hope the recommendations are meaningful and are considered for the future.

I would like to thank my unofficial support network which has included Dr Jade Salim who has let me vent my frustrations, my daughter Dannielle who has been my proof-reader and the other PhD students at St Mary's with whom I have compared notes and who have provided a critical ear.

Had I known before I started how much effort, dare I say blood, sweat and tears, this piece of work would require and how much resilience it would demand, I am not entirely sure I would have started. However, I did get onto the PhD rollercoaster and I have completed it, something of which I am very proud. I would like to thank my family, especially for (nearly always) respecting my sacrosanct Mondays.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction to the Research

### 1.1) The Study

Universally, humans have a fundamental desire to belong, and it is this desire that motivates and drives human behaviour (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). According to Maslow (1943), belonging is the third most important human need following those vital to survival which include physiological needs such as food and safety. Strayhorn (2019) states that belonging is crucial to success at university. In July 2016, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) produced a report titled '*Through the Lens of Students: how the perceptions of higher education influence applicants' choices*' (UCAS, 2016). This report established that 54% of prospective undergraduate students felt it was important to consider whether they would 'fit in' when applying to university (p. 67). The objective of this PhD project was to establish whether students applying to a faith-based university considered 'fitting in' and it proceeded to explore whether they felt they fitted in at St Mary's University, Twickenham.

Undergraduate university students in the UK invest, on average, three years of their lives, uncountable hours of work and a great deal of money in the pursuit of a degree. As with any significant purchase, students (and often their parents) devote a considerable amount of time when selecting where they will make their investment to receive the best possible return. What that return is and how it is valued depends upon the individual students' motivation for pursuing a university education. These motivations may include career aspirations, personal or intellectual development, living independently away from home or making new friends for life.

To reiterate, the fundamental aim of this body of research was to understand student-fit within the context of a faith-based institution; the reasons why students of all faiths and none selected St Mary's, a Catholic institution, as their university of choice; and to ascertain whether students applying to a faith-based university

considered 'fitting in' during the application process. To achieve this aim, there were four objectives. These were:

- 1) To discover whether students set out to select an institution that had similar values to their own;
- 2) To ascertain why students selected St Mary's and whether there was commonality based on students' characteristics;
- 3) To question why students chose to attend a faith-based institution, irrespective of their own faith stance or worldview.

As the research evolved, an additional aim developed, which was:

- 4) To create a model illustrating personal values and institutional fit.

As this body of work focused upon both personal and institutional values, St Mary's University was used as a case study due to its unique Catholic heritage, culture and ethos. Yin (2014) states that "a case study allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (p. 4) which, as highlighted by Punch (2014), allows the researcher to "develop as full an understanding of the case as possible" (p. 120). St Mary's was established in 1850 by the Catholic Poor Schools Committee aiming to train teachers to educate poor Catholic children. It remained predominantly a teacher training college until the mid-1970s when it expanded into new disciplines. St Mary's became a University College in 2006, a university in 2014 (St Mary's University, History and Heritage, 2020a) and achieved research degree awarding powers in 2021 (St Mary's University, Research Degree Awarding Powers, 2021a).

## **1.2) Research Context**

Claims about successful and satisfied students being those who best fit with the institution stem from research carried out by Pervin and Rubin (1967) into student satisfaction. This research has been revisited and updated, with the authors coming to similar conclusions as before, despite changes in the Higher Education (HE) environment and in society over time (Denson and Bowman, 2015; Gilbreath,

Kim and Nichols, 2011). Pervin and Rubin (1967) recognised the elements of 'fit' as: comparable institution and student values, social opportunities and quality of staff. Conversely, this body of research also suggests that when students do not fit with an institution they are more likely to be unhappy, unsuccessful or dissatisfied, particularly if there is a misfit of core values. When this misfit between institution and student occurs, students are more likely to experience higher levels of stress and feel conflicted. In the absence of fit, dissatisfied students are more likely to formally complain (Jones, 2006), drop-out (Alves and Raposo, 2007) and issue lower student satisfaction scores on surveys (Bates and Kaye, 2014).

Dissatisfaction and its consequences are discussed in depth in the literature review in Chapter Two. Unhappiness and dissatisfaction at university can lead to anxiety, depression, mental health problems and in extreme cases suicide (Gilbreath et al, 2011). It is reported that in the UK during the academic year 2016-17, 95 students committed suicide which equates to one student every four days (Megraoui, 2021). The reasons why students take their own lives is thought to be driven by mental health challenges including "difficulties with academic studies, financial problems, key transition points and broader social and cultural pressures" (OfS, 2022). When bearing in mind the consequences of students not fitting in, it is important to both the student and the institution that they work together towards their common goal of achieving a degree.

The relationship between student and university can be compared to that of belonging to a health club. Commenting on student expectations, Jones (2006) stated that "the outcome requires input from both parties and cannot be guaranteed; the student has to prove him or herself worthy of the qualification" (p. 71). This symbiotic relationship can be challenging in an increasingly consumeristic environment. Tutors participating in research in 2002 reported that students tell them they have paid for their degree and therefore expect to pass (Rolfe, 2002). However, knowledge is not passive and the student/tutor relationship is co-creational with effort required by both parties. The institution should endeavour to ensure that students' experiences are congruent with their expectations in order to

retain students, receive favourable student feedback (referenced in national league tables) and for students to graduate into successful professional careers (Bates and Kaye, 2013; Alves and Raposo, 2007). Therefore, it should be incumbent on institutions to understand student expectations, to be aware of what they are and where they originate from.

### **1.3) Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this PhD research is made up of three themes:

- The HE environment;
- Student fit including personal characteristics;
- Values and culture.

Each theme is now discussed and then expanded in greater depth during the literature review.

#### **1.3.1) The Higher Education Environment**

In comparatively recent years, the higher education environment has faced numerous challenges. Amongst these challenges were the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, a demographic dip in 18-21-year-olds between 2009 and 2020; the emergence of a competitive market since the removal of number controls in 2012; and Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Prior to 1998, the sector had been relatively stable, therefore this piece of research is to be viewed through the lens of a turbulent environment and questions to what extent it matters to both the individual student and the university if students fit or not.

Most universities are reliant upon student tuition fee income as their main source of revenue, so they must recruit and retain students to meet business targets assuring their financial security (Moran and Powell, 2018). Facing increased and fierce competition, some institutions have lowered their entry tariffs, offered attractive bursaries, unconditional offers or other incentives to solicit the volume of applications they require (Ellett, 2018; Which?, 2014). The rush to recruit students has created a situation where enthusiastic recruitment strategies have strained

academic integrity as “new student audiences” with fewer UCAS tariff points have been recruited in an effort for institutions to remain financially solvent (Moran and Powell, 2018 p. 16). The overwhelming onus has become recruiting the right volume of students in a contracting market with increased volatility during clearing.

Throughout this thesis there is reference to ‘non-traditional’ students. There is no definitive definition of a non-traditional student as this is a catch-all for an inhomogeneous group which includes, amongst others, working-class students, first generation students, those from ethnic minorities, students who have been within the care system, mature students and sometimes commuting students. Due to the increased student population driven by non-traditional students and their subsequent impact upon the sector, issues pertaining to non-traditional students will be discussed further during the literature review. This discussion will address claims relating to the ability of non-traditional students as it has been suggested that HE has been ‘dumbed down’ to facilitate widening participation (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2010) and that institutions have needed to provide additional tuition in core skills such as maths in order to support students with lower entry points (Moran and Powell, 2018). This will be explored within the literature review with a focus on student expectations and attitudes.

Within literature there is also reference to ‘traditional students’ but again, this is not defined. For the purpose of this thesis and for clarity, based on trends, historically a traditional student was more likely to be male, white, middle or upper-class and to have attended an independent or grammar school. In addition to gender, ethnicity and social status, historically a traditional university student left home to study. University students would have resided in communal Halls of Residence, lived, studied and socialised with likeminded peers and the wider institutional community. This profile has changed over time as the number of female university students overtook their male counterparts, beginning in the mid-1990s when polytechnics offering courses in nursing and teaching, predominantly studied by females, became universities (Bolton, 2012). Literature shows that there are



different expectations between traditional and non-traditional students and this is explored further during the literature review and thesis.

The different expectations of traditional and non-traditional students are of relevance to St Mary's as their student body is typically as follows: 40% of students enrolled at St Mary's are the first in their family to go to university; 30% are from low-income families (those with a combined household income of less than £25k); and around 30% of the undergraduates at St Mary's come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME). Existing research maintains that these types of students often do not have the role models, family support or experience of significant others to offer them advice on their university journey. Typically, these students are unsure about what is required from them as part of their time within higher education, leading to mismatched expectations. This lack of experience makes it harder for them to decide which university is right for them (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010; Archer, Hollingwood and Haksall, 2007; Lehmann, 2007).

### **1.3.2) Student Fit**

'Fitting in' is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "to feel that you belong to a particular group and are accepted by that group" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). During the literature review for this research, it transpired that literature uses the terms 'fitting in' and 'belonging' interchangeably, and indeed the dictionary definition of 'fit' includes reference to belonging. Belonging, is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "to be in the right place, or a suitable place; to feel happy or comfortable in a situation" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a). A further comparison of the two definitions reveals a subtle difference. This subtlety is summarised by Brown (2020) who states "fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are" (p. 35). This point of difference is interesting. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the definition is as per the Cambridge Dictionary and includes reference to belonging: "to feel that

you belong to a particular group and are accepted by that group” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a).

Fitting in and belonging are subjective concepts and are components of student satisfaction, but there is a difference between fit, belonging and satisfaction. There is no definitive definition of student satisfaction so in an effort to articulate, two definitions are offered; one definition is from Lo (2010) and an alternative from Sum, McCaskey and Kyuyene (2010) which together represent the spectrum. Lo (2010, p. 48) defines student satisfaction as “the subjective perceptions, on the students’ part of how well a learning environment supports academic success”. Alternatively, Sum et al (2010) state that student satisfaction “refers to the attraction, pride or positive feeling that the students develop toward the programme or institution” (p. 44). Therefore, student fit refers to a feeling of belonging and acceptance, whereas student satisfaction refers to someone’s expectations being met.

The UCAS commissioned report titled *Through the lens of students: how perceptions of higher education influence applicants’ choices* (UCAS, 2016) found that students “adopt a well thought through and sensible approach to university selection” and highlight the main consideration as being “career-focused” (p. 3). The same report found that 54% of students felt that ‘fitting in’ was important when applying to university; the report also highlighted that there were significant differences between students from different backgrounds. For example, students from an advantaged background were 18% more likely to report that fitting in was of importance to them (p. 6). Much of the research to-date within the area of student fit focuses upon first generation, widening participation, and working-class students. The research into student fit within the context of socioeconomic group is discussed in the literature review. The literature review will also examine current research into different groups of students, including those from working class backgrounds, disadvantaged students, BAME students and those whose parents did not attend university, and will compare non-traditional and traditional students.

The influence that different backgrounds have on the choice's students make will be reviewed and this will allow for similarities and differences of student cohorts to be identified and scrutinised.

During Chapter Two, the research into the impact of socioeconomic factors affecting students is reviewed alongside research into the influence of habitus and cultural capital on student choice. Habitus is a concept created by the French sociologist Bourdieu. Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been used widely across a range of fields but has been subject to criticism, misunderstanding and sometimes controversy as researchers have questioned the logic and cohesion of the theory (Asimaki and Koustourakis, 2014; Nash, 1999). Habitus refers to deeply ingrained characteristics, habits and skills created by life experiences. Despite the criticism, habitus within this body of research is a useful term because it underpins the articulation of cultural differences between traditional and non-traditional students, why groups of people behave differently based on their life experiences and the impact this experience has on decision making. Cultural capital is defined as "the distinctions that develop between individuals and groups due to differences in access to education, family background, occupation, and wealth, giving them advantages and serving as a signifier of an individual's status within a group or society" (Open Education Sociology Dictionary, 2019). Sharing cultural capital with others, for example, attending the same school, creates a collective identity. Cultural capital is relevant to this PhD research because of the increase in first generation students and their lack of experience of higher education, availability of role models and scarcity of advice from family and friends (Archer et al 2007). First generation students do not grow up listening to their parents discussing their experiences of university life, living in Halls, making new friends and so on; they do not have the same anecdotes to draw on. In 2016, research undertaken by UCAS found that the younger children are when they become informed about the nature of HE and the opportunities it offers, the more likely they are to apply (UCAS, 2016). They found that 20% of applicants in their study had decided they would apply to university when aged ten or under. Shaw (2013) stated that "Over 30

years ago, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) asserted that people self-select (or deselect) in certain situations, including their applications to higher education, because they carry preconceptions of the life paths acceptable to 'people like us' – a reflection of what they call 'habitus'" (p. 196). Cultural capital will be discussed further during the literature review along with other factors which may influence or impact students' perceptions of HE.

A number of models relating to the concept of fit are evaluated and are discussed further in the literature review in Chapter Two. Researchers including Gilbreath et al (2011) and Lawrence and Lawrence (2010) have considered and adapted person/situation fit theory, needs/supply fit, person/person fit and environment fit theory to create 'student/institution fit' theory. Gilbreath et al (2011) stated that students who fit with their chosen university showed higher levels of "psychological well-being and satisfaction" (p. 58) and identified sixteen factors contributing to student fit which were categorised into three environments: social, academic and physical. These environments were utilised to articulate the elements of student fit. The sixteen factors are: enjoyable social life; sports and recreational opportunities; great student body; a highly regarded athletic reputation; great support services; great non-academic facilities (for example: track, theatre); diverse student body; a scholarly/intellectual campus climate; state of the art facilities (for example: laboratories); highly regarded academic reputation; great school size; great geographic location; a safe environment; a pleasant physical environment (aesthetics); convenient campus lay-out; and, great affordability. This model was adapted and used for data collection purposes in this research over a two-year period as part of the UK Experience Survey (UKES). It should be noted that these factors are secondary to the primary factors which limit student choice such as students achieving the necessary tariff points for the course and the institution offering a relevant programme.

### **1.3.3) Culture and Values**

The third element of the conceptual framework relates to culture and values. The literature review discusses Schwartz and colleague's extensive research, spanning forty years, into human values and how personal values influence our belief systems and decision making. In addition to individual values, the literature review addresses organisational values. St Mary's values are intrinsically linked to their Catholic heritage. St Mary's is a Catholic University with a long history of philanthropy following its initial purpose of training teachers to educate poor Catholic children. This can be seen in their current mission statement: "We are an inclusive Catholic University seeking to develop the whole person and we empower our community to have a positive impact on the world" (St Mary's University, Mission and Purpose, 2019a).

St Mary's values are inclusiveness, generosity of spirit, respect and excellence. According to the website, "Our four core values define St Mary's and underpin all we do as a University" (St Mary's University, Mission and Purpose, 2019a). These values and their influence upon students, staff and the learning environment are considered and discussed within the third section of the literature review.

### **1.4) Research Philosophy**

My own culture, values, family and educational background have influenced my personal journey, and this has been acknowledged as a factor affecting my position as a researcher. As a researcher, I first needed to be aware of my own experiences, beliefs and assumptions and the potential impact these would have upon my study. The influence our personal world view has upon our research is highlighted by Walliman (2011) who stated that it is "fairly obvious then that we should hold a view on what knowledge is and how we can make sense of our surroundings. These views will be based on the philosophical stance that we take" (p. 15). This awareness is particularly important when undertaking research related to culture and values as highlighted again by Walliman (2011) when he writes, "the cultural background and assumptions of the researcher may unduly

influence the interpretations and descriptions” (p. 12). For this reason, and to ensure transparency and accountability, I have started this research by considering my own culture and values.

I have reflected upon my own familial cultural heritage within an educational context and how this informed the research process, particularly how these assumptions have influenced my approach and research design. During the literature review in Chapter Two, I discuss Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and cultural capital. As noted, habitus can be defined as the social interactions which make you the person you are, moulded by your life experiences, the people who have influenced you, the environment, what you eat, where you buy your groceries, the places you have been and who you socialise with. Habitus is unconscious and is like a community code, shaped by the people you interact with and made of deeply ingrained characteristics, habits and skills. As part of my work, I have reflected upon my own habitus and cultural capital and the impact this had upon my motivation to undertake this research. To contextualise how and why my habitus has influenced my research, I have briefly summarised my own personal educational journey as follows.

My formative years were influenced by being born in 1970, the decade which saw the Winter of Discontent, wage caps, the three-day week, inflation spiking in 1975 at 25%, strikes and power cuts (Pettinger, 2017). Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister in 1979 and during the next decade there was a deep worldwide recession. The UK experienced high interest rates, soaring house prices and high levels of unemployment (BBC News, The Thatcher Years in Statistics, 2013). The economy did not improve until the end of the decade which then saw a boom in the late 80s, when I left secondary school.

Within this tough economic climate, when choosing my ‘O’ level options in 1983, my parents discouraged me from academic subjects in favour of more practical skills like typewriting. Their encouragement to acquire vocational qualifications was based on their own life experiences. To quote my mother, “what good is ‘O’

level biology when you are standing in the dole queue?”. Neither of my parents have any formal qualifications; my father was a plumber whilst my mother held down several unskilled jobs simultaneously to make ends meet, both struggling to stay in work during a decade of high unemployment. Both of my parents had similar family backgrounds, both having working class parents. Their fathers worked on the railways and their mothers were housewives.

Despite having the academic ability, I was actively discouraged by my parents to continue in education. The expectation in our household, part of my habitus, was to leave school at sixteen and find a job to ensure an income, as was the case for my parents and probably their parents before them. Equally, the careers advisors at my comprehensive secondary school in West London, did not discuss the option or route to higher education. This lack of encouragement was not personal, it was indicative of the time as in the 80s only 14% of the population went to university. Following multiple initiatives to encourage wider participation in HE, this rose to 25% in 1990 and 50.2% in 2017/18 (Coughlan, 2019a). In the 80s, school leavers were encouraged onto the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), an on-the-job training programme in the workplace. This discourse from influential adults was unquestioningly persuasive and without a doubt, ‘people like me’ left school and got a job.

Having since read Bourdieu’s theories regarding habitus and cultural capital, I have come to understand how my life journey and those of my peers can be contextualised. This context allows me to relate to ‘people like me’ and importantly understand why we have different challenges to overcome when applying to university, despite having the ability. Although the world has moved on since I left school in the mid-80s, similar obstacles still exist for first generation students. From my first-hand experiences I can empathise with the challenges faced by students who are first in their family to enter HE. I can appreciate their families’ concerns about the cost of a degree and the amount of debt students accrue. I recognise why some question the value of qualifications, and understand why getting a job

can seem more sensible in the short term. I can understand the lack of support some students can experience when searching for the right course, at the right institution, which would give them the best prospects. Parents who do not have any first-hand experience of higher education can struggle to offer advice to their children, not out of indifference, but from a lack of understanding regarding the complexities and from the multitude of confusing information available. I can also understand their concerns that once they arrive at university, many will wonder if they will fit in and wonder 'Will there be people like me?'

I eventually went to university aged 38, taking an MA in Management at London South Bank University. I chose to attend a university with a part-time course, within a commutable distance, offering a course which would accept me via a non-traditional route, recognising my qualifications, life and work experience. I specifically selected a course where I could opt-out after a year allowing me to save face if I struggled. Initially I only committed to a post-graduate certificate which allowed me the option to drop out after a year if everyone else was a) younger than me, b) cleverer than me and/or: c) I hated it/or could not cope whilst working full time and looking after my family. Even aged 38, I was worried about fitting in, or conversely, standing out from the crowd.

My MA dissertation was focused on student satisfaction and amongst my recommendation was that universities should have an in-depth understanding of the expectations of prospective students. As part of my MA research, students confirmed that their expectations were formed by marketing materials (such as the prospectus), open days, events and activities organised by the institution and its agents (such as the Students' Union), and by the look and feel of the campus. I stated that the institution should target the type of students that they can most satisfy; those who most fit with the institution, via these vehicles. By targeting students who best fit with the institution, students were more likely to be satisfied. When I was studying for my MA, my role at St Mary's included responding to



student complaints and enhancing student experience, therefore student satisfaction was a priority for myself and my team.

I also stated that the institution should be clear on the type of student they are trying to attract and must fulfil the promises made. This included the expectations of all types of student cohorts such as foundation and postgraduate students, as well as part-time and mature students and those who choose not to live in the Halls of Residence.

Ideally universities should portray their culture and ethos clearly to allow students to assess whether it is the right place for them to invest their time, energy, and money. In the current economy, universities are competing for students and there is a tension between recruiting enough students and recruiting the 'right' students. This competition was highlighted by the Times Higher Education (THE) when they interviewed Mike Nicholson, director of student recruitment and admissions at the University of Bath in August 2017, stating "that institutions are likely to make offers to students with lower grades than in previous years in a bid to secure them amid the competition" (Else, 2017).

My motivation for this piece of research is to build upon my earlier research into student satisfaction, of which student fit is a factor. I am also driven by my values of integrity, honesty and fairness, and I believe potential students should be provided with all the tools available to make an informed decision about where they chose to study. This is wider than just the course, type of assessment and employment statistics. I believe students should be given the information to be able to understand the culture of the institution in order to decide whether it is the right place for them, so they can achieve their desired outcome and be satisfied. Reflecting on this, I have acknowledged my bias as a researcher and have designed my study to minimise the impact of this. This is discussed further within Chapter Three which addresses the methodology for this study.

### **1.5) Purpose of the study**

The aims for this piece of research have already been stated alongside the purpose which is to generate a greater understanding of student fit and belonging. Additionally, St Mary's University should benefit from the findings as they will have a greater understanding of their student body. This body of work has established the main reasons why students chose the institution, what their expectations were and whether the institution met them. Crucially, this type of understanding is invaluable for the university, providing the evidence and data necessary to make informed decisions, helping to shape future corporate and strategic plans, funding decisions, marketing campaigns and brand identity particularly with reference to communicating culture and values. Were St Mary's to adopt marketing strategies based on this data, future campaigns could clearly communicate St Mary's institutional values. By articulating institutional values to students in real terms, potential students will be empowered to make informed decisions around student fit, which in turn should lead to increased retention, increased student satisfaction and fewer complaints. My research focus seeks to address the gap in current literature relating to student/university-fit within a religious context, focusing on the culture and values of both the student and the institution.

As previously stated, this research is focused on St Mary's University, a Catholic institution based in Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, South West London and takes the form of a case study. Using a mixed methods approach, the study surveyed and interviewed students and alumni to ascertain their reasons for choosing to attend St Mary's. The results were analysed with reference to a range of factors including gender, religion, ethnicity, faculty and whether the students' parents were educated to degree level.

There were three phases of enquiry. Phase One collected quantitative data via a national survey, the UKES. It was a longitudinal survey comparing responses year on year for two years. To complement the data, in Phase Two qualitative interviews were conducted to drill down into the factors affecting the decision-

making process, specifically focused on fitting in and whether there were factors unique to St Mary's, a Catholic university, which made it their university of choice. In Phase Three, the prospectus was used as a tool to represent how the university communicates its brand, specifically via the photography presented, primarily in the university's prospectus, to prompt discussion and explore whether the students felt the pictures were reflective of their experience. In addition to current students, alumni were interviewed alongside a unique cohort of staff who are also alumni.

## **1.6) Thesis Summary**

This chapter has addressed the rationale for the research project detailing the conceptual framework and the aims. The rest of the thesis progresses as follows:

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature, divided into three sections. Part one is the Higher Education (HE) environment. Part two reviews student fit models, the benefits of fitting in and belonging, cultural capital, student expectations and retention. Finally, part three reviews culture and values, both personal values and those within HE along with how these are evidenced and their impact. As St Mary's is a Catholic institution, the Catholic faith and the influence it has upon student experience is also critiqued. The gap in the research relates to personal values and congruency with institutional values and whether this impacts upon student fit.

Chapter Three details the research strategy which was a case study and the methodology adopted for each of the three phases. The study was longitudinal over a three-year period and took a mixed methods approach. Phase One was a questionnaire within the UKES survey asking students why they chose to attend St Mary's. Phase Two consisted of semi-structured interviews, asking why students chose St Mary's and Phase Three used photographs within the St Mary's undergraduate prospectus to establish whether they were representative of students' experiences.

Chapter Four details the outcome of a question relating to university choice within St Mary's UKES survey in 2018 to 2019. The data were analysed by a range of

characteristics including gender, religion, and ethnicity, using a needs supply model. In total, 468 students responded to the survey and the chapter will detail the reasons students gave for choosing St Mary's.

Chapter Five details the findings from Phases Two and Three, which adopted semi-structured interviews with twenty-two students, including alumni. Phase Two addressed the differentiating factors between universities to establish the main influencers. A thematic analysis established whether or not St Mary's famous sporting alumni, the facilities and the opportunities to participate within sports teams and societies were high in terms of importance for student fit. Similarly, this chapter also addresses the importance of the longstanding teacher training reputation and the Catholic ethos in terms of student fit. Phase Three used photographs from within the 2019/2020 undergraduate prospectus as a tool to elicit discussion about why students chose to attend St Mary's. The images are signifiers of the brand and contribute to one's impression and expectations. The study asked students whether the photographs portrayed their lived experience and therefore whether the brand was congruent with their experience. The prospectus is physical evidence for communicating quality of an intangible service, such as education. Due to the similarity of the themes for both studies, the findings are presented together in one chapter, in three parts to avoid repetition.

Chapter Six presents and discusses the model created as part of this body of work, the Holistic Student Fit Model generated in part by using models created by Gilbreath et al (2011), Schwartz, Cieciuch, Vecchione, Davidov et al (1992) and generic person/fit HR models alongside the findings from the study. The model evolved during Phases Two and Three which aimed to establish whether personal and institutional values were linked. The chapter includes five student case studies which capture and the students' voice and the themes from within their interviews.

Chapter Seven offers a final conclusion and recommendations arising from the research. In the next chapter, the literature review, I will focus on the three areas of the conceptual framework adopting pertinent and associated literatures and

research. The three areas are: the HE environment, student fit and institutional culture and values.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### 2.1) Overview

This chapter will review literature pertaining to student fit in higher education. As introduced, it is structured into three sections: the HE environment, student fit, and then culture and values. The salient environment is contextualised pre- and post-the introduction of tuition fees in September 1998. The literature pertaining to tuition fees has been reviewed to assess whether the introduction of fees had an impact upon students' attitudes and behaviour and to address the subsequent changing landscape of the sector.

The current literature analysing student fit, which is predominantly focused upon socioeconomic factors and first-generation students, has been reviewed.

Alongside socioeconomic research, a review focusing on disparities within HE pertaining to ethnicity and gender has been undertaken. The literature relating to ethnicity and gender has been considered due to the aim of ascertaining whether there is commonality of university selection based on certain student characteristics. In addition, research relating to the concept and elements of consumerism has also been reviewed due to the contentious claims pertaining to students being consumers. The literature review also assesses existing models to measure and reflect fit.

The third section of the literature review considered how institutional culture and values are communicated alongside the influence of personal values and a sense of belonging. This includes the impact and ethos of religious institutions, institutional values, how these are evidenced and the influence values have on the organisational culture. It is within this area, pertaining specifically to the relationship between human values and the values of the university, where there is a gap in current research and knowledge.

The literature included within this chapter consists of traditional sources such as journal articles, academic texts and professional reports. In addition, website,

magazine and newspaper sources and data from within the public domain have been read and taken into consideration. Whilst it is acknowledged that such media can be considered as being populist, lacking in rigour, as being potentially flawed and/or biased, the complete spectrum of views were reviewed to reflect and represent current thinking. Existing research into student-institution fit, particularly within a faith-based context was scarce. It was therefore regarded that the inclusion of all sources was warranted. Throughout this chapter, where website, magazine and newspaper sources are cited, attempts to corroborate claims have been made.

## **2.2) Part 1: The Higher Education Landscape**

This section of the literature review has been included to provide context of the current HE environment and the impact it has had for students. The sector has undergone unprecedented change throughout the last two decades as it has been forced into becoming a competitive market (Moran and Powell, 2014). The following reviews the types of UK universities, how they are compared, the introduction of fees and funding and the repercussions this had including value for money, student expectations and complaints.

### **2.2.1) Types of University**

There are currently 170 universities in the UK (Universities UK, 2022) with differing reputations and attributes. Some universities emphasize their longstanding reputation whilst others focus on research, teaching and/or support. The UK's oldest institutions are known as the Ancient Universities, a group of ten institutions including Oxford (established 1096), Cambridge (established 1209) and St Andrews (established 1411); all ten were founded prior to 1800. The Ancient universities historically top league tables, generally followed by Russell Group universities, a group of 24 institutions who pride themselves as world-class research-intensive universities, including some Ancient universities, alongside institutions such as Durham, Bath and Imperial College London. Red Brick Universities, also referred to as civic universities, were developed in industrial cities

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and include the universities of Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds. More recently, in 1992 the Further and Higher Education Act allowed polytechnic and technical colleges, such as London Southbank, to become universities. These institutions are called 'new' and have generally been generally considered less academic, less research focused and more vocational or applied in nature (Jabbar, Analoui and Kong, 2017). The role of former polytechnics was described by Barnett and Di Napoli (2008) as being "to prepare students for specific professions, through good teaching" (p. 4). This is opposed to traditional universities whose role was to undertake research in the pursuit of knowledge (Barnett and Di Napoli, 2008, p. 4).

In 2016, the Government produced a White Paper: "*Success as a Knowledge Economy*" which stated their plan to deregulate HE and encourage "new and innovative providers" (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 9) to the sector bringing more competition alongside degree apprenticeships. Following deregulation, private providers were able to enter the market; by March 2017 there were 115 so called 'alternative providers' hosting approximately 50,000 students, purportedly receiving student loans totalling £417 million (wonkhe.com, 2018; UK Parliament, 2018). In the summer of 2019 one of the largest providers of private higher education, GSM London (formerly Greenwich School of Management), who offered business degree courses validated by the University of Plymouth, went into administration. GSM had 5,440 students in 2017/18 reducing to 3,500 in 2018-2019 which made the business unsustainable (Coughlan, 2019b). This illustrates the volatility and financial challenges faced by the sector. By 2021 the market contracted and there were just six private providers with degree awarding powers in the UK, three of them holding university status (applytouni.com, 2021). Private universities are not subject to the same fee caps as the rest of the sector and are free to set their own fees, allowing them to compete with the mainstream sector. The next section considers how universities are ranked, placed in league tables, and categorised to allow students to compare them.



### 2.2.2) Rankings and Comparisons

Universities in the UK are ranked nationally and internationally by various factors. The two main league tables in the UK are produced by The Guardian and The Times newspapers using a range of key performance indicators including: student, teaching and overall satisfaction feedback, research quality, entry standards/tariffs, student-staff ratios, student, service and facility spend, continuation and completion rates, good honours and graduate career prospects. In addition, league tables draw data from the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which awards gold, silver, bronze or provisional teaching quality ratings, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the National Student Survey (NSS).

Since its conception in 1992, undergraduate students apply to university via the University and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) website. UCAS signposts applicants to the Discover Uni website (formerly Unistats) to facilitate the comparison of courses and institutions. Both websites use(d) data compiled from national surveys including the NSS and HESA data to assist students in their comparison and selection of their preferred institutions. Other websites, such as universitycompare.com, also include lifestyle data relating to the closest Nando's™ and McDonalds™, the number of takeaways and whether Deliveroo™ is available, whilst whatuni.com compares the price of a pint of beer.

League tables are often considered to be contentious as the validity of the surveys used to compile them is questionable (Neves and Hillman, 2017; Sabri, 2013). For example, universities incentivise students to complete the NSS and accompany this with campaigns reminding students of why they should be satisfied (Williams, 2015). Whilst the surveys are controversial, universities still use the outcome for marketing purposes (Office for Students, National Student Survey, 2019a).

In addition to using statistics for marketing, universities use the various surveys for strategic planning and setting budgets. If student needs are met, based on the survey data, students *should* be more satisfied which is then reflected in future

surveys, and then in league tables, retention, and donations in a perpetual cycle. Next, the rationale for the introduction of fees and funding within higher education and their impact is considered.

### **2.2.3) Fees and Funding**

Commissioned by the Labour government, Lord Browne (2010) reviewed the sustainability of funding in Higher Education. The report stated that 45% of young people were entering higher education compared to 6% in the 1960s and a third of school leavers in the mid-nineties (p. 15-18). In the 2016 Government White Paper, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated two specific goals for higher education: to double the proportion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds entering university in 2020 compared to 2009, and to increase the number of black and minority ethnic (BAME) students going to university by 20% in 2020 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 54). This increase was said to be motivated by a philosophy of social mobility, social justice and a desire for economic growth (Shaw, 2013).

Originally Higher Education was just for the privileged few. However, investment into widening participation schemes and the introduction of flexible, modular systems successfully increased participation levels creating a more diverse student population (Moran and Powell, 2014; Archer et al, 2007). As a result, increasing numbers of students have been admitted to higher education; in the academic year 2020/21 there were 2.66 million university students in the UK (Bolton, 2022, p. 5). More of these applicants have come from disadvantaged backgrounds than ever before; in the academic year 2020/21, UCAS reported 22.5% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds were accepted into university (UCAS, 2020a) increasing from 18.5% in 2015 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 54). This increase in participation levels has not only altered the type of student attending university but also contributed to a change in students' expectations (Browne 2010; Watson, 2003; Rolfe, 2002).

Free higher education was introduced in the 1960s following recommendations made within the Anderson Committee report which was commissioned by the Ministry of Education. The Anderson Committee recommended student tuition and maintenance grants be formalised and subsequently the majority of students in HE were funded from public funds (Dyhouse, 2007). The widening participation agenda made free higher education unsustainable and following the Dearing Report (1997) and the Higher Education Act (2004), students contributed towards the costs of their university education. An initial tuition fee of £1,000 was introduced in 1998/99 when maintenance grants were replaced with student loans. In 2003, variable fees were agreed and ratified in the Higher Education Act (2004). In 2005 the maximum tuition fee cap was raised to £3,000, repayable once graduate's earnings reached £15,000 with residual debt written off after 25 years.

The Browne Report (2010) later established that the existing funding arrangements were unsustainable and in need of urgent reform, proposing a radical new system. Recommendations included removing the cap on fees therefore creating a free market, increasing competition and differentiating institutions by price. Some of these recommendations were accepted and from 2012/13 a fee cap of £9,000 per annum was implemented, increasing from £3,375 in 2011/12. The maximum fee is reviewed by the Government annually and is currently £9,250 a year for full time undergraduate students (2022) if the institution has been rated as bronze, silver or gold according to the TEF; St Mary's achieved Silver Status in the TEF in 2017 (St Mary's, 2017).

In 2011 it was difficult to predict what the impact of increased fees would be. There was speculation that poorer students would be unfairly disadvantaged and concern regarding application rates, particularly for mature and part time students, as well as concerns over retention rates. There was potential for the expansion of popular universities such as the historic red-brick institutions and elite research-intensive institutions whilst there was equally a risk that some institutions could collapse, such as those who were positioned towards the bottom of the league

tables. It was difficult to anticipate which institutions would be affected; it could be across the entire sector or specific to types of course (whether it be vocational or academically orientated) or institution (research intensive, teaching or position in league tables). Universities were forced to compete, to attract and then retain the best students (Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007; Thomas and Galambos, 2004). There was an underlying assumption that fees would be differentiated according to a natural or perceived pecking order. However, rather than creating a competitive market which was differentiated by price, most institutions charged the same £9,000 fee and the status quo was more or less maintained.

In 2016, Jo Johnson MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science once again championed competitiveness and value for money within higher education. Within his White Paper, "*Success as a Knowledge Economy*", he stated that the HE sector should operate as per any other competitive industry, believing that increased competition would encourage institutions to improve their service to students by offering innovative programmes and excellent facilities (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). He also directly encouraged institutions to differentiate by price, which institutions had largely avoided since the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2012/13. To stimulate competition, Johnson set in motion new regulations governing degree awarding powers which allowed new, private institutions to enter the market stating that the existing status-quo had favoured historic institutions. Within his white paper, Johnson (2016) acknowledged that this invigoration of the market had the potential to lead to the closure of longstanding institutions and stated that the government would not prevent this, implying that the market would dictate winners and losers in a survival of the fittest scenario.

The Augar review (2019) looked at post-18 education in England, including further and higher education. Like the Browne Report before it, it reviewed the sustainability of HE and made a number of recommendations including reducing the fee cap to £7,500, extending the repayment period, creating a student premium for disadvantaged students, and creating a minimum grade threshold for entrants

into HE. Unlike the Browne Report, it also assessed the consequences of fees on HE. The report slipped from the agenda due to Brexit and then the Covid-19 pandemic until the government released an interim response in January 2021, followed by a statement by Michelle Donelan, the Higher and Further Education Minister, in 2022. The Minister announced a two-year freeze on tuition fees with the maximum rate set at £9,250 until 2025 and a reduction in the repayment threshold from £27,295 to £25,000 for those students entering HE from 2023 (Donelan, 2022). Two key areas remain subject to consultation: minimum entry requirements and number controls.

Following changes to funding policy, the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and a dip in domestic birth rates, universities faced unprecedented financial challenges and indeed a perfect storm. Birth rates declined at the rate of approximately 1% year-on-year from 1991, whilst participation in HE had grown annually from 2000 to 2010. This growth then declined from 2012/13 which resulted in supply outstripping demand (HESA, *Who's studying in HE?*, 2021) until post-pandemic, in 2020 when the sector received a 5.4% increase in applications (Bolton 2022, p. 13). It should be noted that the demographic dip in demand is only temporary as in March 2018, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) predicted that by 2030 there will be a shortfall of 300,000 university places in part due to a 23% increase in 18-year olds (Beech, 2018).

The decision by institutions in 2011/12 to charge the maximum fee, according to Jabbar et al (2017) has led to students adopting the attitude of "I've paid my money give me my degree" (Baldwin and James, 2000). Having considered the political and historical HE environment and the pressures that the sector is currently facing, consumerism within HE is now discussed.

#### **2.2.4) Students: Are they consumers?**

Much has been written about consumerism within higher education and the relationship between academics and students, particularly the juxtaposition between the integrity of the traditional provision of high-quality education and the

need to generate income (Moogan, 2011). Higher education in the UK is comparable to HE in Australia who marketised the sector in 1989, a decade earlier than the UK. Prior to 1989, higher education in Australia was funded by the Government. However, in an identical scenario to the UK, increasing participation rates made the funding arrangements unsustainable. The Australian government implemented the Higher Education Contribution Scheme whereby students paid a fifth of their course fee (Raciti, 2010). In a review of the concept of students as consumers within the Australian context, Baldwin and James (2000) found that quotas and entry requirements restricted a free market and therefore limited choice. Again, this was echoed in the UK, which led to the review in 2016 by Johnson, the Minister of State for Universities and Science. The Australian government implemented plans to enable students to assess an HEI based on quality rather than the status of the university, founded on: institutional age, prestige or alumni. Similarly, in the UK, the TEF was introduced in 2016 with the intention of allowing students to compare institutions by teaching quality. This transformation of higher education has been critiqued by Jabbar et al (2017) who stated that the sector has morphed from being “knowledge generators to service providers” (p. 86). Marketisation of the sector in the UK has been gradual, however, since the introduction of fees, consumer culture and language have crept into HE (Bates and Kaye 2013; Moogan, 2011 Jones, 2006).

Consumer culture is traditionally associated with a customer purchasing goods – a straightforward financial transaction. During this transaction, the customer considers their options, which include; value for money, quality, the reputation of the manufacturer or brand, promises and guarantees when making their purchase. It can be argued that although HE should be transformational and not transactional, these elements started to be more prominent in the minds of students (Ng and Forbes, 2009). The evidence supports claims that the expansion of higher education and the implementation of fees was the instigator of change which in turn raised students’ expectations, and a proportion of students have consequently adopted a consumerist attitude (Jones, 2006; Rolfe, 2002) which has

diminished the student experience by reducing participation in student life. The introduction of fees has resulted in fewer students attending university as a lifestyle choice, because of fit, values or social opportunities and instead a greater significance has been placed upon the class of degree achieved and career prospects (Bates and Kay, 2013; Moogan, 2011; Jones, 2006; Schertzer and Schertzer, 2004; Rolfe, 2002). This change in attitude has also impacted upon participation in social clubs and students residing in Halls of Residence; instead students are increasingly choosing to attend a university closer to their family home, living at home and retaining their existing social scene (Schertzer and Schertzer, 2004; Rolfe, 2002).

Successive government reports have promoted the idea that a university degree promotes social mobility and career opportunity and therefore should be viewed as an investment. Social mobility is defined by UUK in 2016 within their *report 'Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education'* as “people's ability to improve on their own family social position or their own current status through opportunities provided in their society” (p. 10). The Social Mobility Advisory Group was established in 2015 at the request of the Minister of State for Universities and Science, driven by political ideology with the aim of addressing inequality (UUK, 2016). The implication is that social mobility will narrow the attainment gap, therefore improving career prospects, suggesting that university graduates earn more money throughout their career than those without a degree (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016). This career focus has developed since Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan (2005) undertook research into students' expectations of higher education which in 2005 included their future career path, self-improvement and subject knowledge. Now students are predominantly selecting specific courses in order to have a career and earn more money (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016; Bachan, 2014). Potential earnings were reviewed by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills, in their report titled *The Impact of University Degrees on the Lifecycle of Earning* (2013). The report estimated that, on average, men earn approximately

23% more when they have a degree compared with those without, and women earn 31% more than their counterparts without a degree. Additionally, annual salaries can increase depending upon the grade achieved and the subject studied, widening the gap further between graduates and those who do not hold the same qualification.

The consumer group *Which?*™ in their report, “*A Degree of Value, Value for Money from the Student Perspective*” (Which?, 2014) found that three in ten students thought that higher education was poor value (p. 9). Value for money was researched by the National Union of Students and HSBC in 2011 who established that 38% of students were motivated by value for money, increasing from 37% in 2009 (p. 14). Comparatively, research undertaken by the OfS in 2019 established that 46% of students felt that their investment in their education did not represent good value for money (OfS, 2019b). The shift in mindset was summarised by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in their report *Higher Ambitions* (2009) which stated that “the introduction of variable fees for students has rightly sharpened attitudes towards the value for money higher education represents as a personal investment” (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009, p. 70). The consequences of the implementation of tuition fees have led to an increase in expectations and a decrease in satisfaction.

Student satisfaction in 2021 averaged 75% (Hunter, 2021). Since the inception of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) in 2004, the number of student complaints has increased across the decade from 588 in 2006 to 1,517 in 2016, an increase of 158%. Complaints have since risen to 2,763 in 2021, a further increase of 82%, in part due to the impact of Covid-19 (OIA Annual Reports 2021, 2016, 2006, 2004). The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 shone a light on the status of students as consumers, particularly the consumer protection to which they were legally entitled. When the pandemic struck in March 2020, universities suspended face to face lectures and learning moved online with varying degrees of success. In July 2020 a petition was instigated by a student,



receiving in excess of 200,000 signatures. The petition requested a Parliamentary debate for the partial refund of students' fees stating that the quality of online teaching did not meet the standard students had paid for. The petition was debated and the Department for Education (DfE) issued a statement directing students to the Office for Students for consumer advice and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator should a student wish to make a formal complaint. The DfE stated that universities should do everything in their power to maintain the quality of their teaching however, they did not support tuition fee refunds (Petitions UK Government and Parliament, 2021). Although it is acknowledged that these have been unprecedented times, the volume of support for compensation does illustrate the consumeristic position adopted by some students in relation to their degree, directly linking tuition fee payment to both teaching quality and quantity and students' expectations.

Though students cannot buy knowledge, and learning is not passive, whether they adopt a consumeristic attitude or not, students are, by definition, consumers as they utilise and pay for a service. This relationship has been described by Ng and Forbes (2009) as a "cocreation" fashioned from an amalgamation of people: students, academic staff, support staff and the like, highlighting the synergy required for a positive student experience (p. 40). It has been described by the National Student Forum (2010) as being "nuanced and reciprocal" (p. 29). Latterly, Nicola Dandridge, the first chief executive of the Office for Students, during a speech to the Association of University Administrators (AUA) in 2018 referred to students as "informed consumers" (p. 160). Dandridge was discussing sector regulation and the importance of information and guidance in enabling students to make informed decisions. The OfS regulate HE providers and are able to sanction institutions who do not meet the required standards. The key objectives of the OfS are: participation for all who meet the criteria, quality of experience, positive outcomes in terms of career opportunities and personal development, and value for money (Dandridge, 2019). Given it is the role of the OfS to ensure HEIs maintain quality and standards, and their mandate to champion students' consumer rights, it

could be expected that Dandridge would refer to students in this manner.

However, the concept is still novel in the UK following the introduction of fees and subsequent marketisation of the sector.

From this examination of the impact caused by the change in funding arrangements of higher education, it may be assumed that following the implementation of fees, students had different expectations of their course, with concerns around value for money and employability. As stated in the introduction, Jones (2006) compares the relationship between the student and HEI to that of a health club, stating that effort is required from both parties in order to achieve the desired outcome. This is a clever analogy as it clearly reflects that lack of effort on behalf of the gym goer, despite paying a membership fee, will result in disappointing results. The challenge for HEIs is to ensure that students' expectations are managed to ensure that they understand the effort required to achieve their degree and to minimise the likelihood of complaints. Academics have increasingly raised concerns regarding increased student demands, claiming students expect a "24/7 service" (Jabbar et al, 2017, p. 88), have expectations of entitlement, are more demanding and are more likely to complain (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2017). This sense of entitlement increased when students saw themselves as consumers, whilst simultaneously intellectual engagement decreased (Bunce et al, 2017).

Within this context of a competitive market, student expectations, fees and an unpredictable environment, literature relating to student fit and expectations when selecting a university will now be reviewed.

### **2.3) Part 2: Current research into student fit**

Part 1 illustrated the current HE environment. Now in this section, literature on student fit in higher education has been reviewed; it is predominately focused on socioeconomic factors and first-generation students. Magazine and newspaper articles focusing on student interviews were also considered alongside traditional academic sources. Additionally, a number of suitable models, derived from

business management and human resources, have been considered to offer depth and breadth pertaining to fit. University marketing research has also been examined in order to assess how institutions portray themselves to attract potential students.

### **2.3.1) Non-Traditional Student Cohorts**

Researchers in the sociology of education including Bourdieu (1984), Bernstein (1996) and Reay (2010) claim that universities and their cultures are historically middle or upper-class establishments with hierarchical structures and their own discourse. This environment is not easily accessible to non-traditional students, such as students of colour and working-class students who do not understand the expectations, namely 'the rules of the game', when at university. The traditional university environment and culture has been slow to adapt to the influx of non-traditional students with some clinging to "traditional values" (Farwell, 2002, p. 154), retaining "many features of an elite system" (p. 155) and being reluctant to "accommodate new learners" (p. 159). This is possibly a factor why institutions with the highest numbers of non-traditional students have the highest attrition rates, as non-traditional students simply do not fit in (Smith and Naylor, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Wilkins and Burke, 2015). Whilst it is acknowledged that there are a range of factors which contribute to non-completion such as financial (Sutton Trust, 2023), entry qualifications and the subject studied (Smith and Naylor, 2001), the rationale that attrition is linked to fitting in is examined further in 2.3.4 where habitus and cultural capital are discussed and 2.3.6 where retention is discussed. Aimhigher was an initiative created by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2004 with a goal to increase participation in higher education in England of under-represented groups such as minority groups and students from non-traditional backgrounds. This initiative is generally known as widening participation. Under-represented groups include disadvantaged young people, students from BAME backgrounds and young people in care (Aimhigher, 2006).

The term disadvantaged student is quite vague and often terms for disadvantaged students, widening participation, and working-class students are used interchangeably. This is an issue because these students are not a homogenous group. HESA base their definition of disadvantaged students on home location as their statistics are based on regional census statistics. Prior to entering HE, the government define disadvantaged students as those eligible for free school meals, and looked after children, a term for young people in care. Schools receive extra funding, a pupil premium, to support disadvantaged children. Working class students are more likely to apply to a post 1992 university (The Sutton Trust, 2008) which are generally lower in the league tables. This is considered to be because the post 1992 universities promote their widening participation agenda and encourage disadvantaged and less traditional students to apply, and offer more flexibility to students (Reay et al, 2010). In addition, working class students lack role models to help inform them about university and the cultural capital required to support their decision making; as previously noted, students whose parents did not go to university cannot draw upon their parents' own experience. This is discussed later in section 2.3.4.

Winstone and Hulme (2019) differentiate between 'knowledge of university' and 'knowledge about university' with the latter, 'knowledge about' stemming from experience or 'insider knowledge' (p. 5). Whilst most students will have 'knowledge of' university which is obtainable via literature, open days and research, 'knowledge about' university is elusive for non-traditional students. This lack of knowledge results in some young adults being encouraged into the workplace to earn a living rather than accruing the debt associated with university (Reay et al, 2010; Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander and Grinstead, 2008; Lehmann, 2007).

Some reports within HE categorise students by their secondary school, either community or privately educated to allow for data comparison. An example of this can be found within the listings in The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2023

(2023) which offers the breakdown of students from state, independent and grammar schools within the 'vital statistics' section of each university. The Sutton Trust (2008) undertook research into university admission based on the school students had attended. They found that of 300,000 applications from less affluent students, only 1% attended a university ranked in the top thirteen of league tables. More recent research by The Sutton Trust in 2017 established that advantaged students "are six times more likely to enter a high tariff institution compared to the most disadvantaged" (The Sutton Trust, 2017, p. 4). The Sutton Trust's findings established that despite disadvantaged students having the academic ability required and achieving the necessary qualifications to meet the entry criteria, they did not select high ranking institutions. Within the context of St Mary's, in 2017/18, 95.1% of students had attended a state school whilst the national average was 89.8% (HESA, 2021), reflecting the size of St Mary's non-traditional student population.

HESA data (2021) reflects that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 54% of students in HE had a parent who was not educated to degree level or they did not know or chose not to respond. This rate is similar to research undertaken a decade earlier by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HESCU) entitled FutureTrack (2008). This research established that 51% of students who had a parent with a degree considered going to university, compared to 26% of first-generation students (p. 39). Students who are the first in their family to go to university are unsurprisingly called 'first generation' or 'first in family' students and their parental education has an influence in university attendance. This illustrates that the majority of students now entering HE are non-traditional, making traditional students the minority. The definition of first-generation students is solely based on parental education and is not linked to class or income; however, students may well experience the same challenges regarding role models, cultural capital and support from their families. First-generation students were found to have limited knowledge and understanding of what is expected from them at university once they were there (Crozier and Reay, 2011). This concept of the unknown is

discussed by Strayhorn (2019) who found that first generation students experienced increased anxiety about going to university as they were unable to seek advice or assurances from their parents due to the aforementioned lack of first-hand experience to draw upon themselves.

Although commuting students are not technically a category of student within the widening participation agenda, they are more likely to be working class, mature, first generation or BAME, probably due to financial constraints or caring commitments (Maguire and Morris, 2018). In 2018 The Sutton Trust found that more students were commuting to university, with only one in ten travelling more than 150 miles to university. This trend coincided with the introduction of fees and presumably was due to students avoiding more debts associated with accommodation costs (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). The claims regarding proximity to home mirror earlier research by Rolfe (2002) who found that proximity to university was very important to 40% of students attending a post-1992 university compared to only 3% of students attending a high-status university (p. 173). This reflects the earlier definition of traditional students who saw university as an extension to boarding school, away from home, opposed to non-traditional students who are more likely to commute to university. Rolfe (2002) found commuting diminished students' experience as students did not participate in the traditional social activities associated with going to university such as joining societies. Rolfe (2002) stated that commuting students only attended for taught sessions and did not spend much time on campus. Consequently, this lack of engagement with the university led to a different relationship and often negatively impacted student experience.

Another distinct group of students are those who have been in care, known as 'care leavers. Care leavers are entitled to additional support when applying to university including bursaries and grants (Oliver, 2021). UUK (2022) define a 'care leaver' as:

anyone who spent time in care during their childhood in one of many different settings, including in children's homes, foster homes, homes with other family members, or as an unaccompanied asylum seeker.

In 2018/19, 13% of students in higher education were care leavers, compared to 43% of all other students (OfS, 2021b). UUK (2022) highlight that half of care leavers are mature students, which they state is due to “inequalities” care leavers face at school which impact upon attainment levels. Howells (2019) writing for the website Wonkhe stated that “the fact that right now a young person in care has a greater percentage chance of spending time in prison than progressing to higher education should be considered as an ongoing shame on our advanced and civilized society”. Low participation rates for care-leavers once again highlight the barriers and challenges non-traditional students face when transitioning to higher education.

As with working class students, ethnic minority students are more likely to apply to a post-1992 university. The student body at post-1992 universities is generally more diverse than more traditional institutions (Sullivan, Parsons, Wiggins, Heath and Green, 2014; The Sutton Trust, 2000). Additionally, students report feeling more comfortable in an institution which champions diversity and positive interracial interactions, offering a positive racial climate. Currently approximately 30% of students studying at St Mary's are students of colour, compared to the national average of 25%.

An example of a student of colour considering which university was best for them is offered from a BBC article from January 2019. The article offers a case study of a student's dilemma between selecting the 'best' university in terms of reputational standing whilst being unsure whether it was best for them. The story focused on Anoushka Muranda Dougherty, a biracial teenager from a state school in Kent who was offered a place at Cambridge University called “*I'm mixed-race, is Cambridge University right for me?*” (BBC, 2019a). The story and accompanying interview on BBC Sounds focused on Anoushka's choice of university between Cambridge and King's, exploring Anoushka's concerns about being the odd one out, mainly in

terms of ethnicity but also being from a state school. The article highlighted that in 2017 only 3% of students who started at Cambridge were black, or mixed race with black heritage. When Anouska spoke to Cambridge BAME students when visiting during an open day, they did raise concerns about the feeling of belonging and elements of self-segregation.

Anoushka discussed her application to Cambridge with her mixed heritage school friends. Her friends said they disregarded Cambridge as they felt it was a “fantasy world”, that they would not fit in as the other students were “not their crowd”, that there would be too many “white kids from private schools” and they wanted to share accommodation with other students “who look like them”. Anoushka’s parents were confident that their smart, funny daughter would “achieve a sense of belonging” at Cambridge, but pointed out that this “depends on whether you find your group, your tribe...”. The references to the lack of diversity at Cambridge University implies that fitting in ethnically was of importance for Anoushka, her friends and her parents, but that this could be offset by a sense of belonging with likeminded people (BBC, 2019a).

In October 2016 the Government reviewed how people of different ethnicities experienced public services. Following the review, in October 2017 the Race Disparity Audit was undertaken which then imposed a requirement compelling universities to report admissions, retention and degree outcome by ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic background (Cabinet Office, 2017). The report found that white students are around a third more likely than black students to get a good grade in their degree, with 56% of black students achieving a 2:1 or first, compared with 80% of white students. The report also highlighted that black students are the most likely to drop out of university, and only two percent of all academic staff are black. In February 2019, the Universities Minister, Chris Skidmore was quoted in the Daily Mail as saying “Universities need to reflect modern Britain, and ensure that everyone who has the potential, no matter their background or where they are from can thrive at university” (Harding, 2019a). This rhetoric stresses the



Government's agenda to diversify access and participation in higher education and challenges the traditional norms surrounding higher education.

In addition to poorer degree outcomes for BAME students, other cohorts of non-traditional students experience similar inequalities. HESA data (2021) shows that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 44% of undergraduate students in HE in the UK were male and 56% were female. HEPI found that young women are 35% more likely to attend university than men and women outperform their male peers. Within the subset of men, the poorest performers are white working-class men (Hillman and Robinson, 2016). Collectively the discussion above evidences the inequalities in access to higher education for some groups of students including students of colour, working class men, care leavers, those on low incomes and those from academies or comprehensive secondary schools. It also highlights the lack of understanding regarding the value of a degree based on the course and institution. This lack of understanding was addressed by Michelle Donelan, The Universities Minister (2022), who was the first in her family to go to university, quoted in *The Guardian* as stating:

People from my kind of background, they just see a course. They've not got those advisers telling them this course is far superior to that one, and they can just end up doing a course hoping it's going to lead them somewhere, and it doesn't (*The Guardian*, 2022).

This narrative highlights the contrasting experience of traditional students who have more support and encouragement when deciding whether and where to attend university. Early engagement is discussed by Thomas (2012), referring to pre-entry, outreach activities which are designed to provide advice and support and to offer students the opportunity to experience higher education prior to application. Such activities, evidenced by Thomas in the *What Works?* report (2012), supported students in making "informed choices about institutions, subjects and courses, and to have realistic expectations of HE study" (p. 18). St Mary's University Widening Participation and Outreach Team state that their purpose as follows:

The Widening Participation and Outreach Team develops engaging programmes that address and help remove some of the barriers that young people may face in accessing Higher Education.

We deliver a range of projects with specific target schools and colleges populations and prioritise working with children and young people from areas of the population that are traditionally under-represented or disadvantaged in Higher Education

St Mary's Website, Widening Participation and Outreach, 2023

Despite the opportunities offered by university out-reach activities, Thomas (2012) acknowledges that not all students are aware of the services and support available to them and therefore do not access them. This results in underrepresented groups lacking the information they require to make an informed decision regarding higher education, echoing the claims made by Donelan (2022).

### **2.3.2) Person Fit Models**

For this research person/fit models were considered to ascertain whether traditional and non-traditional students had different perspectives pertaining to fitting in. There are a range of models predominately used in the realms of business and human resource management which attempt to measure how people fit in, usually related to the workforce and organisational commitment. Within this context, congruence between the fit of the individual and that of the organisation leads to greater career success, job satisfaction, higher levels of motivation, increased retention of staff and increased turnover (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2009). These models are relevant to consider in the context of student-fit because essentially, the same logic applies: fit between the individual [student] and the organisation [university] leads to greater career success [academic success], job [student] satisfaction, higher levels of motivation and increased retention [course completion]. The models overlap, and are summarised in the following Table 2-1 (over):

Table 2-1 Summary of person/fit models

<b>Person environment fit</b>	The correlation between the level of match between an individual's characteristics and that of the environment they are in.
<b>Person/job fit</b>	The correlation between high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace/organisation and the job role.
<b>Person/organisation fit</b>	The correlation between high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace/organisation but less so with the job role.
<b>Person/supervisor fit</b>	The correlation with high levels of job satisfaction and relationship with the supervisor.
<b>Person/group fit</b>	The correlation between high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace/organisation but particularly relationships with co-workers leading to shared common goals, good communication and decision making.

Amongst existing research into student/institution fit, Bowman and Denson (2014) adapted Person/Environment Fit models to create a Student/institution Fit model. These researchers utilised and based their model on earlier research undertaken by Tinto (1975). Bowman and Denson's (2014) model includes six factors: religious, athletic, academic, socio-economic, political and social. The model most relevant for my research, measuring student-university compatibility was created by Gilbreath et al (2011). Gilbreath et al (2011) constructed a list of student-school fit factors which were grouped into three fit environments: social, academic, and physical. The research focused upon needs-supply fit and was presented using the mean from their data categorised by each environment. These authors established that students ranked the physical environment over the social or academic when describing their ideal university. This model is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four.

### 2.3.3) University Fit

Research into student fit is dominated by sociologist Professor Diane Reay. Reay et al (2010) discuss the term "institutional effect", which they also refer to as "institutional habitus", whereby an institution has an identifiable set of features, such as its culture and ethos which impact students' opinions (p. 111). This, they state, "exerts a powerful influence" on potential students and their identities (p.

111). Reay et al (2010) found that working class students looked for an institution where they felt “comfortable” and “accepted” (p. 112). Student anecdotes highlight that working-class students balance competing demands of work commitments, family, community and social lives, with one student stating that she would “fit in fine academically” at a Russell Group university “but won’t fit in at all socially” (p. 117). According to de Vreeze, Matschke and Cress (2018), the lower a students’ social class, the less comfortable they are at university due to a mismatch of their own norms and that of the HEI. Research into transitions between college/sixth form into university found that students who visited a university campus prior to enrolment, whether attending an open day, post application visit day or widening participation activity, enabled students to “imagine what ‘being a student’ would be like” (Briggs, Clarke and Hall, 2012, p. 6). Baldwin and James (2000) concluded that universities should target students who fit with their universities by highlighting the different experiences HEIs offer, thus allowing students to compare experiences rather than just league tables and research profiles. Briggs et al (2012) found that students who did not fit in or adapt to the environment felt like a “fish out of water” (p. 6) and were more likely to drop out. This, they stated, was in part due to a lack of understanding of the institutional discourse, and those who learnt it adjusted quicker to the environment and felt that they fitted in. Institutional discourse is not defined by Briggs et al (2012), but it is implied that it is the academic environment and how students adapt to it as learners, but also includes the formation of social relationships. This research reflects the difference between fitting in and belonging previously highlighted and the importance of both.

#### **2.3.4) Habitus and Cultural Capital**

As introduced in Chapter One, habitus is a concept attributed to Aristotle, from the Greek word “hexis” meaning ‘of stable disposition’, and latterly developed by Bourdieu. Reay et al (2010) discussed the concept of “institutional habitus”. Thomas (2012) expands on the definition of institutional habitus, stating that it “incorporates practices that mutually shape and reshape the institutions with their students, their communities” (p. 14) illustrating the impact habitus has upon the

university environment. Alternatively, Briggs and Hall (2012) defined “institutional discourse” as a factor affecting the student experience resulting in “a range of experiences of fitting in and standing out in higher education” (Reay et al, 2010, p. 107). Habitus makes you the person you are, moulded by your life experiences, the people who have influenced you, the environment and places you have been. Habitus is unconscious and is like a community code, shaped by the people you socialise with and is made of deeply ingrained characteristics, habits and skills (Reay, 2004). Your habitus affects the way you behave. Nash (1999) explains that “habitus develops a history and generates its practices, for some period of time, even after the original material conditions which gave rise to it have disappeared” (p. 184). Reay (2004) refers to Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, stating that it “makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable” (p. 435). This suggests that people make decisions based on their habitus or in other words, based on their culture and experience. Similarly, Lehmann (2007) states that students interpret their experiences through the lens of their specific class of habitus. This is congruent with research carried out by Strayhorn (2019) who established that social identities such as gender and ethnicity intersected to influence a sense of belonging. Thomas (2002) identified that students whose habitus is incompatible with that of their university are more likely to drop out, stating “If a student feels that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they may be more inclined to withdraw early” (p. 431).

Cultural capital, according to Thomas (2012) is “class related” (p. 13). Cultural capital was introduced and defined in Chapter One which highlighted that one’s cultural capital consisted of elements such as access to education and wealth, but Thomas (2012) also adds elements that include a person’s way of speaking and being including their accent and ways of behaving (p. 13). Briggs et al (2012) state that undergraduate students see “the move to university as a personal investment of the cultural capital accrued through school and college education” (p. 3). Research undertaken by UCAS in 2016: *‘Through the lens of students: how*

*perceptions of higher education influence applicants' choices'* found that students adopted a sensible and career-focused approach to selecting a university (UCAS, 2016); the same report also stated that 48% of advantaged students believed that "employers were more interested in the university you attended than the subject studied" (p. 6). The reference to the type of university attended reflects students' cultural capital and the differing perspectives they have towards university depending on their background. This disparity is acknowledged within the report, stating that there are "stark differences in applicants' views of universities and perspectives of HE depending on their social background" (p. 3).

Parents were found to be the major influencer on choice of institution in research undertaken by Briggs (2006); parental influence was followed by that of friends, teachers and school advisors (p. 709). Collier and Morgan (2008) contrasted students' familial cultural capital and found that students whose parents went to university grow up "more familiar with higher education from listening to family members" (p. 430) and are therefore better equipped to understand and conform with the demands and expectations of university. This is believed to give these traditional students a head start. Examples of the reverse of the advantage traditional students experience were previously considered in 2.3.1 which discussed the challenges experienced by non-traditional students and their lack of cultural capital when applying to university, citing an example offered by Donelan (2022) and findings from the *What Works?* report (Thomas, 2012) which established that despite widening participation and outreach activities, some students still lack the knowledge and understanding to access the available support, likely due to their cultural capital. Thomas (2002) stated that "in society certain classes and groups are dominant and so, control access to educational and career opportunities" (p. 430), again attributing this power and control to cultural capital.

An example of the impact of cultural capital is discussed later in Chapter Five, Case Study Two, when a female student of colour who commuted to university discussed how her family and background influenced her choice of university.

### **2.3.5) Student Expectations**

Education is intangible as you cannot see or touch it. Moogan (2011) highlights that “HE is a transient experience with no transfer of ownership until the very end of the process” (p. 571). In terms of marketing a service, such as education, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2008) claim that customers [students] use every interaction with an organisation to form their opinion. This theory originates from Bitner’s Evidence of Service Model (1995), stating there are three elements of service: people, process and physical evidence, which are present at every encounter a person has within a service environment. Zeithaml et al (2005) emphasise that service encounters can be remote, including platforms such as the website, email communication as well as face-to-face. Ivy (2008), like Bitner (1995) stated that experiences such as the simple interactions like a telephone call, may have more of an impact on student choice than a university’s research profile. This body of research implies that the website is contributing to the construction of students’ expectations. A student may consider site design, use of images, ease of navigation and intuitiveness of the website as tangible elements. These elements are considered as representations of the institution contributing towards their expectations of an intangible service. Each encounter, even at a micro level, accumulates to create an overall perception of an organisation upon which quality and satisfaction are based. Claims regarding expectations are echoed by Nadiri, Kandampully and Hussain (2009) who stated that students use equipment, pamphlets and brochures to evidence how the university will “enhance perceived service quality and achieve student satisfaction” (p. 531). Jones (2006) warns that these interactions form “the basis of the initial contract between the student and the HEI” (p. 72), cautioning institutions to be wary of false promises.

Phase Three of this body of research utilised St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus as a research tool. The university prospectus was selected as a source of photographs as it is a permanent, tangible, key marketing tool used to promote the institution and the university experience. When considering the prospectus, which is an example of physical evidence, elements such as its design, use of photography and quality of paper act as representations of the institution contributing towards students' expectations of an intangible service. Research participants were asked to identify photographs within the prospectus which resonated with them and were asked whether they felt the prospectus was truly representative of how they viewed St Mary's.

The university prospectus as a genre has progressed from being a list of courses and is now used as a marketing tool selling the institution and the university experience. There is a body of evidence supporting this claim, suggesting that the university prospectus has been the main source of information for prospective university students when selecting a university course (Brown and Sen 2010; Dawes and Brown, 2002; Briggs, 2006; Ivy, 2008). Askehave (2007) quotes Fairclough in 1995 who concluded "the 1966/67 [prospectus] entry gives information about what is provided on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. In the 1993 prospectus, by contrast, the promotional function is primary; it is designed to 'sell' the university..." This leads to the understanding that as the HE landscape has changed and students have adopted a consumeristic approach to higher education, a commercial approach has been adopted by institutions to use the prospectus much more as a marketing tool.

Traditionally the prospectus has been one of the main forms of marketing for university education alongside UCAS fairs and open days. More recently, websites and social media have also been adopted and are possibly becoming more influential. Rutter *et al* (2017) found that online communication is generally more prevalent for marketers. However, within higher education the move online marketing "appears less pronounced" (p. 24). These researchers state that the



university prospectus is “a very important communication medium in its own right” (p. 24). Additionally, they stated that the prospectus is used by students and parents when choosing a university, and cite research by Johnson (2011) regarding the discourse used within the prospectus and how it is used to represent the culture of the institution. This chimes with research carried out by Graham (2013) who specifically focused on the discourse used by institutions looking to attract widening participation students. Graham (2013) found that institutions sought to make the prospectus “culturally familiar” to some groups of students (p.81), which was reflected in their use of imagery (p. 82).

Graham (2013) determined that the images used in university prospectuses have a “constitutive effect” (p. 83) meaning they want the reader to feel part of something - namely the university - but at the same time suggesting their ideal student. The example Graham (2013) used are images of students participating in sports, moving into Halls and socialising in the bar, which Graham (2013) claims portrays an expectation of students having money and leisure time. This resonates with research by Winter and Thompson-Whiteside (2017) who stated that the prospectus should aim for a balance between the familiar, such as high street shops, alongside excitement with a goal of producing “continuity and familiarity” so that students could picture themselves fitting in (p. 244).

Gibbs and Dean (2015) asked whether ‘*education institutes communicate trust well?*’ and they highlighted that universities market themselves competitively using the standard marketing practices adopted in the commercial sector. They stated that by implementing these commercial marketing strategies, universities are trying to “attract students in the same way as consumers to cars, iPads and foreign holidays” (p. 155). However, they questioned the integrity of the HEIs and their practices. Gibbs and Dean (2015) are equally critical of these marketing practices within the HE sector, maintaining that the approach has led to misleading claims. This has been evidenced by Bradley (2018), who reviewed marketing practices in higher education prospectuses, discussing complaints received by the advertising

standards authority (ASA). Bradley (2018) points to articles within the media in 2013 and an article in the Times Higher Education (THE) which exposed a number of unidentified HEIs whose prospectus claims could not be substantiated.

Illegitimate claims were predominantly related to statistical data. Examples included positions held within world and national university rankings, graduate employment prospects and student satisfaction.

Bradley (2018) cited statements made from the Head of Standards at the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) who said that “marketing from universities is not viewed as being ‘advertising’ by its adolescent recipients”. They continue to state that because of the perception of universities, “university marketing may bypass the filter of scepticism through which young people typically perceive other advertisements” (p. 3). This implies that in general, people trust HEIs because of their traditional role in society as experts, educators and contributors to the greater good.

Following the expansion of higher education and the success of widening participation schemes, the student demographic has changed, broadened and is more reflective of society. The ‘adolescent recipients’ referred to by the QAA now includes more vulnerable young people who have little or no experience of HE and are without the cultural capital or support network to question inflated claims.

Bradley (2013) claims that “information in prospectuses and on websites may be the principal source of evidence for many students’ choices” (p. 15), making it more important that the information and claims within them are accurate and honest.

In 2015, the Government updated the Consumer Rights Act to include students who purchase a service, namely education, from a university. The Act provides students with the same level of protection as other consumer purchases. The Competition and Marketing Authority (2015) (CMA) highlight very specific areas covered under the Act including information provision, terms and conditions and complaints. Under consumer protection regulations (CPR), universities are required to give potential students accurate information, for example entry

requirements, core modules, course composition including contact hours and self-study and details of the level of staff who will deliver the content, their status and experience. If information is hard to find, the HEI could be breaching the law due to misleading omission.

Following the updating of the Consumer Rights Act (2015), Harding (2019b) stated that “universities are going to face a crackdown on how they advertise and market courses to attract students” due to the number of complaints received by the ASA. Consequently, a new set of guidelines were issued by the ASA in 2017 for universities and the claims they make in their prospectuses. These guidelines stated that universities should:

- establish what type of comparative claim they wish to make;
- make sure they hold the relevant evidence;
- make the basis of the claim clear and include necessary qualifications;
- accurately represent the evidence;
- make comparative claims verifiable.

(Advertising Standards Authority website, 2019)

These principles were created to ensure that claims in prospectuses could be substantiated with robust evidence and highlighted the need for the avoidance of ambiguous terms or exaggerations.

In February 2018, Pok Wong took Anglian Ruskin University to court claiming that the university had not delivered the quality of education she had been promised based on the contents of the prospectus. Despite graduating with a first in International Business Strategy, Ms. Wong claimed that the information in the prospectus was misleading and wanted compensation for “fraudulent misrepresentation” (Apen-Sadler, 2018). Amongst complaints Wong listed lecturers being late and students being told to self-study. In June 2019 Ms. Wong received an out of court settlement of £61,000, £46,000 of which was towards her legal fees. The BBC (2019b) reported the NUS as saying “students do not have

clear rights under law, and the report of the settlement does indicate a way students can seek recourse". The NUS continued to state their preference was for students "to be partners in education" instead of seeking a financial settlement. Anglian Ruskin disputed Ms. Wong's allegations stating "the claims were wholly without merit and resulted in cost orders made against Ms. Wong by the Central London County Court on two occasions". Anglian Ruskin University settled the legal case upon advice from its insurance company to prevent escalating legal costs. In contrast to Jones (2006), the university argued that the prospectus did not constitute a contract with students and therefore tuition fees should not be refundable on that basis. In 2017, following complaints regarding the integrity of claims in university prospectuses, the Advertising Standards Agency upheld complaints against six universities.

In addition to literature relating to the claims within university prospectuses, there is less literature relating to the imagery. Askehave (2007) compared a range of international prospectuses and their design, noting that imagery was used to depict the local area and atmosphere including images of extra-curricular activities, facilities and campus life with less relating to teaching. In an analysis of one institution there were 46 photos in the prospectus. Of these, 78% were of "students busy with outdoor activities or inside, relaxed and engaged in social activities with peers" (p. 737). Thirteen percent of photos were related to studying and 2% in a student/teacher scenario. Askehave (2007) concluded that the prospectus aimed to portray university "experience" (p. 739). In addition, research by Rutter et al (2017) concluded that young middle-class white males were the most represented image within prospectuses which is at odds with the fact that more women attend universities than men.

Whether via the prospectus, website or other opportunities, the lack of relevant and appropriate information for students when applying to university was highlighted in the Browne Report (2010, p. 30) which stated that the greatest proportion of students identified the following items as being of interest prior to applying for a

university degree. These elements are detailed in Table 2-2 (below) which highlights the importance of the academic and financial elements of the course. However, there is no mention of the social environment, clubs, societies or sporting opportunities.

Table 2-2 Points of Interest to Potential Students: The Browne Report, (2010) p. 30

<b>Student evaluation</b>	Student satisfaction with:
	The standard of teaching
	The course
	The support and guidance received
	The feedback on assessment
	The library facilities
	The IT facilities
The Students' Union	
<b>Course information</b>	Weekly hours of teaching contact time
	Proportion of the assessment that is by coursework
	Proportion of students employed in a full time professional or managerial job one year after completing their course
	Proportion of students in employment in the first year after completing the course
	Professional bodies which recognise the course
	Average salary in the first year after completing the course
<b>Finance Information</b>	Cost of university Halls of Residence
	Maximum available bursary
	Maximum household income for eligibility for a bursary

Buckley, Soilemetzidis and Hillman (2015) undertook research into the information students would like when deciding on a university. These researchers found “a substantial minority of students continue to find the information they were given before they started their course vague (21%) or even misleading (10%)” (2015, p. 5).

In order to help students to select a university, there are several surveys in place to measure and record student satisfaction which are publicly available for their reference. The most prominent survey is the NSS. For public accountability and to assist potential students choose a university HEFCE created the NSS in 2005. The results of the survey are available on comparison websites allowing students to compare institutions as they would car insurance on price comparison websites.

The websites highlight a key information set (KIS) which includes student satisfaction, average salary, employment rates, tuition fees, accommodation costs, student retention figures and assessment information. It can therefore be assumed that potential students will use this data as one of the tools available to aid their decision-making process including whether they would fit in and stay at university.

### **2.3.6) Retention**

Driven by increased competition, Moran and Powell of *Shift Learning* undertook some research on behalf of HSBC, The Guardian and UUK into the economic uncertainties facing the HE sector following the replacement of HEFCE with the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in 2018. Their report discusses the difficulties being faced due to changes in funding, Brexit and competition for students. The increased competition for students intensified the importance of student retention, highlighting the need for attracting students committed to the institution. Retention is a crucial indicator of student satisfaction. An example of this is cited within the report '*What Works – Student Retention and Success*' (Thomas, 2012) who found that "students who think about leaving are less satisfied with their university experience and appear to be less engaged with their peers and their institution" (p. 11) and are therefore more likely to drop out. Similarly, Schertzer and Schertzer (2008) stated that

Overall, the literature supports the view that a variety of factors affect student retention: academic fit, student-institution values congruence, student-faculty values congruence, academic advising, institution social opportunities—all of which ultimately have an impact on satisfaction, institutional commitment and student retention (p. 81)

Financially it is more cost effective for institutions to retain continuing students and their annual fee than attracting new students to the university. As previously stated, it is acknowledged that students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with less traditional entry qualifications are more likely to drop out of university after their first year (Archer et al, 2007). This drop-out rate impacts those universities who recruit more widening participation students, including working class and ethnic minority students, as opposed to institutions who recruit mainly

white middle-class students where retention is less apparent (Reay et al, 2010; The Sutton Trust, 2000). American research established that student/institution fit was the second most influential factor leading to students dropping out of their studies, second only to financial difficulties (Bowman and Denson, 2014), highlighting the financial importance of student/institution fit for universities.

In addition to the financial drivers for retention, poor progression rates negatively impact academic reputation as retention data is used as a measure of performance (Thomas, 2012; Higher Education Academy, 2012; Briggs, 2006). Poor retention figures in turn impact recruitment as established by Briggs (2006) when he discovered that academic reputation was one of the top three factors in university selection. If universities were to behave more like businesses, they would adopt marketing practices and target segments of potential students. Segmentation helps a business to understand and identify their market based on matching the needs or demands of a client to their particular product. If the customer demand and the product match, then their expectations are met and the customer is satisfied. It is important for institutions to target the students who fit well with their unique university offer. Attracting the students who fit the best is important as these students will be the most satisfied when the experience they receive is as they had expected. Students who feel that they fit with an institution, whether this is the institution as a whole or within a niche such as a sports team or their peer group are more likely to complete their course and be more satisfied (Bowman and Denson, 2014; Nadiri et al, 2009; Wright, 2008).

### **2.3.7) Marketing**

In 1997, the consumerisation and consumption of higher education was referred to as the "McUniversity" by Ritzer who coined the term, referring to universities becoming service providers rather than knowledge generators. Ritzer (1997) predicted the future of HE using a hypothetical McUniversity, the equivalent of a cheap and cheerful 'Happy Meal' delivering mass, cost effective courses for consumers. Ritzer (1997) suggested HEIs of the future would be like Dominos

Pizza™ and would deliver to students at home. This tongue-in-cheek model became a reality globally in 2020 when students, along with the general population around the world, were isolated due to the coronavirus pandemic. HEIs rapidly moved their lectures online to facilitate learning. However, there were complaints from students who did not feel that they had received value for money (Weale, 2020), the equivalent of receiving a Happy Meal™ when they had paid for a Big Mac™. By July 2021, The Office of the Independent Adjudicator received 900 complaints relating to Covid-19 from students (OIA, 2021b). The OIA placed a statement on their website relating to students requesting a reduction in fees. The OIA indicated that “If your provider has offered you different but broadly equivalent teaching and assessment opportunities and these are accessible to you, it is not likely that you will get a fee refund or reduction for that” (OIA, 2021c), however, as the body responsible for managing complaints, it is within their purview to suggest a financial remedy if appropriate (OIA, 2021c).

The commercialisation of HE led institutions to make strategic decisions based on commercial factors considering factors such as competitiveness and customer satisfaction which in turn led to marketing strategies to entice more students (Jabbar et al, 2017). During the 2018 recruitment cycle, several universities made unconditional offers, presumably to hit recruitment targets. According to Ellett (2018) writing for the consumer group *Which?*™, unconditional offers have increased from 2,570 in 2013 to 87,540 in 2018 (Ellett, 2018). St Mary's was one such university who made unconditional offers, a decision which was later reversed; a statement was made by Professor John Brewer, Pro Vice Chancellor, in November 2018 declaring unconditional offers would no longer be made (BBC, 2018). This decision hit national headlines and was seen as quite a bold move, especially when compared to other institutions, such as Bath Spa who at the same time opted to ignore A level results in favour of interviewing students and incentivising students who exceeded their predicted grades with a £750 cash bonus (Turner, 2018). The BBC interviewed England's Education Secretary Damian Hinds in November 2018, who said that the increased use of unconditional



offers was “disturbing” after UCAS data showed a third of 18-year olds received an unconditional offer in 2017. Mr Hinds continued to state that unconditional offers “should not be used to get people through the door” (Richardson, 2018) and was again quoted by Weale (2019), writing for The Guardian, as accusing universities of “adopting pressure selling tactics that back students into a corner”. The use of unconditional offers highlights the techniques universities are adopting to meet recruitment targets and in turn, financial targets.

The difficulty for HEIs was, and is, that many of them offer similar courses, for example in September 2021, 117 HEIs offered a BA in English Literature (UCAS, 2020b), so the challenge was, and remains, how to differentiate themselves. It is too simplistic to state that students solely select an HEI because of the course, which is clarified by Rutter et al (2017) who stated that students are not “simply purchasing a degree but are engaging in a complex educational and social system” (p. 22). King stated “people choose their brands the same way they choose their friends. In addition to the skills and physical characteristics, they simply like them as people” (King, 1970 p. 14 cited in Rutter et al, 2017 p. 22). The reference to brand highlights the importance of differentiation and how this is communicated, confirming the importance of why HEIs adopted marketing strategies. The importance of brand was reiterated by Rutter et al (2017) who stated that potential students create perceptions of an institution through their brand messaging regardless of whether this messaging was intentionally managed by the HEI or not (p. 23).

Jabbar et al, (2017) found that the increase in competition for students pressurised HEIs into raising their branding and core values to use them as marketing tools. In part three, I will now discuss culture and values and their impact upon the university experience.

## **2.4) Part 3: Culture and Values**

There is less research and literature available relating to culture and values that specifically pertain to students within a university context, which offers this research an opportunity to create new knowledge. The Cambridge Dictionary defines culture as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time” and defines values as “the principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong, and how to act in various situations” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). The importance of values was highlighted by Westerman, Whitaker and Hardesty (2013) who understood “values to be of critical importance to outcomes in organizations, as they underlie and explain individual attitudes and behaviors and have been linked to both employee performance and satisfaction” (p. 325). The next section will review human values, organisational values, faith and community because of the influence our values and faith have on our decision making.

### **2.4.1) Human Values**

The values model that is the most commonly used is Shalom Schwartz’s Theory of Basic Human Values (2012, 1992) and both versions are depicted in Figures 2-1 and 2-2.



Figure 2-1 Schwartz et al (1992) Values Model



Figure 2-2 Schwartz et al (2012) Values Model

Figures 2-1 and 2-2 depict Schwartz et al's 1992 and 2012 iterations of his values model. The models have been rigorously tested internationally by many researchers including German researchers Wetzelhütter, Nnebedum, De Wet and Bacher (2020), Spanish researchers Giménez and Tamajón (2018) and Cohen (2009) based in Israel, adopting the model for their own research.

Schwartz et al (2012) defined values as being "trans-situational goals" (p. 664) meaning that values are not constricted by a given situation, they are personal and enduring. Schwartz et al (2012) also state that values "can help to explain individual decision making, attitudes and behaviour" (p. 664). Bardi and Schwartz (2003) highlight that not all researchers agree that values influence behaviour. For example, Verplanken and Holland (2002) highlight people do not always consciously think about their values when they are making choices. The example these researchers offer is "the person who values honesty might be creative in

filling out his or her tax form” (p. 434) and conclude “on the one hand, it seems that in spite of our capacity to hold elaborate value systems, we do not always live up to them” (p. 445). Whilst acknowledging that values may only be part of the decision-making process, there is a consensus that “numerous empirical studies link values to behaviors” (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003, p.1207). Values and their associated motivational goal, as defined by Schwartz et al (2012), are detailed below in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3 Definition of Schwartz et al (2012) values and its associated motivational goal (p. 664)

<b>Value</b>	<b>Motivational goal</b>
Self-direction	Independent thought and action – choosing, creating and exploring
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships and of self
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provides
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature

Figure 2-2 on page 71 depicts human values in a continuum and Schwartz et al (2012) acknowledge that the values can overlap, citing Davidov, Schmidt and Schwartz (2008) as stating that the model depicts a “continuum of colours rather than a set of discrete motivations” (p. 664). The 2012 model articulates the values which each influence its neighbour and are collectively allocated within four higher-order values of self-transcendence, openness to change, self-enhancement and conservation. The values on opposite sides of the circle are competing values, for example, within the higher-order value of openness to change there is the value of self-direction including thought and action. Opposing this is the higher-order value of conservation which includes conformity and tradition.

The higher-order values of openness to change and self-enhancement have a focus on personal values meaning, for example achievement, power and protecting oneself. This is in contrast to the opposing higher-order values of self-transcendence and conservation, which represent a social focus. For example: benevolence and universalism which include concern for others.

The higher-order values of self-transcendence and openness to change are associated with growth, meaning that people are more likely to be motivated when they are anxiety-free. The higher-order values of self-enhancement and conservation are associated with self-protection meaning that people are more likely to be motivated to act when they feel threatened.

During this research project, a revised aim was developed which was to see whether Schwartz's human values could be combined with the person/fit models (as detailed in Table 2-1 on page 54), to create a values focused student/university fit model. These models are discussed in greater detail in Chapters Five and Six, alongside the findings of qualitative interviews with students and alumni.

Due to the Catholic ethos of St Mary's University, the value of tradition is of particular relevance as this is where religion is attributed. The neighbouring values which also have influence are conformity (including rule), and security. Security includes both personal security and that of society. Tradition is defined as "maintaining and preserving cultural, family, or religious traditions" (Schwartz et al, 2012, p. 669). Within Chapter Six, there is a discussion regarding religion and where it is placed within the Holistic Student Fit Model.

Research undertaken by Westerman et al (2013) found that people who were religious were more likely to be 'virtuous advocates' meaning they held high social and moral values which benefit organisations as they will prioritise organisational goals over their own goals (Westerman et al, 2013). This interplay between personal and organisational values correlates with the fit models previously detailed in Table 2-1. Within a university environment, Schlesinger, Cervera and

Pérez-Cabañero (2017) found that if students shared values with the university there is increased loyalty. Once again, this is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six. The next section reviews and critiques the ideas behind organisational values.

#### **2.4.2) Organisational Values**

I have completed a review of the information listed on university websites relating to their values and how different types of universities portray themselves. As detailed earlier, there are different categories of university, such as the Russell Group which includes eighty percent of the ancient universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. The Russell Group collectively describe themselves as:

24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector.

(The Russell Group, Our Universities, 2021).

The MillionPlus is a group of 21 universities including those described as new, who were former polytechnics and colleges, including London South Bank University, the University of Bolton and Middlesex University. The MillionPlus group collectively describe themselves as:

The Association for Modern Universities in the UK, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We champion, promote and raise awareness of the essential role played by modern universities in a world-leading higher education. We are driven by a strong commitment to robust research and evidence in policy decisions in order to support a successful and flourishing UK higher education system, which can rise to the global economic, social and cultural challenges of the 21st century.

(Million Plus, Who we are, 2019)

St Mary's is part of the Cathedrals Group which consists of fifteen universities and university colleges with a church foundation. Examples of other institutions within the group are York St John, University of Roehampton and Liverpool Hope University. Collectively the group describes itself as:

The only grouping in the UK higher education landscape based on ethical principles informed by faith-based values. Members share a common faith heritage and a strong commitment to values such as social justice, respect for the individual and promoting the public good through our work with communities and charities.

(Cathedrals Group, About Us, 2019)

When comparing how each group describes its culture and ethos, it can be seen that the Russell Group has a focus on research and business whilst the MillionPlus Group highlight social and cultural challenges and the Cathedral Group focus on faith, social justice and public good. These statements reflect the cultural differences between the groups and indicate areas where institutes differentiate themselves.

When considering St Mary's culture, it is key to understand its Catholic heritage. St Mary's University was founded in 1850 in Hammersmith by the Catholic Poor Schools Committee before moving to Strawberry Hill in 1925. Initially the College was administered by the Brothers of Christian Instruction, then in 1899 by the Vincentian order followed by a succession of Catholic priests until its first lay Principal was appointed in 1992. St Mary's mission began with six students and a goal of training them to become teachers to educate poor Catholic children. The teacher training ethos has endured and currently a third of students are enrolled on teaching courses. The institution has evolved over time, first admitting women in 1966, diversifying the portfolio of courses in 1975 and evolving from a college to a university college, and finally a university in its own right in 2014 (St Mary's, The Founding of St Mary's, 2019b).

St Mary's website describes its legal objectives as:

To advance education, in such manner as befits a Catholic foundation, by: the provision, development and conduct of a Catholic institution of higher education; and the provision of training and continuing professional development for teachers in both religious and secular schools, with special provision for those intending to teach in Catholic and other Christian schools."

(Articles of Association of St Mary's University, Twickenham: approved by the Privy Council January 2014)



A Catholic foundation in higher education is understood as “an academic institution which in a rigorous and critical fashion assists in the advancement of human dignity and cultural heritage through research, teaching and services offered to local, national and international communities.

(Source: Ex Corde Ecclesiae 1990 para 12: quoted in The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland The Canon Law: Letter and Spirit, p 442)

(St Mary's, About Us, 2019c)

It is clear from St Mary's legal objectives, values and membership of the Cathedrals Group that their founding Catholic heritage is the mainstay of the university's culture. St Mary's has four core values which are prominently displayed on the wall in the main cafeteria, the Refectory, and are detailed within its Vision, the university's five-year plan. These values are inclusiveness, generosity of spirit, respect and excellence (St Mary's, Vision 2030, 2021b). These are not dissimilar to those of other universities. For example, neighbouring university Kingston's values are excellence, respect, innovation and creativity (Kingston University, Kingston University Matters, 2019), and Roehampton University which is also a member of the Cathedrals Group lists community, engagement and partnership (Roehampton University, Strategic Plan, 2019).

There are only fifteen faith-based universities in the UK, approximately 12% of the total. Four UK universities are Catholic: Leeds Trinity, Liverpool Hope, Newman and St Mary's (Catholic Education Service, 2019). Proportionally in the UK, there are more faith-based primary and secondary schools than universities. The literature was reviewed to ascertain whether there was any commonality of themes relating to the choice of institutions at primary, secondary and higher education pertaining to their faith-based status. In 2017 there were 6,814 faith-based schools in England, of which 91% were primary schools and 9% were secondary schools, equating to approximately 35% of all primary schools and 19% of all secondary schools in England. In the UK, primary and secondary schools are ranked in league tables based on attainment levels in reading, writing and maths plus their Ofsted rating. The Telegraph 2018 Guide to Schools uses the data from these league tables to rank the top 100 primary schools, of which the top five schools

were all faith based. Four are affiliated to the Church of England and one is Catholic (Kirk, 2019). More recently, in the Sunday Times Parent Power Schools Guide 2022 offer a list of the top 500 primary schools in the UK. The top five schools within The Times rankings include two Catholic schools with the remaining three being secular (McCall, Sunday Times Parent Power Schools Guide, 2021).

As previously discussed within 2.3.1, in February 2008, The Sutton Trust undertook research into university admissions by individual school. This research focused on schools with the highest university admission rates and concluded that pupils from elite and independent schools were more likely to transition to one of the top thirteen universities in the UK: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, London School of Economics, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, University College London, Warwick and York. When focusing on the students who had transitioned from one of the top 25 non-grammar, state schools to one of the top thirteen universities, 28% came from schools who had a faith-based admissions criterion despite nationally only 19% of secondary schools being faith-based. This statistic would suggest that students who attend faith-based schools are striving to attend high ranking universities and not those which are faith-based. The levels of academic success and league table attainment garnered by faith-based primary and secondary schools is not replicated in higher education. The four Catholic Universities based in the UK were ranked 51<sup>st</sup> (St Mary's), 80<sup>th</sup> (Liverpool Hope), 100<sup>th</sup> (Leeds Trinity), and 118<sup>th</sup> (Newman University) in the 2023 Sunday Times University League Table.

There is a body of research around why faith-based schools achieve higher levels of academic attainment than state schools, particularly whether it is their unique ethos or whether their entry criteria benefit the middle classes. Unlike state schools, faith-based schools are able to govern their own entry criteria and are usually oversubscribed. Although anyone can apply, they are able to prioritise children whose families practise a particular faith. The selective nature of faith-based schools is further evidenced when considering the proportion of children

entitled to free school meals; in London 17% of children in faith-based schools received free meals, whilst the average in other schools was 25% (Walford, 2008). It is unclear whether faith-based schools are sought after and oversubscribed due to their positions in league tables or because of their ethos and values. It is claimed by Walford (2008) that when Tony Blair was the Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, he believed that the ethos of faith-based schools promoted the moral development of pupils as well as academic ability. It was during his premiership that the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), now the Department for Education, issued guidance entitled '*Faith in the Education System*' (2007) encouraging the growth of faith-based schools. Within the '*Faith in the Education System*' guidance, the Government and the faith-based schools stated that they "recognise that many parents who are not of the faith of a particular faith school seek places in those schools because they value the ethos and character of the school" (p. 3). The ethos and values of an organisation is traditionally the centre of their identity, in other words, their brand. If it is the case that faith-based primary and secondary schools are successful because of their ethos and values, then it is unclear from the available literature why this is not reflected in HE. Literature is scarce regarding why students chose faith-based universities where institutions claim similar values to faith-based primary and secondary schools, and therefore similar brands. Parents may choose faith-based schools because of their ethos and character, but parents may also aspire to send their children to faith-based schools because of their academic reputation and league table success and then in turn, aspire to Russell Group universities for the same reasons.

### **2.4.3) Faith**

UK-based research into student fit is scarce, particularly within a faith context, however there is a body of research relating to faith-based higher education in America. The National Centre for Education Statistics (2023) state that there are 3,931 universities in America, 226 of which are Catholic (Association for Catholic Universities and Colleges, 2023). Due to the availability of American studies, the literature was reviewed to explore potential similarities. An American think tank,

The Pew Research Center (2020), established that 60% of American teenagers aged 13-17 said that religion was very or somewhat important to them, whilst 66% of university graduates are Christian, 20% of whom are Catholic. This is representative of the population as in 2019, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) stated that 68.2% of the population of the United States of America identified themselves as being Christian, which is made up of Protestant 46.5%, Roman Catholic 20.8%, and other Christian 0.9% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). When comparing American statistics to the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data from 2011 shows that 59.3% of the population identify as being Christian. The second largest religious group, they state, are Muslim which make up 4.8% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2012). The 2021 census data is not yet available, but a poll for YouGov in 2020 has indicated a decline in religious belief stating that 41% of the UK population do not believe in God, compared to 27% who believe in a form of God or higher power (You Gov, 2020). The website, British Religion in Numbers (BRIN), cite statistics from 2010 which estimates that 60% of UK students attending university identify with a religion, mirroring that of the UK population. BRIN state that “most [students] do not regard themselves as particularly religious” (Field, 2010). However, in more current research by HESA (2021) using student data from 2017/18, 50.2% of students identified as having a religion. The largest group was Christian (32.9%) followed by Muslim (8.9%). This decline in religious observance makes comparisons with America even more tenuous, however the research has been included due to the absence of anything more relevant or substantial, therefore data cannot be compared on a like-for-like basis. In 2018/19, 44% of St Mary’s students indicated they had a religious affiliation, less than the UK average; 30% of St Mary’s students said they had no religion and the remainder did not comment. The lower than average proportion of students with a religious affiliation may be surprising to some observers who might assume a Catholic University would have a higher than average proportion of religious students. As previously discussed, although faith-based primary and secondary schools have a high proportion of

students who are religious due to their selective admissions criteria, this is not replicated at St Mary's. The data is not publicly available to see if this is consistent with other faith-based HEIs in the UK.

A number of American studies into religious identity and satisfaction at Christian universities found that students used adjectives such as caring, compassionate and friendly when referring to universities with a religious affiliation. Students felt that these universities had a deep sense of community spirit which was supportive, compassionate and accepting of others. Students believed that staff were caring, offering pastoral support. Students with a religious affiliation were found to be more satisfied when attending a faith-based institution. A definition of faith-based universities is offered by Swezey and Ross (2012) who cite Benne's 2001 model as follows:

The expression "religious colleges" refers to those institutions of higher learning where the religion of the founding or sponsoring religious group has some direct influence upon the institution itself. By "direct" I mean real, observable, clear and effective, with an active connection between a particular religion and a particular academic institution... The direct influence to which I refer can be seen in terms of institutional identity, mission, governance, administration, criteria for faculty hiring, curricula, student life, campus ministries, policies, operations and procedure and so forth. (p. 63)

It is believed that the 'direct influence' within this definition creates an overarching religious environment and culture where student identity and/or satisfaction are not linked to the specific religious affiliation of the institution. This means students from any or no religion can fit in at a faith-based institution, which promotes and supports a tradition which is different to their own (Bowman and Denson, 2014; Burchell, Lee and Olson 2010; Swezey and Ross, 2010). When considering Swezey and Ross' citation of Lirfin's definition of a religious college (2004), St Mary's appear to have adopted an "umbrella" model, whereby the university welcomes diversity of all faiths and none. However, in 2018, St Mary's created a new role of Director of Catholic Mission. The Director works to promote St Mary's Catholic mission and vision which was derived from the work of Saint John Henry Newman (Booth, 2018). Newman wrote *The Idea of a University* in 1850 and his concept of a university was based upon liberal education, taking a holistic

approach requiring self-reflection. Newman’s vision is summarised by Barnett (1997) who stated that “higher education is literally that: it is a higher form of understanding, gained through self-reflection on what is taken for knowledge” (p. 20), the purpose of which was to expand the mind and develop one’s character, described as “intellectual self-empowerment” (p. 21).

In 2019, St Mary’s became the new home for Mater Ecclesiae College which was founded in 1614 and was formerly located at Heythrop College, London (St Mary’s, Mater Ecclesiae College, 2019d). Mater Ecclesiae College is the only institution in the UK to offer ecclesiastical degrees (The Catholic Church, Bishops Conference for England and Wales, 2019). The partnership between St Mary’s and Mater Ecclesiae has resulted in St Mary’s welcoming seminarians and lay students studying the BA (Hons) in Theological Studies alongside the Ecclesiastical degree, the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology. The religious beliefs of St Mary’s students and their motivations for attending the university are discussed in Chapter Four following the analysis of the data collected during Phase One.

#### **2.4.4) Community**

Research carried out in 1986 by McMillan and Chavis sought to define community. They proposed four elements: membership, influence, integration and a fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection combined to define community. These are characterised in Table 2-4:

Table 2-4 McMillan and Chavis, Definition of the elements of a sense of community, 1986 (p. 9)

<b>Membership</b>	The feeling of belonging or sharing a sense of personal relatedness.
<b>Influence</b>	A sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members.
<b>Integration and fulfilment of needs</b>	The feeling that members’ needs will be met by the resources received through their membership of the group.
<b>Shared emotional connection</b>	The commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together and similar experiences.

McMillan and Chavis expand on their definition of belonging, linking belonging with identification and stating that this involves “the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group” (p. 10) which is comparable with the earlier definition of student fit: “to feel that you belong to a particular group and are accepted by that group” (Cambridge Dictionary 2019).

McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) definitions were created for community in broad terms and the model can be applied to higher education and the university community. Later in this study participants refer to St Mary’s community. What they meant by this will be explored in Chapter Five. Scenarios included the wider community and how residents and businesses engaged with their local university, whilst others considered their peers in Halls, classmates, teammates across various sports, students, lecturers and other staff. The common thread throughout the reference to community was that it involved people. The consistent reference to people is congruent with the Cambridge dictionary definition of community: “all the people who live in a particular area, or a group of people who are considered as a unit because of their shared interests or background” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b). It also aligns to the origins of the word ‘university’ which derives from Latin ‘universitas magistrorum et scholarium’, meaning community of teachers and scholars (Wikipedia, 2021).

The St Mary’s community was the subject of research completed by Bogle (2020) entitled ‘Simmaries’. St Mary’s students are collectively known as ‘Simmies’, a name which originates from the 1900s when St Mary’s students were known as Simmaries, changing to Simmeries or Simmarians in the 1920s, a term still used by some older alumni (Bogle, 2020). This has since been shortened to simply Simmies and the name is used by the Students’ Union, sports teams and societies, and by the students themselves as a collective noun for current students as well as alumni. Bogel’s (2020) narrative includes multiple references and examples of the St Mary’s historic community. When St Mary’s only had 32 students, “there was a

strong sense of community. They did everything together...” (p. 22). This quote relates to St Mary’s in 1919, post-World War One when St Mary’s operated a military routine. Bogle (2020) writes that the college was very disciplined, students were required to be obedient, get up early, attend Mass and there were restrictions on evenings out. Perhaps it was the small number of students, the strict routine or communal living which created the sense of community Bogel (2020) describes. It is unclear but there is a documented sense of camaraderie.

Within the collective term of ‘community’ there are groups such as sports teams, class mates and societies. Bogel (2020) chronicled the history of sports at St Mary’s, dating back to the 1900s stressing the role sport contributed to the community: “College songs, College dinners, gatherings of old Simmarians, wartime get-togethers, local Simmarian clubs – all of these centred-on sport from the College’s earliest days. Being active and sporty was part of being a Simmarian” (p. 89). The importance of sport within the modern university will be discussed further in Chapters Four, Five and Six as the impact upon student fit and sense of belonging is evaluated.

In conclusion, this chapter has looked at three areas: the HE landscape, student fit and culture and values. The chapter has highlighted the turbulent environment HE has experienced, and as a consequence of funding, how important it is for universities to meet income targets. It has explored the conflict this has created between recruiting students to meet income targets and the consequential ethical challenges that ensued, such as unconditional offers and the lowering of entry requirements. It examined the importance of students feeling a sense of belonging or fit and the impact this has on retention and attainment for universities, but also for the well-being, success and satisfaction for students. It has also addressed values, culture and religion within a faith-based university. It concluded by summarising what a university is: a community which comprises of its population; the staff, students within the context of its physical environment: the campus, location and facilities; its social environment: culture, sports and social



opportunities; and its academic environment: courses, research and reputation. Although universities group themselves together and offer similar courses, each university has its own unique community and it is against this backdrop that the research was undertaken. Chapter Three now addresses the design and methodology of this research.

# Chapter 3

## Philosophy and Research Design

### 3.1) Introduction

As discussed during Chapter One, this body of research was motivated by my belief that prospective students should be provided with all the tools available to make an informed decision on where they choose to study. Chapter One also introduced and discussed the concept of cultural capital and how this, being your personal history, life experience, family culture and values, in turn influences choice, expectations and experience of higher education. The research philosophy for this investigation stemmed from these motivations, as well as my personal values and my personal cultural capital which were previously discussed. This then influenced the principles and ideas leading to the research design for this study, which will now be discussed. This chapter comprises of five sections as follows:

- Research objectives
- Research paradigm
  - Ontology
  - Epistemology
- Research design and methods
  - Case study methodology
  - Target population and sample
  - Data collection
  - Reliability
  - Ethical Issues
  - Piloting and preliminary work
- Data Analysis
  - Phase One – quantitative data analysis
  - Phase Two – thematic analysis

- Phase Three – analysis of photographs and thematic analysis
- Data Presentation

This is followed by a discussion regarding the creation of a student/institution fit model, the rationale for recommendations arising from the research, engagement with St Mary's research community and a chapter summary. I will now continue by reiterating the research objectives and will then discuss the research paradigm, design, methodology, methods of data collection and data analysis.

### **3.2) Research Objectives**

This research was undertaken at St Mary's University in Twickenham, London. As previously discussed, St Mary's is a Catholic university originally established in 1850 to train teachers to educate poor Catholic children, but is now a university with approximately 4,600 students (The Sunday Times, Good University Guide, 2022, p. 79). The fundamental aim of this investigation was to understand student fit within the context of a faith-based institution; the reasons why students of all faiths and none selected St Mary's, a Catholic institution, as their university of choice. To achieve these aims, the following objectives were set:

- 1) to discover whether students set out to select a university that had similar institutional values to their own personal values;
- 2) to ascertain why students selected St Mary's and whether there was commonality based on student characteristics;
- 3) to seek to understand why students chose to attend a faith-based institution, irrespective of their own faith stance or worldview.

As the research evolved, an additional aim was added:

- 4) to create a model illustrating personal values and institutional fit.

These aims were researched across three phases which were designed to ascertain and articulate from the students' perspective why they chose to study at St Mary's, and whether they considered if they would fit in at the university. Fitting

in was defined in Chapter One as “to feel that you belong to a particular group and are accepted by that group” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). An overview of the three phases are detailed in Table 3-1 (below):

Table 3-1 Summary of the three-phase study into student ‘fit’

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>One</b>	To establish and quantify, using student surveys, the reasons why students chose to attend St Mary’s University and whether factors differed according to individual students’ characteristics
<b>Two</b>	To obtain a narrative from students, by conducting a series of interviews, to establish in greater depth why they chose St Mary’s. Participants will also be asked if they know what St Mary’s values are and their personal experience/examples of those values.
<b>Three</b>	Utilising the photographs from the 2019/20 university undergraduate prospectus, Phase Three asked students to select pictures which resonated with them and asked why. Participants were asked whether the prospectus was an accurate representation of their experience.

Next, I will address the research paradigm.

### **3.3) Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm considers the epistemology, ontology and the associated methodology for the research process. It is defined by Punch (2014) as “a set of assumptions about the world, and about what constitute proper techniques and topics for inquiring into the world” (p. 14). Punch (2014) expands and clarifies this definition as follows:

1. The ontological question: What is the form and the nature of the reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?
2. The epistemological question: What is the relationship between the knower and what can be known?
3. The methodological question: How can the inquirer go about finding out what can be known?

(Punch, 2014, p. 15)

The next three sections will address these three elements on an individual basis.

#### **3.3.1) Ontological Approach**

My ontological position was discussed in Chapter One, when I gave an account of my personal educational experience. This was evidence of my lived experiences, or namely my habitus. From this position of my experience, a subjective ontological approach was adopted. A subjective ontology was described by

O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) as an approach which “sees facts as culturally and historically located, and therefore subject to variable behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and interpretations” (p. 57). This approach is compatible with presenting the data via a case study, as the aim of this research was to understand students’ motivations, behaviour and experience, utilising a “rich and vivid” narrative of events (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017, p. 376). These researchers define a case study as “a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle” (2011, p. 289). They continue to state that the purpose of a case study is to seek to:

portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts; to catch the complexity and situatedness of behaviour; to contribute to action and intervention; and to present and represent reality – to give a sense of being there. (p. 129).

Bearing these interpretations in mind, I considered a subjective approach was the most appropriate, as this approach recognises individual experiences and acknowledges that I, the researcher, is embedded in the research process and that I am not separate from it.

### **3.3.2) Epistemology**

An interpretive epistemological approach was adopted as it has allowed me to consider interviewees’ individual experiences and opinions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2009). This approach recognises that students are humans who will have multiple perspectives influenced by their individual versions of reality, social context and environment from which they view the world: their cultural capital, and formed by their habitus. Fisher (2004) describes interpretative research as “seeking people’s accounts of how they make sense of the world and the structures and processes within it” (p. 41). Therefore, as interpretivism is based upon people generating knowledge and constructing meaning from interactions, either as individuals or in groups, between experience and ideas in a world that is unpredictable, this approach was appropriate for my research which was focused on capturing subjective experiences. Punch (2014) defines a case study as being:

In keeping with other approaches in qualitative research, the case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case. Therefore, the case study is more a strategy than a method" (2014, p. 120).

Punch's definition highlights the appropriateness of adopting a case study format for this body of research which was undertaken from a phenomenologist stance, focusing on students, their experience at university, their recollections and interpretations of those experiences from which individual case studies could be constructed. This approach was flexible; allowing knowledge to develop as circumstances and situations changed, therefore it was the most appropriate for a subjective topic such as the feeling of fitting in or belonging. It also allowed for stories, anecdotes and personal experiences to be collected, and, for these types of data to be accepted and considered as valid data (Howell, 2013). An individual's perspective will vary according to a variety of factors including their experience, ethnicity, cultural background and so on. There will undoubtedly be numerous influences upon the students' realities as participants, for example, including the culture of their faculty or school. It is recognised and valued that a question can have many different answers dependent upon the perspective of the participant. This approach allowed me as a researcher to explore values, adopting an interpretive stance, with a focus upon the complexities of how participants make sense of their world (Walliman, 2011; Myers, 2009).

### **3.4) Research Design**

As detailed above, a subjective ontological approach and an interpretive epistemological approach underpinned this research. These approaches combined to fashion the research design. This body of work takes the format of a case study, focussing on St Mary's University, Twickenham. Stake (1995) defines a case study as "both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning" (1995, p. 237). Utilising Stake's definition, this research focus, 'the case', was on a single institution. The aim of this case study was to offer a unique and in-depth account of the reasons why students chose to study at St Mary's, which is the product derived from the learning. This approach is congruent with Cohen

Manion and Morrison's (2011) description of a case study which, they state, "portrays 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation" and articulates "participants lived experiences of, thought about and feelings for, a situation" (p. 290). Yin (2018) highlights that "there's no formula" for a case study, and that case studies are relevant when seeking an "in-depth description of some social phenomenon" (p. 4); this thinking could be understood to include phenomena such as fitting in and belonging. The research is bound at one institution and embeds five individual student case studies to represent the relationship between St Mary's students and the institution and, personal and institutional values, which are presented in Chapter Six. Next the methods adopted as part of the research design are discussed in greater depth. The research design is later summarised and depicted in Figure 3-8.

#### **3.4.1) Case Study Design**

Within case study literature, there is not one definitive definition of what constitutes a case study. Four definitions were considered, Stake (1995) and Yin (2013), due to their dominance of research into case study theory, Punch (2014) and Cohen Manion and Morrison (2011) due to their publications in educational research. As I endeavour to justify my use of a case study, it can be maintained that Yin's definition is the most significant for my argument. He states that such a study amounts to:

an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (Yin, 2013, p. 16).

From the consensus of the four aforementioned definitions, I deduce that a case study is the study of something that is 'real life' and in-depth. The next step was to consider the characteristics of case studies, bearing in mind the definitions of the above authors.

Having considered the literature regarding case studies alongside an exploration of their characteristics and requirements, the most appropriate approach for this body of work was an instrumental embedded single-case case study. An instrumental

case study is defined by Stake (1995) as a case study that uses a particular case to give insight into an issue. Stake (1995) articulates two other types of case study: intrinsic, and collective. An intrinsic case study is typically undertaken to learn about a particular case whilst a collective case study involves studying multiple cases simultaneously. This is also known as a multiple or comparative case study.

Yin (2013) discusses four basic types of designs for case studies as being: holistic single-case design, embedded single-case design, holistic multiple-case design and embedded multiple case design (p. 50). A holistic single-case design consists of one single case, for example, one organisation or person. An embedded single case study design consists of one case with additional sub-units, for example a case study of a university which includes additional case studies from lecturers. A holistic multiple-case design includes several organisations, for example, multiple universities. An embedded multiple case design would, for example, focus on multiple universities and their students or groups of students such as international or mature students, academic and/or professional staff. There is discussed later in 7.6, as there is scope for potential future research adopting a multiple case study design.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) highlight that case study boundaries often include organisations, in this instance St Mary's University. By focusing on a single institution, the aim of this case study was to offer a unique and in-depth account of the reasons why students chose to study at St Mary's, which is congruent with Cohen Manion and Morrison's (2011) description of a case study. These researchers state that a case study, "portrays 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation" and articulates "participants lived experiences of, thought about and feelings for, a situation" (p. 290). The case is bound at St Mary's University, which is 'the case'. Although an embedded multi-case design would have allowed for comparisons between other universities, St Mary's was the single case study for a number of reasons. First were restrictions of both access and ethics. Whilst I was



granted permission to access St Mary's student records system to obtain personal data for data analysis purposes, the same level of access was not available at other institutions due to the personal data contained within student records and due to commercial sensitivities. Second, basing the research at a single institution afforded the opportunity for in-depth research, and having been employed by St Mary's for seventeen years, I offered a unique insight. The design and data collection of the embedded single-case case study was approached systematically to ensure rigour and three phases of data collection were undertaken.

A mixed method approach was adopted across three complementary phases, defined as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004 p. 17). Braun and Clarke, (2014) maintain that qualitative forms of research offer "rich and compelling insights into the real worlds, experiences, and perspective... in ways that are completely different to, but also sometimes complementary to, the knowledge we can obtain through quantitative methods" (p 1). A mixed methods approach was adopted so the research would capture both statistical information using responses via a survey alongside the use of complementary semi-structured interviews, allowing the capture of variables affecting decision making which are difficult to quantify numerically. Qualitative research offered the opportunity to research why, how and when people chose to study at St Mary's, whilst the quantitative research offered the opportunity to measure how many and how frequently specific reasons were chosen. A multi-method approach was utilised which allowed for a holistic approach utilising different sources, allowing for triangulation and corroboration of the data increasing validity and reliability. A summary of the research method for each phase is detailed (over) in Table 3-2:

Table 3-2 Details of the research method adopted for each of the three phases

Phase	Method	Rationale
One	Quantitative	Questionnaire, via UKES, a national survey sent to all students. The questionnaire included the question 'We would like to know why you chose to study at St Mary's' which was modelled on Gilbreath et al (2011) offering students sixteen reasons including an 'other' option for free text.
Two	Qualitative	Semi structured interviews with a sample of undergraduate students, alumni and staff who are also alumni to obtain a narrative relating to their university choice and St Mary's values.
Three	Quantitative and Qualitative	An analysis of the photographs within the 2019/20 St Mary's University undergraduate prospectus, quantifying photographs and categorising them alongside semi structured interviews with a sample of undergraduate students, alumni and staff who are also alumni.

The initial quantitative data collection and preliminary analysis adopted for Phase One created a set of data which was later enriched by qualitative interviews during Phases Two and Three. This approach allowed me to elaborate findings, clarify areas of interest, add context and life to the data. A mixed method approach required both inductive and deductive reasoning. Initially an inductive approach was adopted when collecting the quantitative data, however following the data analysis, themes began to emerge which were subject to further research in Phases Two and Three. There was an interrelationship between both inductive and deductive strategies; the quantitative data led to initial suppositions which were then tested in the subsequent interviews, confirming the theory. Bryman and Bell (2003) highlight that the deductive approach requires the researcher to have a central research question and then this in turn will "drive the process of gathering data" (p. 10). The formality of a central question or hypothesis would have hindered my research into an emotive subject such as the feeling of belonging or fitting. There are no clear definitions for fitting in or belonging which could be open to interpretation for different individuals and is therefore difficult to measure scientifically or quantifiably. Additionally, I wanted the participants to speak in their own words, using their own language and sets of relevancies and orders of importance rather than these being restricted by the research instrument.

Therefore, although some questions were posed following Phase One, a more inductive approach was adopted to allow for the collection of qualitative data using interviews and to enable conceptual ideas to develop. An inductive approach allowed for discussions about fitting in at university and to identify the reasons why students chose to attend St Mary's which were unknown and unanticipated by the researcher. These could then be discussed by the interviewees during the unstructured interviews. Walliman (2011) warns that when taking an inductive approach, the researcher must not jump to conclusions as "we should be aware that what might at first seem obvious may not be so reliable upon making further investigations" (p. 22), warning researchers against making assumptions. Induction allowed the flexibility to update the emphasis of the research throughout as I gained insight and understanding from the participants. This approach did not require a hypothesis in advance of the research to be proven or disproven but allowed for themes and patterns to be identified and for broader insights to be established (DeCarlo, 2018). For these reasons, the research design adopted three complementary phases to test the reliability of the research.

The design of Phase One allowed me the freedom to replicate the data collection, offering the option to compare data to previous or future research with precision. The data were collected in the form of a questionnaire with one question and a range of potential responses, including free text, allowing students to add their own reasons. The collection was replicated year-on-year for two years. The design was longitudinal, initially over a three-year period but unfortunately St Mary's withdrew from the survey in 2019. Students were asked the following question:

We'd like to know why you chose to attend St Mary's. Pick one or more of the following or add your own:

- Affordability
- Catholic ethos
- Diverse student body
- Enjoyable social life/great Students' Union

- Entry tariff for my course
- Geographic location
- Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)
- Great support services (eg. careers service, student services)
- Highly regarded academic reputation
- Highly regarded sporting reputation
- Intellectual climate
- Pleasant/safe campus environment
- Size
- Sports and recreational opportunities
- State of the art facilities (eg. laboratories)
- Other (please state)

This list was based on existing research by Gilbreath et al's (2011)

*'Person/Environment Fit and its effects on university students: A response surface methodology study'*. Some of the identifying factors in Gilbreath et al's (2011) research, which was based in the USA, were adapted for use within St Mary's University, adapting the tone to reflect UK higher education. Changes were made to add reference to entry tariff points which are unique to the UK. Tariff points, also referred to as UCAS points, are a numerical value reflecting a students' qualifications and whether they meet the threshold entry requirement set by the institution. A reference to UCAS tariff points was added to questionnaire as a reason for university choice. This addition was mainly due to the insistence of the Market Research and Data Analyst based at St Mary's who firmly believed students main motivation for selecting St Mary's was based on the number of tariff points they had achieved. In addition, other amendments were: campus environment and safety were combined, layout was omitted, great student body was amended to diverse student body and due to St Mary's unique position as London's only Catholic university, Catholic ethos was also added as an option.

A qualitative approach was adopted for Phases Two and Three, allowing me the freedom to explore the aspects of decision-making and providing an opportunity to gain valuable insights into the topic. This approach complemented the quantitative method of data collection in Phase One which allowed me to use interviews with open ended questions (Fisher, 2004). Phase Three included an analysis of the photographs within the 2019/20 St Mary's University undergraduate prospectus. This analysis quantified the category of the photographs, classified them and allocated them to an HE environment derived from Gilbreath et al's (2011) person/environment fit model. An analysis was completed to quantify the images selected by students alongside a narrative detailing why.

The data collected from each of the three phases were analysed and then the design was reviewed. This is evidenced in Chapter Five where the data from phases Two and Three are presented together after the design was amended due to similarities within the findings.

#### **3.4.2) Target Population and Sample**

The target population for Phase One was the undergraduate and foundation student body of St Mary's University in Twickenham, who were invited to participate in the UKES Survey. For the subsequent studies, a sample of undergraduate students were recruited and, following valid feedback regarding the robustness of the research, this was expanded to include members of St Mary's alumni. The sampling strategy differed by phase as detailed in Table 3-3:

Table 3-3 Details of three phases, sampling strategies

Phase	Type of data collection	Sampling Strategy
One	Questionnaire, via UKES Survey	This is a national survey and is sent to all students. The question was deliberately short to promote maximum participation. The maximum sample size was limited to the total number of current foundation and undergraduate students at St Mary's who chose to participate each year and were current enrolled students in February of 2018 and 2019
Two	Semi-structured Interviews	A representative sample of the foundation and undergraduate student population was selected. This allowed for the data collected to be as representative as possible of the entire St Mary's student population. A sampling frame was adopted to ensure representation across the groupings used to analyse the data in Phase One: ethnicity, religion, parental education and faculty. As this is a relatively small study, it is accepted that the sample will not be truly representative.  In addition to students, alumni and staff who were also alumni were recruited.
Three	Semi-structured Interviews	This phase ran in parallel with Phase Two with the same participants.

To illustrate the student sample, the following graphs depict the student population at the time of the data collection, compared to the participants in the study. Using the data from the student records system, the student population at St Mary's at the time of the research is depicted in Figure 3-1 as follow:

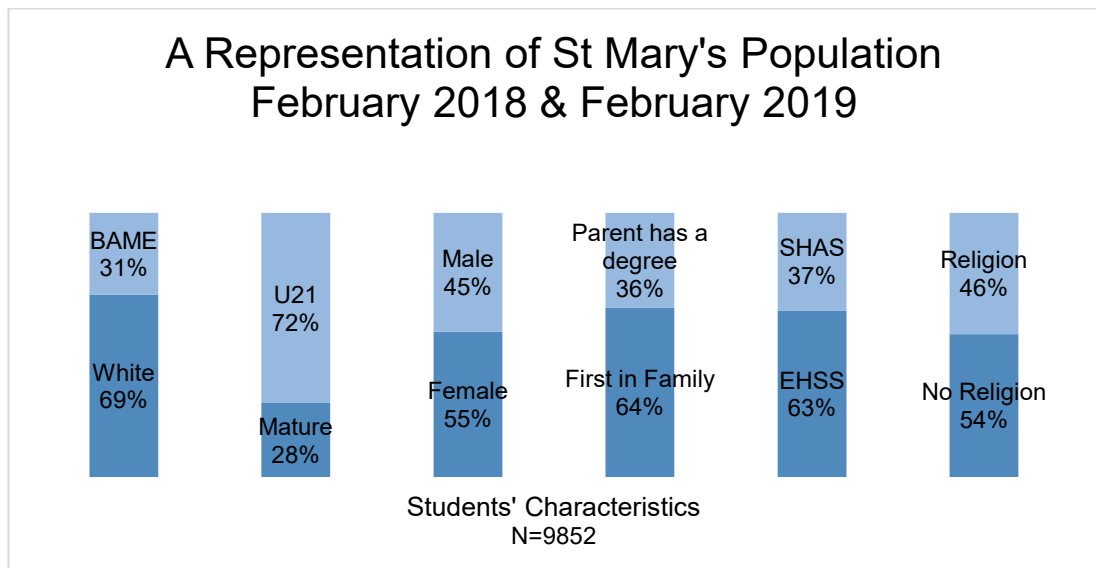


Figure 3-1 St Mary's Population in February 2018 and 2019

The following three graphs illustrate the characteristics of the participants; first year students, alumni and then all participants combined. The first is Figure 3-2 (below) which illustrates the first-year participants who participated in the interviews for Phases Two and Three.

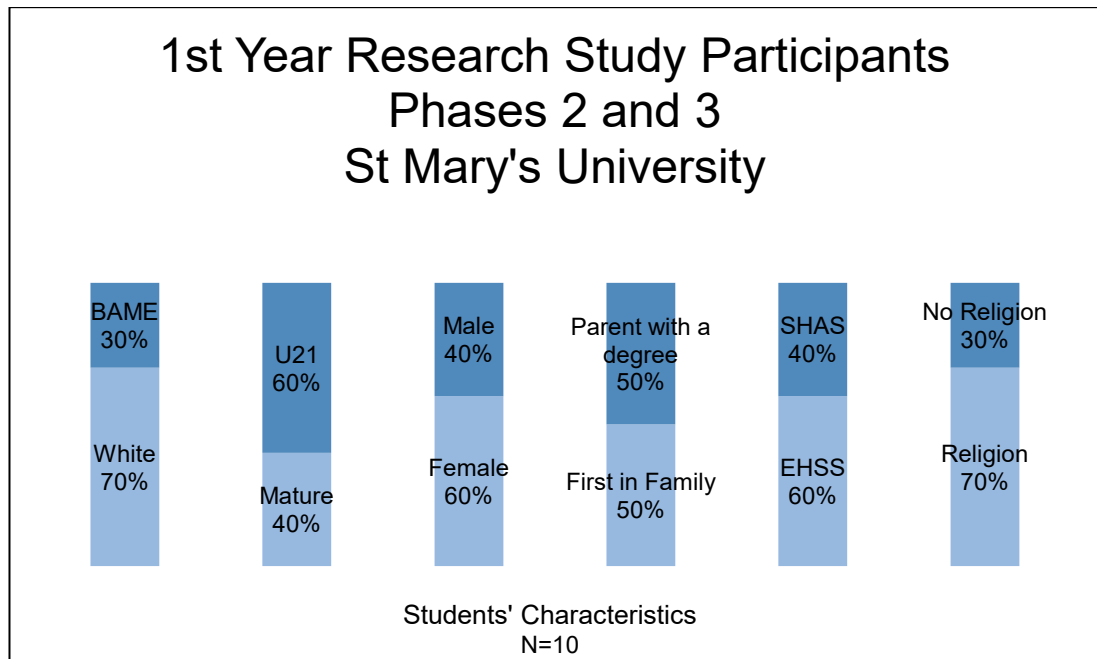


Figure 3-2 First Year Participants

Figure 3-3 (over) reveals the alumni who participated in Phase Two and Three and summarises their characteristics.

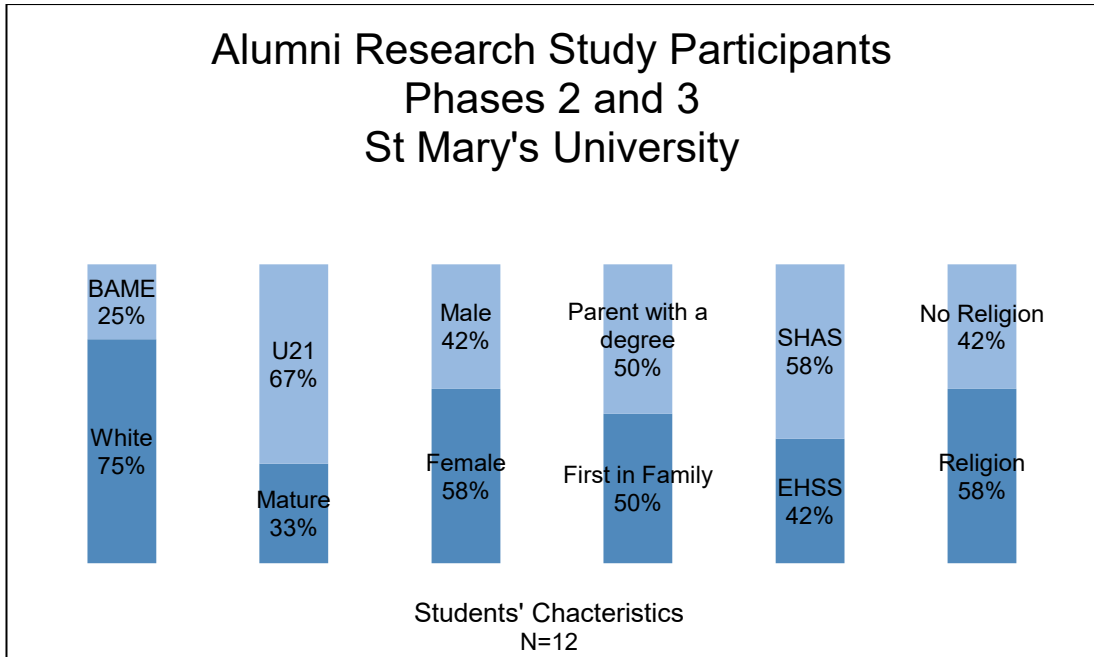


Figure 3-3 Alumni participants (including staff/alumni)

Figure 3-4 (below) summarises and illustrates the characteristics of all of the participants for Phases Two and Three including first year students, alumni and staff who are also alumni.

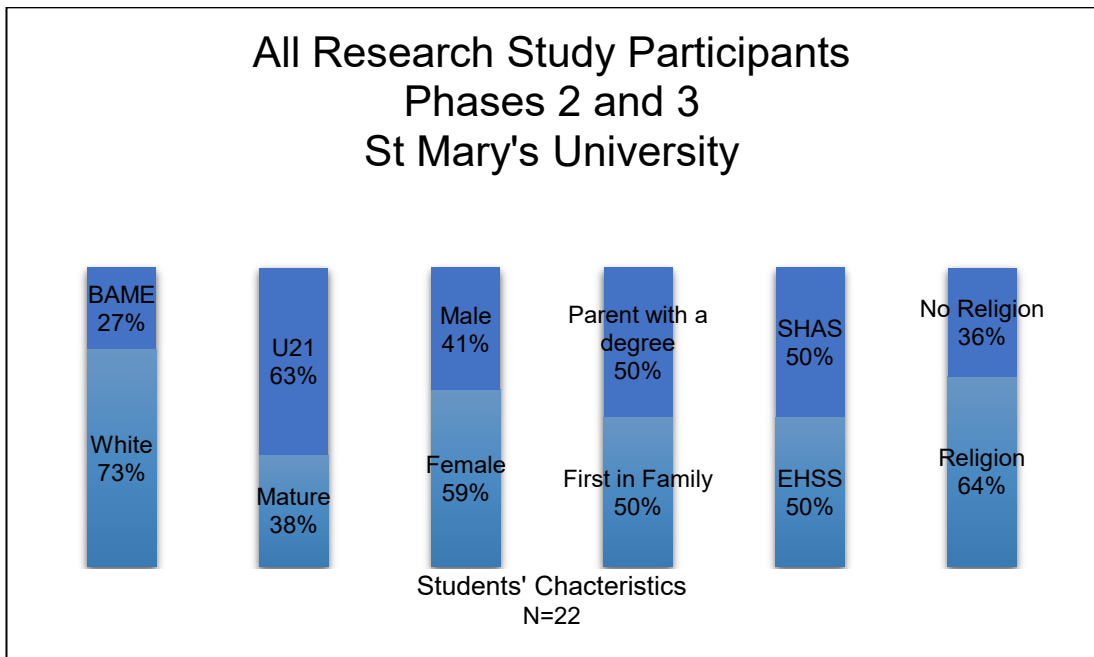


Figure 3-4 All Participants



The diagrams above reflect that participants represented a reasonable facsimile of the actual student population. The rationale for interviewing students in their first year was based on data arising from Phase One. The data reflected that the students' reasons for selecting St Mary's changed as they progressed throughout their degree. As the research question is rooted in their initial motivations for application it seemed most relevant to capture data from students before their motives developed and whilst they could still remember their reasoning. The sample could have included postgraduate students and this could be an area for future research.

In total, twenty-two students, including alumni were interviewed. One group of participants consisted of ten students who were first year students when interviewed. First-year students were selected as they had recently joined the university and the reasons for doing so were relatively fresh in their minds. The first-year cohort was as follows:

- Seven students were white and three were students of colour;
- Six were female and four were male;
- Seven students identified as having a religion, either Catholic, Christian or Baptist, although one was self-confessed as lapsed, whilst three had no religion;
- Six were on a programme in English, History and Social Sciences (EHSS) and four were in the School of Sport, Health and Applied Sciences (SHAS);
- Four of the students were commuters, whilst six were residing in Halls of Residence;
- Five of the students were first generation, whilst five had a parent with a degree;
- Eight of the students were members of a society such as the Catholic Society, Cheer Leading Society and Football Society;
- Two were mature students.

Another group of participants consisted of six alumni. The students graduated between 2014 and 2019 and were made up as follows:

- Four students were white, two identified as being students of colour;
- 67% were male;
- Four students identified as having a religion, either Catholic or Christian, although some were lapsed, whilst two had no religion;
- Four had graduated from a programme in SHAS, two from the EHSS faculty;
- Two of the participants were commuters, and four had resided in Halls of Residence;
- Half were first generation students;
- Half had been a member of a society;
- Two were mature students when studying.

The third participant group consisted of six members of staff who were also alumni; it was of particular interest why these individuals had such a longstanding relationship with the university. Of this cohort:

- Five members of staff were white, whilst one was of Asian heritage;
- Four of the cohort were female;
- Three identified as having a religion, either Catholic or Christian, although two were lapsed, whilst half had no religion;
- Half of the group had graduated from a programme in SHAS;
- Two of the students were commuters, whilst four had resided in Halls of Residence;
- All of the staff/alumni group had been a member of a society.

The staff alumni group had relationships with St Mary's of between four years and thirty years when including study time. A summary of the participants and their personal characteristics is included in Appendix J.

### **3.4.3) Data Collection**

Three annual St Mary's surveys were considered as vehicles for data collection. At the point of student registration in September, students are invited to complete a "Student Experience Survey". This survey would have been optimal as students would have limited or no experience of the institution and their reason for selecting St Mary's would be fresh in their mind. However, the request was declined. The second option was the student "Welcome Survey" which takes place in October each year. This survey is sent to all new students and focuses on their induction experience. Despite having agreement for this research question to be included, the deadline was bought forward, and the opportunity was missed. The third option was in February 2018 in the UK Engagement Survey (UKES). The UKES survey is a national survey focusing on UK undergraduates. It is the second largest student survey, after the National Student Survey (NSS) and centres on student engagement.

The qualitative data collection for Phases Two and Three was via a number of semi-structured interviews conducted with students across a two-year period to obtain a rich source of data. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed for themes, and so a thematic analysis approach was adopted.

Josselson (2013) describes an interview as "a meeting between two people for the purpose of one person sharing personal experience with another" (p. 13).

Although the method of data collection for Phases Two and Three was the same, the approach to the interviews and the techniques adopted varied between studies.

### **3.4.4) Reliability**

To ensure rigour and quality within the case study, Yin's (2018) four design tests were considered. The tests are: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (p. 43). This required the following steps:

Table 3-4 Case Study Validity Tests

<b>Test</b>	<b>Action taken:</b>
<b>Construct validity</b>	Multiple sources of evidence were obtained: interviews with 22 students and alumni. The use of a questionnaire and photographs in addition to interviews. Three robust phases of enquiry.
<b>Internal validity</b>	Data (transcripts) were coded and a thematic analysis was completed. I worked with the data from the 'ground up' (inductive) looking for patterns. This resulted in values being at the forefront, leading to the creation of the HSFM.
<b>External validity</b>	The quantitative data collection is replicable. Used rigorous models: Schwartz (1992) and Gilbreath (2011)
<b>Reliability</b>	The data were verified and it was triangulated (Three phases of enquiry).

Cohen et al (2009) highlight that reliability in qualitative research and quantitative research are different. In quantitative research, reliability pertains to replicability, whilst in qualitative research it pertains to authenticity and depth. Winter (2000) claims that quantitative researchers "attempt to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the research process" however; qualitative researchers "embrace their involvement" (p. 9). As mixed methods were adopted for this piece of research, the essence of these statements is apparent: Phase One consisting of raw data collated from a questionnaire compared to Phases Two and Three which required engagement with participants and their stories. This engagement within the process can impact upon the validity of the research outcome, as discussed by Patton (2002), who stated that "the researcher is the instrument" (p. 14).

In addition to my own possible bias, as previously discussed, those who put themselves forward may have had an ulterior motive or may have been particularly satisfied or dissatisfied with their choice of university.

The qualitative data collection was carried out between May 2019 and July 2021. This was to ensure that the behaviour of students was observed over an extended period of time to allow for my understanding to develop, and more importantly, to understand what was significant and why (Walliman, 2011).

### **3.4.5) Ethical Issues**

As previously discussed, my values were also considered when approaching the ethics of my research design. Lichtman (2012) suggests “that it is neither possible nor desirable for researchers to keep their values from influencing aspects of the research study” (p. 25), whilst Atkins and Wallace (2012) emphasise the importance of adopting a reflexive approach to ensure respect, honesty and morality. These values mirror those of the university and are fundamental to the research which is exploring both the institutions and students’ culture and values in terms of fit. It was also important to ensure that no harm came to any participants within the study and that they were treated fairly. This included consideration of physical and emotional harm, as well as stress. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2018) were adhered to. The BERA guidelines (2018) highlight the responsibilities researchers have and BERAs ethical expectations which includes acting without prejudice and the responsible dissemination of the findings.

Students were issued with participant information sheets which detailed the purpose of the study, an invitation to participate, requirements, the benefits of the study and sections on confidentiality and the right to withdraw.

In addition, participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions and to report concerns. Permission was obtained via the university’s ethics committee for all data collection. All data were anonymised and collated using student regnum numbers. Interviews were attributed by using reference numbers to ensure students were not identifiable. The participants consent forms have been securely stored to evidence consent and understanding.

In line with St Mary’s research policy, all electronic data were stored on St Mary’s University servers and was stored in accordance with GDPR regulations. In addition, the UKES survey requires students to confirm that they have read their data protection statement and consent to their data being used.

Confirmation of ethical approval, copies of the ethics application form, participant information sheets and interview guide can be found in the appendices, Appendix B through to H.

#### **3.4.6) Piloting and Preliminary Work**

As the UKES survey is a national survey, piloting is undertaken by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) who develop the survey. They state that the questionnaire should take between five and ten minutes to complete. For Phases Two and Three, a pilot interview was completed in February 2018. From this pilot, one change was made to subsequent interviews: the inclusion of the list of reasons for attending university as a point of reference should it be required.

#### **3.5) Data Analysis**

A brief explanation of the analytical methods is detailed over in Table 3-5 and then discussed in greater depth for each phase. The case study presented is a narrative report, described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) as being “a prose account... interspersed with relevant figures, tables, emergent issues, analysis and conclusion” (p. 301). Therefore, the thesis is the case study with the relevant figures, issues, analysis and conclusion presented in Chapters Four to Seven. In addition, Chapter Six includes five student case studies which are also narrative reports. These reports capture the in-depth interviews from Phase Two and afford the opportunity to portray the students’ voice authentically.

Table 3-5 Details of three studies, data analysis

Phase	Type of data collected	Analysis
One	Questionnaire, via UKES Survey	To identify and quantify the reasons students gave for selecting St Mary's and analyse this by school (faculty), age, gender, religion, entry tariff. The analysis was undertaken using SPSS and Microsoft Excel software.
Two	Interviews	Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The text was then subjected to a thematic analysis. This required key words, repeated throughout to be coded in order to identify patterns relating to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis was completed twice, once highlighting sections on printed transcripts and then replicated using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. Both analyses were compared to ascertain the themes.
Three	Analysis of the photographs and interviews using the undergraduate prospectus	The photography was analysed by counting the images and allocating them to a descriptive group. This phase ran in parallel with Phase Two with the same participants and the interviews were analysed as per Phase Two (above).

### 3.5.1) Phase One - Quantitative Data Analysis

The data from the UKES Survey were received in an Excel spreadsheet. The responses were merged with participants identifying data from St Mary's student records system. Initially a spreadsheet was created to total the responses and detail how frequently each of the sixteen reasons were selected. This analysis was completed by uploading the raw data on an Excel spreadsheet onto SPSS. The cross-tab function was used to obtain descriptive statistics giving frequency of selection of fifteen factors (excluding other). The frequency output was then analysed by a range of factors to compare the frequency data to establish whether different student characteristics influenced their decision. The data included the following:

- Responses by year: 2018 (only), 2019 (only), 2018 and 2019 (together);
- Responses adopting six student characteristics which were: gender, ethnicity, faculty, religion, age and year of study;

- Two other groups were also analysed, parental education and those who had considered. These data were only available once.

A chi-square test was utilised to investigate any differences between the frequency data collected as descriptive statistics. The chi-square tests for differences between two variables, in this case whether an option was selected or not selected and by whom. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) detail this test as one which "measures the difference between a statistically generated expected result and an actual (observed) result to see if there is a statistically significant difference" (p. 789). The test starts with a null hypothesis, that there is no difference or association between the responses and then tests to see whether this assumption is supported by the data. For the test to be valid, all frequencies must be greater than five. This was not the case in all instances within my data. These data were disregarded as the sample was too small to draw any conclusions. The minimum level for the data to be of statistical significance is .05. If the value exceeds this, the assumption is correct and the null hypothesis is supported. If the figure is lower than .05 then there is a statistically significant difference between groups. The lower the number, the more significant the difference is.

Phase One concluded with a summary of the most frequently selected reasons for attending St Mary's and areas where there were statistical significances by students' personal characteristics. These areas were investigated further in Phase Two.

### **3.5.2) Phase Two - Thematic Analysis**

Interviews were conducted until sufficient data were available to undertake a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was completed adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide. The six steps are depicted later in Figure 3-5. Thematic analysis is defined by Clarke and Braun (2017) as a way of "identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data" (p. 297). The analysis was a manual process, but deliberately so, allowing the researcher to become fluent in the data and to have an intimate knowledge of the



content. The use of grounded theory was considered but discounted because of the non-linear format of the three phases which did not allow for overlapping data collection and analysis to lead onto the next sample, although a similar process to that of the creation of grounded theory was used to analyse the data. This process was described by Birks and Mills (2011) as building a theory by “finding constructs, connecting them and considering the nature of that relationship” (p. 9). This method was utilised, finding themes and patterns then connecting them. This is supported by Clarke and Braun (2017) as, they state, “thematic analysis provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data” (p. 297). Braun and Clarke’s 2021 research refines and updates their thematic analysis theory. They discuss ‘small q’ and ‘big Q’ qualitative research, stating that there is a tension between both approaches. These researchers state ‘big Q’ research uses “qualitative tools and techniques within a qualitative paradigm”, alternatively, ‘small q’ adopts the same techniques but with a quantitative paradigm (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 7). The six steps are now discussed:

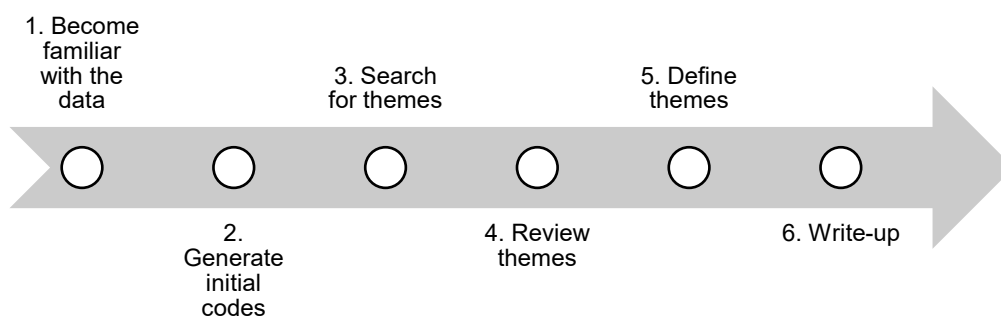


Figure 3-5 Braun & Clarke’s six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke (2006)

### **Step One: Become familiar with the data**

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcription process, although laborious and time consuming, allowed for immersion and familiarity with the data through careful listening of the recordings including rewinding of sections

to confirm accuracy and understanding. This allowed for familiarity with the data which would not be possible if the transcription process was out-sourced. This concluded step one of the analysis, 'become familiar with the data'.

### **Step Two: Generate initial codes**

The interview transcripts were printed and read multiple times with sections highlighted when searching for initial themes. Additionally, the text was also uploaded to NVivo, a software package for qualitative data analysis, where the data were coded using nodes to organise and classify themes. This step allowed for critical engagement with and an opportunity to reflect upon the data and took a significant amount of time. Braun and Clarke (2021) state that the process of reflexive thematic analysis requires "coding to be open and organic, with no use of any coding framework" (p. 334). When completed, this concluded step two, 'generate initial codes'.

### **Step Three: Search for themes**

Braun and Clarke (2022) state that coding "is about demarcating the variation in the dataset, in order to develop themes robustly based on clusters of pertinent similar meaning" (p. 69). The initial themes were summarised using a table which included a unique participant reference number, individual participant characteristics and theme. This process concluded step three 'search for themes'. An example of a participant and the themes arising from their interview can be seen in Table 3-6:

Table 3-6 Example of the summary of interview themes

Participant	Characteristics		Basic Themes
STU1	Ethnicity	White	Has received support and has a positive relationship with lecturers Catholic Ethos – concerns re sexuality. Initial concerns unfounded and has had a positive experience Feel there is a unique community, small size makes the campus welcoming and friendly atmosphere on campus Concerns re value for money especially contact hours Diversity – lack of other mature students
	Gender	Female	
	Religion	Catholic	
	Programme	Psychology	
	Home	Commuter	
	Other	Mature, First in Family	

**Step four: Review themes**

A total of 139 basic themes were identified. These were then refined and grouped into 39 general categories. The general categories were assigned one of 17 codes which were then organised into seven themes. This concluded step four ‘review themes’.

**Step five: Define themes**

The themes were reviewed multiple times before they were finally defined which concluded step five ‘define themes’.

Step six ‘write up’ is addressed within Chapter Five. Verbatim quotes were used from the participants in the study to illustrate the points they raised and to add texture and life to the narrative.

**3.5.3) Phase Three - Image Analysis**

An analysis of the photography within the St Mary’s 2019/20 undergraduate prospectus was undertaken. The photographs were categorised and quantified. For example, 30 of the photographs within the prospectus include a student of colour. This represented 23% of all photos within the prospectus which included a student. The images were summarised using personal characteristics such as gender and ethnicity, which were compared to the actual student population to see whether the photography was representative of the student population.

The photographs were then assigned an environment, adopting Gilbreath et al's (2011) categories. This step ascertained how many photographs were used to portray each environment which was compared to the data obtained in Phase One. This evidenced whether the pictures corresponded with the factor's students stated were important. Tables and graphs were created to reflect the images chosen by students and how frequently they were chosen and which of the three environments they related to. An example of this is shown in Figure 3-6 below:

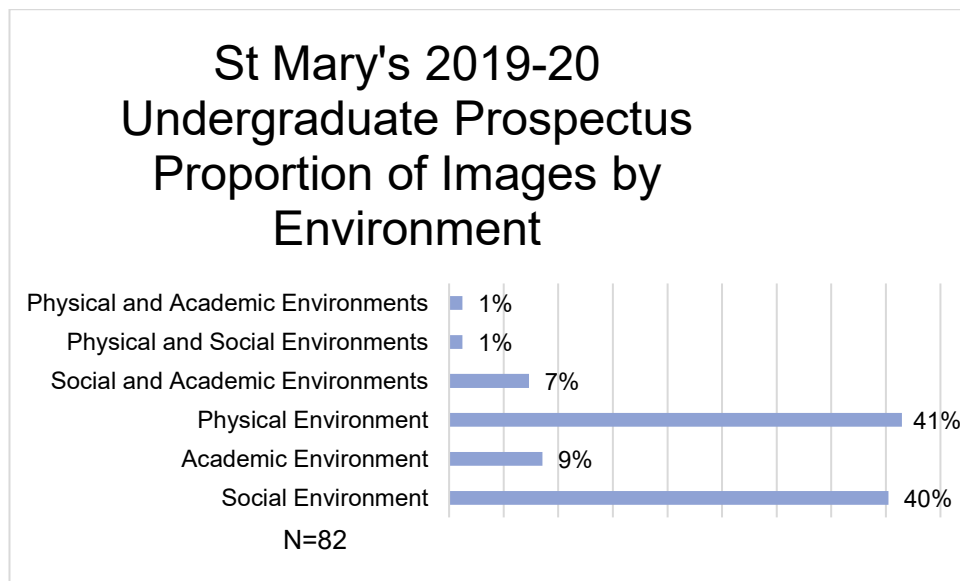


Figure 3-6 Prospectus photograph analysis; pictures by environment

Finally, all the sets of data were compared and analysed for relationships between variables. This analysis added credibility to the data but also allowed for the creation of layers of data, allowing me to fashion an understanding of the themes within studies.

In addition to the photography analysis, the data from the semi-structured interviews relating to the photography was subject to a thematic analysis in the same manner as Phase Two.

The university prospectus was selected as the source of imagery as it is a key marketing tool used to promote the institution and the university experience. The 2019/20 St Mary's Undergraduate prospectus was chosen rather than the website as it was a permanent resource, rather than the website which is regularly updated.

To complement the understanding created as part of the qualitative research, participants were asked to identify photographs within the prospectus which resonated with them. This included photographs they liked, disliked, related to or those with which they did not relate. They were also asked if they felt the prospectus was truly representative of how they viewed St Mary's.

The prospectus is structured so that information which is the most important to students, the physical elements, are at the beginning. Following interviews with the marketing team, this format was based on experience rather than research or theory relating to the information students state is the most important, it was more of a common-sense approach. The prospectus format includes the majority of the imagery at the start and is more text based for the remaining two thirds including details of courses, information on funding, open days and how to apply.

Photos relating to the social environment made up 44% of St Mary's 2020/21 undergraduate prospectus followed by the physical environment which totalled 40% and academic pictures which totalled 16%. When considering the images selected by participants, 51% were from the physical environment, 36% fell within the social environment, and the remaining 13% was from the academic environment.

### **3.6) Presentation of the Data**

Initially a traditional approach was adopted to present the analysed data for each of the phases independently, each within a discrete chapter. During the process it became evident that the data and themes from Phases Two and Three were similar. Themes from Phase Two were drawn from students' narratives and the examples they offered. These themes corresponded to those offered during Phase Three when students discussed the photographs within the prospectus, which elicited a similar narrative. For this reason, Chapter Five presents the data from both studies simultaneously. Due to the quantity of data, the chapter has been split into three sections plus an introduction and concluding summary. The data will be presented using the three HE environments created by Gilbreath et al

(2011). Although Chapter Five is unusually long, the presentation via three parts has been adopted for clarity and to aid the reader to understand the process. It is in effect, two chapters amalgamated to prevent unnecessary duplication and repetition.

### **3.7) The Creation of a Student Fit Model**

The themes arising from Phases Two and Three were mapped against the definitions given in the human values model created by Schwartz et al (2012, 1992), Gilbreath et al's (2011) three environments and generic HR fit models. This began the process which lead to the creation of a Holistic Student Fit Model. The student fit model endeavoured to illustrate how students' personal values influence how they will fit with the three HE environments. For example, a student with a high requirement for safety and security would be categorised with the value of conservation. This value is defined as "preserving stability and security in relation to one's surroundings, with the emphasis on subservient self-repression, the preservation of traditional practices and protecting stability" (Giménez and Tamajón, 2019, p. 3). This value would then be mapped against generic fit models and assigned to person environment fit which is defined as "the correlation between the level of match between and individual's characteristics and that of the environment they are in". Examples of person environment fit are the safe campus, which aligns to Gilbreath et al's (2011) physical environment. This process is depicted in Figure 3-7 and is elaborated within Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

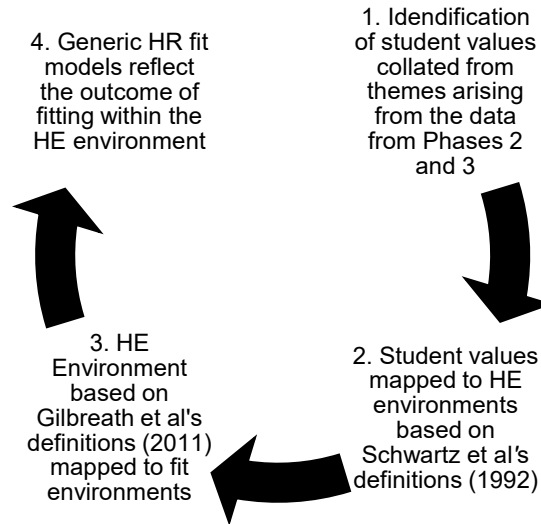


Figure 3-7 The mapping process adopted to create a Holistic Student Fit Model

The final version of the Holistic Student Fit Model can be found in Chapter Six. Chapter Six also contains full details of how the model was created. A brief overview is as follows:

Step 1: A table was created that detailed Schwartz et al's (2012, 1992) human values with accompanying adjectives. For example, this included the value of security with associated adjectives: healthy, sense of belonging, cared for, family security, social order, clean, reciprocation of favours, national security and stability.

Step 2: Human values were mapped to Gilbreath et al's (2011) three environments. For example, the value of security was mapped to the physical environment, as security is described as desiring security, social order and cleanliness, whilst the physical environment includes a pleasant and safe campus environment.

Step 3: The three environments were mapped against generic fit models which reflect the outcome if a good fit is achieved. For example, the physical environment was mapped against person environment fit and this is the correlation between the level of match between an individual's characteristics and that of the environment they are in.

Each of the segments of the model were applied by using the thematic analysis data from Phase Two as example case studies. The segments are deconstructed

in Chapter Six, which fully details the process of how they were created and applied. The discussion also offers consequences for the lack of student fit.

### **3.8) Recommendations**

Chapter Seven offers a series of recommendations for St Mary's, HE staff and potential students, arising from this body of work. Fisher (2004) advises researchers to consider how practical recommendations are, so they may be actioned. Fisher suggests considering the following guidelines:

- The degree of support or opposition to the recommendations;
- The availability of the money and resources needed to implement the recommendations;
- Whether a business case can be made that would release the necessary resources;
- The practical and logistical difficulties that implementation of the recommendations might entail;
- The processes by which the recommendations should be sold to interested parties;
- The timetable for implementation.

(Fisher, 2004, p. 235-237)

The recommendations in Chapter Seven aim to guide action, further research, policy and consideration for the various stakeholders within higher education.

### **3.9) Opportunities to Engage with The Research Community**

During the lifetime of this research project, I have taken opportunities to engage with both the St Mary's research community and the wider community externally. This has included attendance at the Crest Summer School in September 2018, which was organised by Guild HE and a professional discussion with the *Which?*<sup>TM</sup> HE Policy Advisor, again in 2018. This represented opportunities to talk about my research, to network and get feedback on my proposals. This was followed by the Crest Writing Retreat in 2019, which again included opportunity to discuss ideas with staff from Guild HE and other PhD students.

Other opportunities have included the attendance at the Cathedrals Group Research Sandpit entitled 'Applying our Values to Wellbeing and Place' occurred at York St John's University in 2019. Again, this event offered the opportunity to network with colleagues from a number of Cathedral Group institutions. During the



planning discussions it was interesting to observe how colleagues attempted to influence others to their ideas alongside interaction regarding impact and how it could be measured.

In addition, I have presented twice at events organised by the Institute of Education. Once, in September 2019, which was a 'brown bag', lunchtime talk and the other was at the Research Festival in February 2021. These events gave me the opportunity to disseminate early findings in an academic environment and to obtain feedback.

There is reference within this thesis to St Mary's Vision 2025, a document which set out the institution's plan for the future. It was published in 2020 with a five-year life-span. During the time it has taken to complete this research project, the university has undertaken a review of Vision 2025 and Vision 2030 was published in November 2021. I was fortunate enough to participate in the consultation process for Vision 2030 and to discuss some of the initial findings from Phases Two and Three to evidence the reasons why students chose to study at St Mary's. In addition to contributing to the consultation, I was invited to contribute to St Mary's Catholic Mission working group. This group has a mission, stating "Catholic universities have a gift to offer the world which arises from our understanding of knowledge. We have a duty in teaching and research to ensure that the link between faith and reason is not severed" (St Mary's, St Mary's as a Catholic University, 2022a). As part of this meeting, I was able to contribute to the discussion regarding Catholic secondary schools and the pathway into Catholic higher education.

### **3.10) Methodology Summary**

The Saunders and Tosey (2007) research "onion" has been adopted to depict a summary of the methodology adopted for this body of research. It depicts the six layers of the research philosophy, approach, methodological choices, strategy, time horizon and then the data collection and analysis. This is illustrated in Figure 3-8 below.

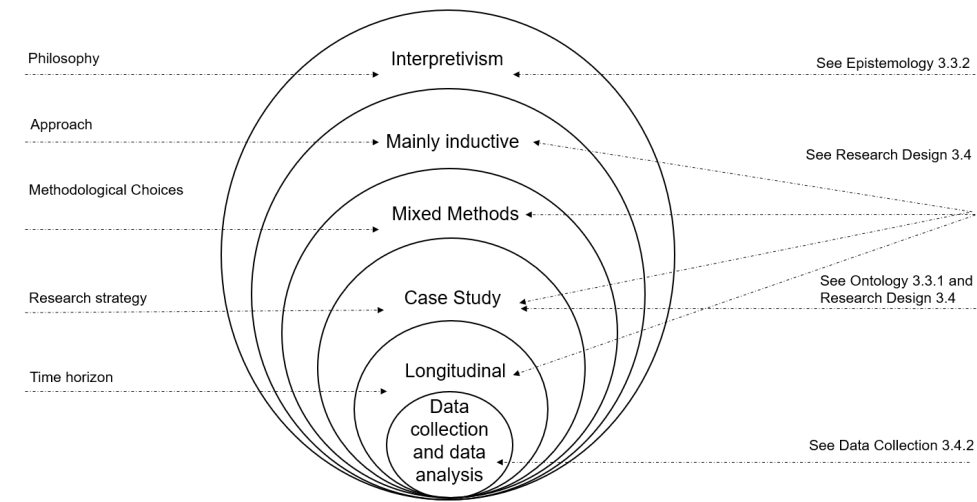


Figure 3-8 Adapted from The Research Onion, Saunders and Tosey (2007) figure 4.1, (p. 59).

This chapter has outlined the research design, methodology, strategies and data collection tools which have been utilised for this body of work. The chapter now concludes with Table 3-7 which summarises the three complementary phases which contributed to the study. The next chapter, Chapter Four, details the data collection and analysis of Phase One.

Table 3-7 Complete details of the three phases

Phase	Objectives	Method	Data collection	Sampling Strategy	Data Analysis
One	To establish why students chose to attend St Mary's University and whether these factors ranged according to student characteristics.	Quantitative	Questionnaire, via UKES	This is a national survey and is sent to all students. The maximum sample size was limited to the total number of current foundation and undergraduate students at St Mary's who chose to participate each year and were current enrolled students in February 2018 and 2019.	To identify and rank the reasons students gave for selecting St Mary's and analyse this by school (faculty), age, gender, religion, entry tariff, using SPSS and Microsoft Excel software.
Two	To build on Phase One, by conducting a series of interviews with students and alumni to establish in greater depth why they chose St Mary's.  Students were asked about St Mary's values, how these were evidenced and their experience of them.	Qualitative	Semi structured interviews with a sample of foundation and undergraduate students, alumni and staff who are alumni	A representative sample of the foundation and undergraduate student population was selected. This allowed for the data collected to be as representative as possible of the entire St Mary's student population.	Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The text was then subjected to a thematic analysis.
Three	An analysis of the photography from the 2019/20 undergraduate prospectus.  Participants were asked to select pictures which represented St Mary's/resonated with them and why.	Quantitative and Qualitative	During semi structured interviews (above) participants selected photographs, which were recorded and then discussed.		Photographs were analysed by counting number of occurrences and categorising them using Gilbreath et al's (2011) environments.  See above for interview analysis.

# Chapter 4

## Quantifying why students selected St Mary's

### 4.1) Introduction and Aim

This chapter details the outcome from a question relating to university choice within St Mary's UKES survey from 2018 to 2019. In 2018 and 2019, St Mary's University, Twickenham participated in the UK Engagement Survey (UKES) which is a nationwide online survey managed by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) targeted at undergraduate students and focusing on student engagement. It is the second largest student survey in the UK, after the National Student Survey (NSS). Advance HE claim on their website that the data "helps you [universities] to better understand your students' experience in the key areas of critical thinking, learning, interaction with others, challenges, engagement, skills development and how students spend their time" (Advance HE, 2019). Using a needs-supply model, the aim of Phase One was to obtain quantifiable data relating to why students chose to attend St Mary's University and whether there were any areas of statistical significance based upon student characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion or faculty.

The UKES survey was an opportune vehicle to collect data for this research as the format allowed St Mary's to personalise the questionnaire by adding bespoke institutional questions. For the purposes of this research, the following question was included within St Mary's UKES survey in 2018 and 2019 "We'd like to know why you chose to come to St Mary's. Please select one or more from the following list or add your own reason". Participants were offered sixteen possible responses which were then analysed to rank students' expectations based on how frequently a category was selected. These responses are listed in Chapter Three, pages 94-95.

St Mary's was one of 38 universities to participate in the survey in 2018 and of 31 universities in 2019. Across both years, six institutions within the Cathedrals Group took part (Neves, 2018). The total number of respondents for St Mary's

UKES survey in 2017/18 was 199, which was 5% of the student body, and in 2018/19 there were 259 respondents, which was 8% of the student body. St Mary's participation rate was much lower than the average rate per institution which was 911 in 2018 and 960 in 2019, although as St Mary's is a small university it may have been proportionally similar to other institutions who took part (Neves, 2018). Initially the research design was for a longitudinal survey over three academic years to reflect the student lifecycle. Unfortunately, St Mary's decided that the uptake was insufficient to warrant continued investment and participation beyond 2019. Therefore, this aspect of the research was subsequently limited to a two-year period.

In summary, Phase One was longitudinal, collecting quantitative data over a period of two years via the UKES in February 2018 and February 2019. The results are reported using descriptive statistics, using the frequency of selection of each of the choice factors. Due to the focus on descriptive statistics, no inferences or predictions are reported within this chapter - the chapter reports what has been found (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Where comparisons are made between factors, such as years or age, the percentage was used. Where areas of statistical significance are highlighted, resulting from the chi-square test. As described by Brace, Kemp and Shelgar (2000), "the chi-square test is used to explore frequency data – that is data that indicate how often a particular event occurs" (p. 90). In this instance, the event is how frequently an option was selected or not selected, such as affordability. The chi-square test calculates the expected frequency and compares it to the actual frequency. The difference between the two (frequency and actual) determines the level of significance (Field, 2009, Fisher 2004).

#### **4.2) Framework and Methodology**

As part of the literature review in Chapter 2, an analysis of concepts, frameworks and models relating to fit and university choice was conducted. Amongst these were fit models from human resources theory which include person/environment fit,

person/organisation fit and specific to the HE sector: student/institution fit (Pawlowska, Westerman, Bergman and Huelsman, 2014; Bowman and Denson, 2014; 2011; Lawrence and Lawrence, 2010; Shin, 2004). The model most relevant to measure student/university compatibility was created by Gilbreath et al (2011) who constructed a list of student/school fit factors which were grouped into three fit environments: social, academic, and physical. The additional question included within the UKES survey replicated the list of factors and the three categories although the wording was slightly adapted for students in the UK, changing athletic reputation to sporting reputation and adding reference to the Students' Union. Two additional options were created including Catholic ethos based on St Mary's Catholic heritage and an open question was also added to allow for freedom of expression. Two of the original options were condensed, combining safe and pleasant campus and campus layout was omitted as was great student body. These changes were made to streamline the options to keep the question as concise as possible to promote maximum participation. A list of potential responses was offered in alphabetical order to reduce bias. These reasons are detailed in Table 4-1 over where they are assigned to an environmental category utilising Gilbreath et al's (2011) three environments:

Table 4-1 UKES responses and their relevant Gilbreath et al (2011) Environment

<b>Social Environment</b>	Catholic ethos
	Diverse student body
	Enjoyable social life/great Students' Union
	Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)
	Great support services (eg. careers service)
	Highly regarded sporting reputation
<b>Academic Environment</b>	Sports and recreational opportunities
	Highly regarded academic reputation
	State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)
	Intellectual climate
	Size
<b>Physical Environment</b>	Entry Tariff
	Affordability
	Geographic Location
	Pleasant/safe campus environment

The responses from the UKES were merged with participants identifying data from St Mary's student records system and then the data were analysed by a range of factors to establish whether there were any variances between students with different characteristics. The characteristics included gender, faculty, religion, ethnicity, year of study, age, parental education, whether the student had considered leaving university and time spent commuting. The gender field was self-identified and not biological sex. At the time of data collection there was no option to opt out of this field or to include a non-binary option.

The research undertaken by Gilbreath et al (2011) focused upon needs/supply fit and was presented using the mean from their data categorised by each environment. Gibreath et al (2011) established that students ranked the physical environment over the social or academic when describing their ideal university. Within the context of this research, needs refer to what students want, including both the tangible and intangible elements, their expectations, whilst supply refers to the university offer including the factors within the three environments. Tangible expectations include the campus amenities, books in the library and the equipment

in the laboratories, which are examples of the physical resources that students can see and touch. Intangible expectations consist of elements which students desire but cannot see such as the quality of teaching, the intellectual climate, lively debate and academic rigour. Gilbreath et al (2011) found that students were more satisfied when their needs were met, stating “specifically, students will be satisfied with their university and experience positive mental states when their university provides the environments that they like to have” (p. 50). This statement is congruent with Kotler et al’s (2008) classic definition of customer satisfaction as being: “the gap that exists between customers’ expectations of service quality and the service quality experienced” (p. 626) which means the smaller the gap between expectations and experience, the more satisfied a person is. Gilbreath et al (2011) stated that satisfaction was highest when needs and supplies were both high, for example, if a students’ need was for sports and recreational opportunities, they were the most satisfied if there was an abundance of opportunities. Gilbreath et al (2011) also stated that students were satisfied when needs and supply were both low, meaning that even if a student had a lower need of sports and recreational opportunities, as long as there were some opportunities available to them, they would still be satisfied. Again, this is congruent with Kotler et al’s (2008) statement regarding expectations and experience being compatible, as satisfaction occurs when there is no gap between the two. Gilbreath et al (2011) suggested that universities should establish not only what students want from university, but also how much. In other words, universities should clarify, quantify and understand students’ expectations.

### **4.3) The Research Group – St Mary’s Student Population**

To contextualise the data, this section seeks to articulate the type of students who make up St Mary’s student body, compared where possible to national averages, the Cathedral Group of universities, and the UCAS competitor group to which St Mary’s belongs. This is important because it begins to illustrate not only who St Mary’s students are but also their backgrounds, cultural capital and expectations. The UCAS competitor group included Kingston, Roehampton, Greenwich,



Middlesex, Brighton, and Brunel Universities. These have been identified by UCAS as a group of similar institutions to which the students are likely to apply.

When deciding which factors to use to analyse the data, several conceptual frameworks and models, in addition to fit models, were considered including student satisfaction (Alves and Raposo, 2007) and decision-making (Dawes and Brown, 2008). Limiting factors for the data analysis were key considerations alongside the availability of personal data, ethical considerations and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Dawes and Brown's (2008) research into decision making stated there are three steps when deciding which university to attend: awareness, consideration, and choice. Their analysis utilised ethnic group, age, sex (gender) and parental education as explanatory variables which is mirrored in this analysis. Ethnicity was a key factor because of the body of research indicating different patterns of consumer choice and behaviour relating to ethnic origin. Dawes and Brown's findings (2008) also noted the difference in behaviour of students whose parents attended university. These theories were considered when analysing the data. In addition to ethnic group, age, sex (gender) and parental education variables, religion was also considered because of St Mary's Catholic ethos and heritage. An analysis of academic ability would have offered valuable insight due to the body of research claiming HE has been 'dumbed down' to facilitate widening participation (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2010). In theory UCAS entry points could have been used as a factor to compare academic ability upon application against reasons for application. These data were considered unreliable as the data within the student records system were inconsistent.

The literature review critiqued widening participation (WP), a term for a group of students who are non-traditional including first-generation, BAME, working class and mature students. Following investment into WP, there is now a more diverse student population within HE in England (Moran and Powell, 2014; Archer et al, 2007). This increase in non-traditional students includes more people from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups such as ethnic

minorities. Thirty percent of all St Mary's students between 2017 and 2019 came from families with a household income of less than £25,000 per annum. Ninety five percent of St Mary's students attended a state school, higher than the national average (89.8%), but lower than the Cathedrals Group average (97%) and similar to the UCAS competitor group average (95.8%). These data suggest that St Mary's has a higher than average proportion of WP students but has a similar profile as institutions within both the UCAS competitor and Cathedrals groups (HESA, Who is studying in HE?, 2021).

HESA data indicates that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 54% of students in HE had a parent who was not educated to degree level or they did not know/chose not to respond. Students who are the first in their family to go to university are unsurprisingly called 'first generation' or 'first in family' students and their parental education has an influence on their university choice. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), research undertaken by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HESCU) entitled FutureTrack (2008) stated that 51% of students who had a parent with a degree considered going to university, compared to 26% of first-generation students (p. 39). The definition of first-generation students is solely based on parental education and is not linked to class or income. Analysis of the ethnicity of 128 St Mary's first-generation students who responded to the UKES Survey in 2018/19 shows that 74% identified as being white, whilst 25% identified as being BAME. Of the 64 St Mary's students who responded and who had a parent educated to degree level, 64% were white and 34% were BAME students.

The national ethnicity data from HESA (2021) for the academic year 2017/18 is compared to St Mary's UCAS competitor group and the Cathedrals group in Figure 4-1 (over).

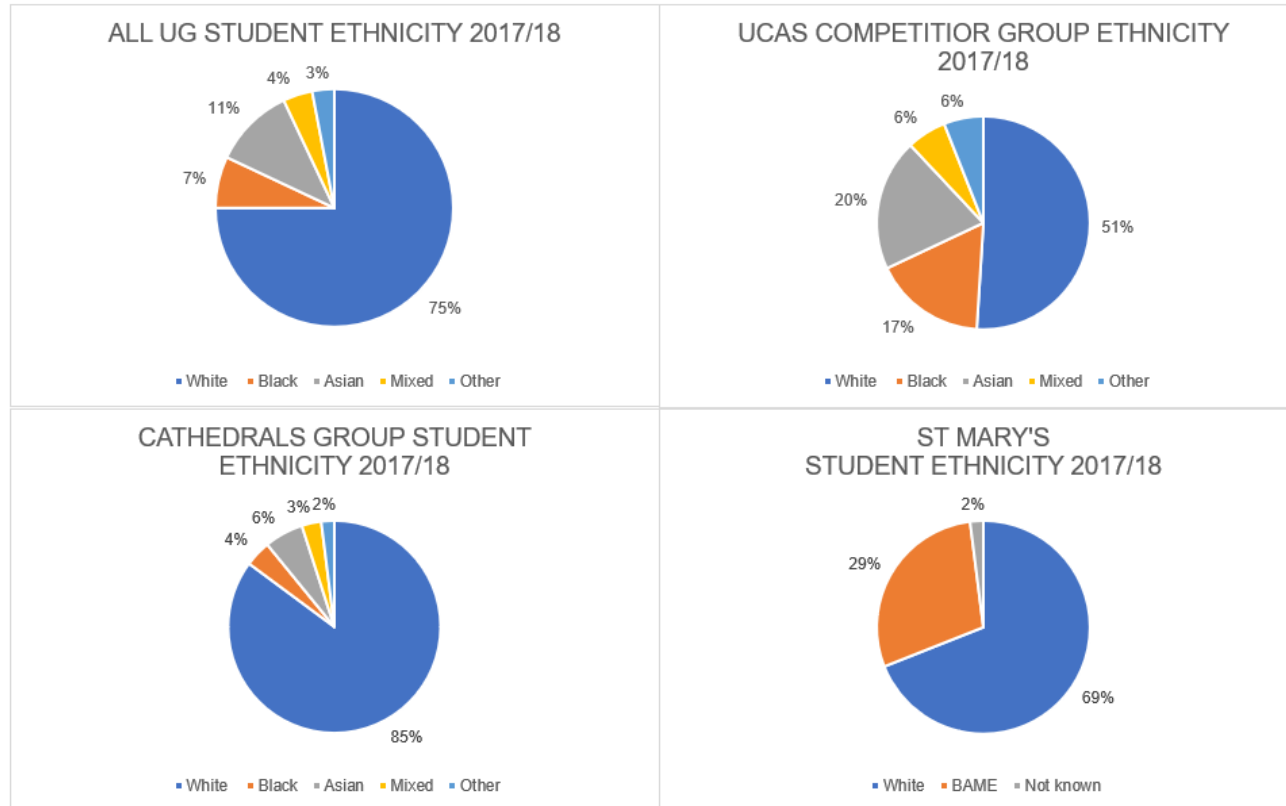


Figure 4-1 Ethnicity by group compiled from HESA data detailing UCAS competitor group, Cathedrals Group and St Mary's University data

Figure 4-1 reflects that St Mary's University has a higher than average proportion of BAME students than other UK universities nationally and in comparison to others within the Cathedrals Group, but a lower proportion than the institutions in their UCAS competitor group. This difference in composition of the ethnicity of the student body is likely to impact on the reasons why students selected St Mary's as research by Dawes and Brown's (2008) found ethnicity to be a key factor in consumer choice behaviour.

HESA data (2021) reflects that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 46% of undergraduate students in HE in the UK were mature students and 54% were aged 20 and under. In 2017/18, 20% of St Mary's students were mature which increased to 34% in 2018/19, lower than the national average. A mature student is defined by UCAS (2019) as students over the age of 21.

Research also reflects that WP students are more likely to commute to university which is likely to be driven by limited finances and/or caring commitments (Maguire and Morris 2018). This trend is considered to be a consequence of fees and presumably due to students avoiding more debt associated with accommodation costs (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). HEPI data from 2018 found that first-generation students were more likely to commute, therefore the UKES data were analysed using the question 'About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week during term-time doing the following? Commuting to campus (driving, walking, etc.)' comparing travel time to parental education and ethnicity. When considering further attributes of commuting students, proximity to university was found to be very important to 40% of students attending a post-1992 university, compared to only 3% of students attending an 'old' university (Rolfe, 2002). Although St Mary's was established in 1850, it took until 2006 for the college to become a university meaning it is comparable to post-1992 institutions. Seminal research by Rolfe (2002) found commuting to diminish student experience as students did not participate in the traditional social activities associated with going to university such as joining societies and that commuting students only attended

for taught sessions and did not spend much time on campus. More recent research has supported Rolfe's findings; examples of this are that driving to campus deters student participation in social activities which are alcohol related, caring commitments and lack of awareness of opportunities (Maguire and Morris 2018; Thomas and Jones, 2017). Such research has concluded that the lack of engagement from commuter students with the wider university led to a different relationship and a lessened student experience. Maguire and Morris' (2018) research into commuter students claimed that they are less satisfied with their student experience and are more likely to drop out. Data were available in the 2018/19 UKES Survey relating to students who had considered leaving and their reasons. This is discussed later in 4.5.

HESA data (2021) indicates that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 44% of UK undergraduate students in HE in the UK were male and 56% were female. The breakdown at St Marys for the two-year period within this study was 45% male and 55% female, which is in line with the national average. Whilst, by a small margin, more females attend St Marys than males, disproportionately more females responded to the survey than males. This discrepancy and bias are notable and is considered when analysing and discussing the results, due to the discrete influence it has.

Following a restructure which took effect from September 2018, four schools at St Mary's University became two faculties: Sport Health and Applied Sciences (SHAS) and Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (EHSS). Where possible, the 2017-2018 data have retrospectively been reformatted to reflect the two-faculty structure. For the purposes of the data analysis, joint honours students were allocated to the faculty where they were majoring. The Institute of Theology had three respondents in 2019 who have been included within EHSS as in 2018 they were part of the School of Education, Theology and Leadership. The restructure has made comparisons between schools/faculties difficult as the data were not consistent enough to allow for comparison between years. EHSS was created from

an amalgamation of three schools and the impact of the new structure could influence student experience, meaning the data could not be compared like-for-like.

The breakdown of St Mary's university population for the two-year period 2017-2019 by religion was as follows:

Table 4-2 St Mary's Student Population by Religion

Year	No Religion/Unknown	Christian/ Catholic	Any other
2017/18	55%	35%	10%
2018/19	54%	36%	10%

In summary, St Mary's student body is depicted in Figure 4-2 below which illustrates a 'typical' student.

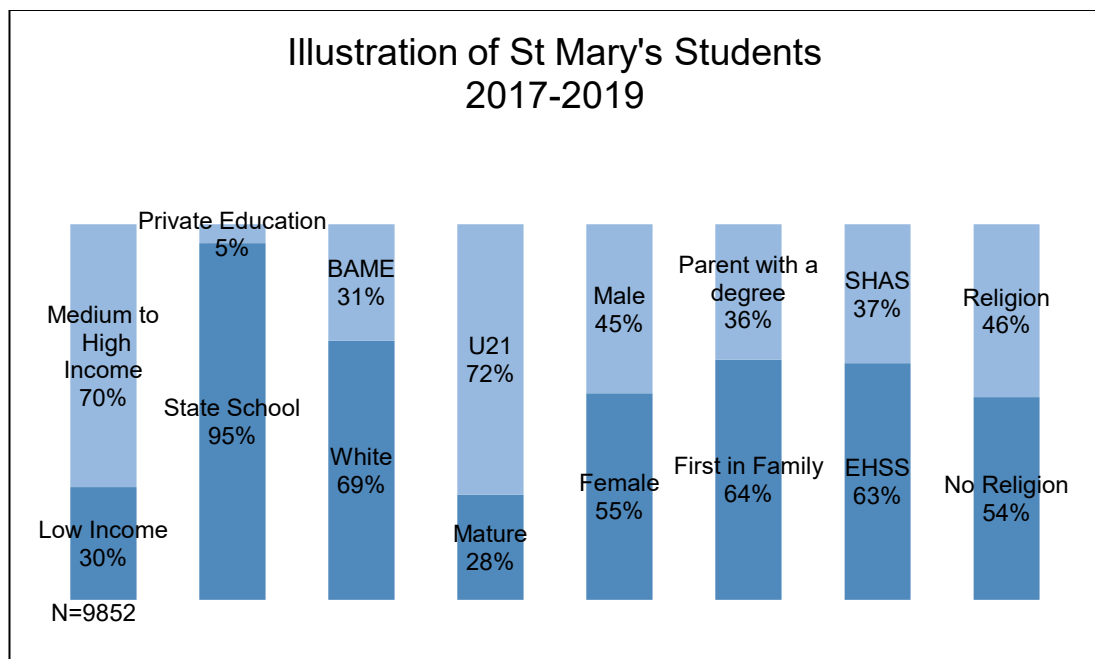


Figure 4-2 Illustration of St Mary's Students based on the characteristics of the student body

Table 4-3 Overview of all responses

	TOTAL RESPONSES 2018	% OF ALL RESPONSES 2018	% OF RESPONDENTS 2018	TOTAL RESPONSES 2019	% OF ALL RESPONSES 2019	% OF RESPONDENTS 2019
<b>SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT</b>						
Enjoyable social life/great student union	46	6%	23%	62	6%	24%
Sports and recreational opportunities	46	6%	23%	68	7%	26%
Highly regarded sporting reputation	44	6%	22%	64	7%	25%
Great support services (eg. careers service)	47	6%	24%	58	6%	22%
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	35	5%	18%	38	4%	15%
Diverse student body	24	3%	12%	31	3%	12%
Catholic Ethos	36	5%	18%	26	3%	10%
<b>ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT</b>						
Intellectual climate	20	3%	10%	31	3%	12%
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	20	3%	10%	27	3%	10%
Highly regarded academic reputation	91	12%	46%	111	11%	43%
Size	72	10%	36%	104	11%	40%
<b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>						
Geographic Location	95	13%	48%	145	15%	56%
Pleasant/safe campus environment	112	15%	56%	136	14%	53%
Affordability	23	3%	12%	35	4%	14%
Other (please state)	25	3%	13%	38	4%	15%
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>736</b>			<b>974</b>		

#### **4.4) Results and Discussion**

Mirroring the categories created by Gilbreath et al (2011) detailed in Table 4-1, the data were categorised adopting three environments: social, academic and physical. The results, using the total of all responses are shown in Table 4-3.

As responses within the “other” category comprised of free text responses, these responses have been excluded from the main body of the environmental category breakdown; these are discussed separately within 4.6 of this chapter. As a result of this exclusion the figures, which are rounded, do not total 100%.

In the academic year 2017/18, St Mary’s had a total of 3,678 undergraduate students, which decreased to 3,293 in the academic year 2018/19. The UKES survey was sent to all students to complete and completion rates were 199 (5%) in 2017/18 and 269 (8%) in 2018/19. When reference is made to respondents it refers to the number of students who responded and when reference is made to responses it refers to the number of choices the respondents made. Students were able to select multiple responses to the question. In the academic year 2017/18 responses totalled 736 and in 2018/19 there were a total of 974 selected. This represents an average of 3.6 reasons per respondent. The following data are a combination of both responses and respondents depending upon the discussion point raised. Due to the differing quantities of options within each category, the mean is used when appropriate to allow for comparison.

The data were first categorised into the three environments of social, academic, and physical and then comparisons were made between years and also within the factors contributing to students’ characteristics such as age, ethnicity, gender and faculty. Similar to Gilbreath et al’s (2011) research, St Mary’s students selected the physical environment the most frequently (mean of 91), followed by the academic (mean of 59.8) and then social (mean of 44.6). This is summarised in Table 4-4 (over).



Across two years 2017 to 2019, the reasons for selecting St Mary's have remained fairly consistent with the top four reasons being pleasant/safe campus environment, geographic location, highly regarded academic reputation, and size. Together these accounted for 51% of the total responses. This is comparable to research undertaken in Scotland in 2006 which established that the top three factors for university choice were the academic reputation, distance from home, and location (Briggs, 2006). Whereas Table 4-3 details all responses, Table 4-4 below reflects responses within their environmental category:

Table 4-4 All responses categorised by environment

Year	No of respondents	Environment					
		Social		Academic		Physical	
		Total	Mean	Total	Mean	Total	Mean
<b>2017-2018</b>	199	38%	39.7	28%	50.8	31%	76.7
<b>2018-2019</b>	259	36%	49.6	28%	68.8	32%	105.3
<b>2 years</b>	468	37%	44.6	28%	59.8	32%	91.0

#### 4.4.1) Physical Environment

Across the 2-year data collection period the physical environment was the most frequently chosen with a mean of 91. An average of 32% of respondents selected reasons within the physical environment. When considering the frequency of selection, of note were responses categorised by parental education. Of the 64 respondents who had a parent educated to degree level, 67% selected pleasant/safe campus environment compared to those 128 students who did not have a parent educated to degree level (53%). A chi-square test indicated that this was significant demonstrating that there was an association between students selecting the campus option and their parent's level of education ( $X^2 (2, N=458) = 8.629, p < .005$ ). Equally, and again proportionally but not statistically significant, the pleasant/safe campus environment was selected more frequently by younger students, becoming less so with age: 71% of students aged 18 or under selected the pleasant/safe campus environment compared to 59% of those aged 19-21 and

39% of those over the age of 21 ( $X^2(2, N=458) = 2.012, p < .369$ ). From the data collected within this study, there are no logical or theoretical explanations for these differences due to parental education. These areas will be explored further adopting qualitative methods during Phase Two.

#### **4.4.2) Academic Environment**

Across the 2-year data collection period, the academic environment was the second most frequently chosen with a mean of 59.8. An average of 28% of respondents selected a reason from within the academic environment.

Prior to an academic restructure in 2018, more students in the School of Education, Theology and Leadership (SETL) students (59%) said they considered "highly regarded academic reputation" when applying to St Mary's more than any other school: Sport, Health and Applied Sciences (SHAS) (44%), Management and Social Sciences (MSS) (37%), and Arts and Humanities (A&H) students (24%).

Following the merger, in 2019 the students of the newly formed Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (EHSS) still considered "highly regarded academic reputation" more than SHAS students. The reason why the academic reputation was selected more frequently by EHSS students is unclear and could not be established from the UKES data; the association between students selecting 'highly regarded academic reputation' and their faculty of  $X^2(1, N=458) = 12.499, p < .001$  was statistically significant.

When responses were analysed by parental education, those (64) respondents with a parent educated to degree level rated size (42%) more frequently than those (128) students who did not have a parent educated to degree level (35%). From the data collected within this study, there are no logical or theoretical explanations for these differences due to parental education or faculty. This was not found to be statistically significant  $X^2(2, N=458) = 5.027, p < .008$ . These areas will be explored further adopting qualitative methods during Phase Two.

#### 4.4.3) Social Environment

Across the 2-year data collection period the social environment was the least frequently chosen with a mean of 44.6. The social environment has a 2-year average selection rate of 37% and is the area with most options; a choice of seven and it was the environment with the greatest levels of statistical significance.

As per Table 4-3, sports and recreational opportunities (26%) and sporting reputation (25%) were the fifth and sixth most popular reasons selected so have potential to positively impact the St Mary's brand. Unsurprisingly, due to the content of the courses and personal interests, more SHAS students consistently said they considered "sports and recreational opportunities" than the average of any other school. The chi-square test confirmed that there was a significant association between students selecting 'sports and recreational opportunities' and their faculty ( $X^2 (1, N=458) = 62.715, p < .001$ ). In addition, more male students placed an emphasis on sport-related factors than females. The chi-square test established that there was a significant association between students selecting 'highly regarded sporting reputation' and their gender ( $X^2 (1, N=458) = 8.980, p < .005$ ) and 'sports and recreational opportunities' and their gender ( $X^2 (1, N=458) = 3.981, p < .005$ ). The wider, national UKES survey found that BAME students were more likely to participate in sports and societies, averaging 60% compared to 48% of white students (Advance HE, 2019). This was not evident within St Mary's data and there were no areas of statistical significance when analysed by ethnicity. Both sports and recreational opportunities and the sporting reputation were selected more frequently by students aged 19-21 followed by 18-year olds and then those aged over 25, although this was not statistically significant (sports and recreational opportunities  $X^2 (2, N=458) = 8.629, p < .005$  and sporting reputation  $X^2 (2, N=458) = 4.961, p < .084$ ). This will be examined further during Phases Two and Three.

The sporting environment was a key area of discussion within all three phases due to St Mary's sporting reputation, as well as the use of sporting pictures and

successful athletic alumni for marketing purposes. Equally, the sporting reputation was of interest as Briggs (2006) found that after the top couple of choice factors, those following were likely to be the real differentiators for universities. This theme will be explored further during Phases Two and Three.

There were no areas of statistical significance and ethnicity, however it is of note that fewer students in SHAS selected diversity as a choice factor when compared to EHSS. This is particularly surprising as the respondents from both faculties have similar ethnic backgrounds with 33% of EHSS respondents identifying as BAME compared to 27% of SHAS respondents. There was a significant association between students selecting 'diverse student body' and their faculty  $\chi^2 (1=N=458) = 5.503, p < .005$ . Reasons for this cannot be drawn from the UKES data but will be discussed further, adopting qualitative methods during Phases Two and Three.

A representative number of students responded reflecting there were no significant variances between responses when analysed by religion. Of note though, within the social environment, in 2018 no students categorised as 'other religions' which included Muslim, Hindu and Sikh students considered "enjoyable social life/great students' union" compared to an average of 6.5% for the other groups. In addition, in 2018 no students categorised as 'other religions' selected the "Catholic ethos" compared to 7% of Christian/Catholic students. The Catholic nature of St Mary's will be discussed further during Phase Two.

Commuting data was available for 2018 only. This level of data was pertinent due to the literature previously critiqued regarding commuting students and participation. In 2018, 23% of respondents chose enjoyable social life/great students' union as a reason for selecting St Mary's; the seventh most popular reason. The social life and SU was chosen by 38% of students aged 18, 29% of those aged 19-21 and only 10% of those over the age of 25. Of the same respondents, 33% commuted for 11-15 hours per week, 37% commuted for 1-5 hours whilst those without a commute, who presumably were living in Halls

accounted for 30%. This was not of statistical significance ( $\chi^2(7, N=458) = 13.738, p < .056$ ) and the low response rate makes it difficult to draw conclusions, however, this finding is contrary to the research detailed in Chapter Two. The literature review previously examined research undertaken by Rolfe (2002) which found that commuter students were less likely to participate in social clubs as they retained their existing social scene. This difference may be due to the small sample size or due to a cultural shift since Rolfe's research was undertaken in 2002.

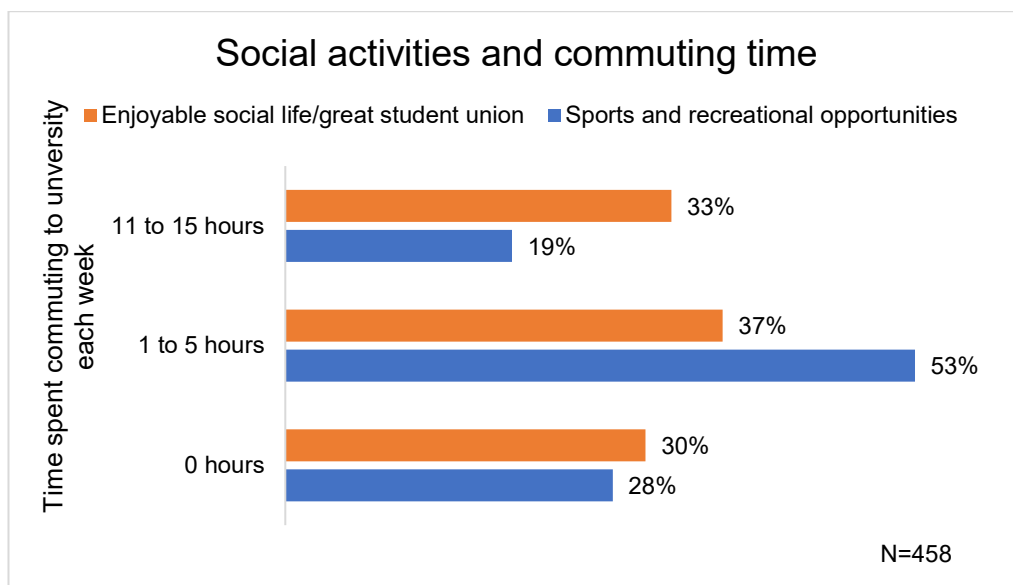


Figure 4-3 Commuting time and social participation

Parental education did not appear to be a factor affecting commuting time for St Mary's students and it would appear that most of those students who responded live locally; 73% of respondents had an average commuting time of five hours or less per week.

#### 4.5) Students Who Considered Leaving

A new question was added to the 2019 UKES asking students 'have you considered for any reason, leaving your undergraduate course?' The national UKES average was that 27% of students had considered leaving their course. Research undertaken in 2012 reflected that in the UK, one in every 12 students left HE during their first year of study and within their case-study, between 33% and 42% of students had considered withdrawing (Thomas and Jones, 2017). St Mary's proportion of disaffected students was lower than average, as 22% of

students had considered leaving during 2019, 70% had not and 8% did not respond.

When summarised by environment, the following is seen:

Table 4-5 Responses by intention to leave of respondents (students)

Year	Respondents	Environment		
		Social	Academic	Physical
<b>2018/19</b>				
<b>Has considered leaving</b>	22%	25%	31%	37%
<b>Not considered leaving</b>	70%	38%	27%	32%
<b>Did not respond</b>	8%	38%	39%	30%

Those who did not respond were disregarded from further analysis. The 57 students who had thought about leaving were less likely to have selected reasons from three social/life style factors more frequently than the 182 students who had not considered leaving. These were: great non-academic facilities (4% v 18%), sports and recreational opportunities (16% v 30%), and enjoyable social life/great students' union (11% v 27%).

From the data, it can be inferred that the students who were thinking of leaving the university had not considered, or were not looking for a social environment or to 'join in' the community. The lack of participation in social activities could be driven by a variety of reasons such as caring or work commitments and commuting restrictions (Maguire and Morris 2018; Thomas and Jones, 2017; Rolfe, 2002).

The chi-square test established that there was a significant association between students selecting 'enjoyable social life and SU' and consideration of leaving  $X^2(3, N=458) = 7.990, p < .005$ . These findings are illustrated in Figure 4-4 (over).

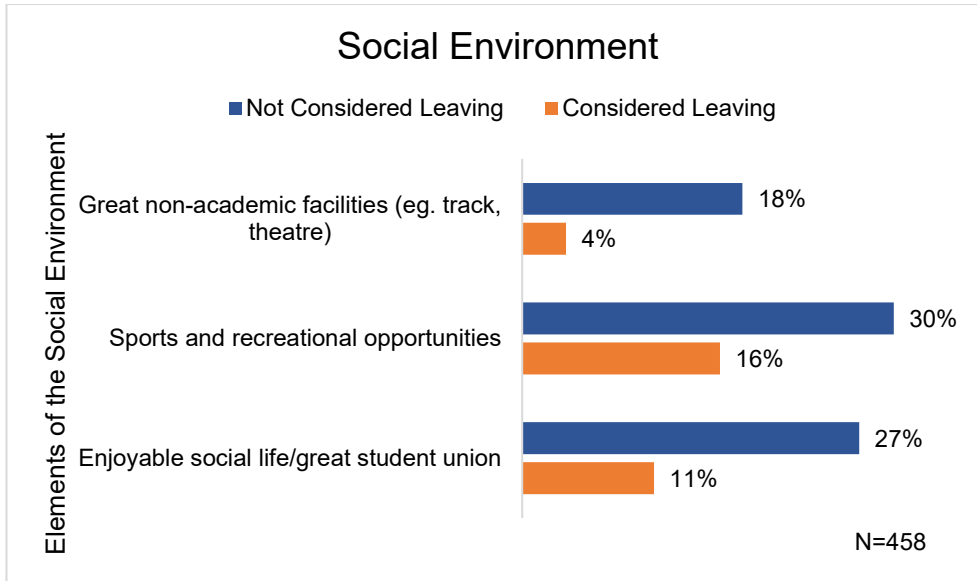


Figure 4-4 Social Environment by Intention to Leave

In line with the wider, national UKES findings, the St Mary's data also reflects that students who participated in sports and societies were less likely to think about leaving university (Neves, 2018). The reason for this cannot be ascertained using the UKES data but will be considered during Phase Two. Additionally, proportionally within the academic environment, students who had not considered leaving were more likely to select the academic reputation of the institution (42%) compared to those who had considered leaving (37%). The reasons for this will be addressed during the second phase of this research, utilising qualitative methods.

Using some of the additional questions from St Mary's UKES survey, the data established that the students who had considered leaving, were less satisfied with the quality of their course when compared to those who had not thought about leaving depicted in Figure 4-5.

It is not possible to correlate the students who had considered leaving against commuting times as the data are not available in both years.

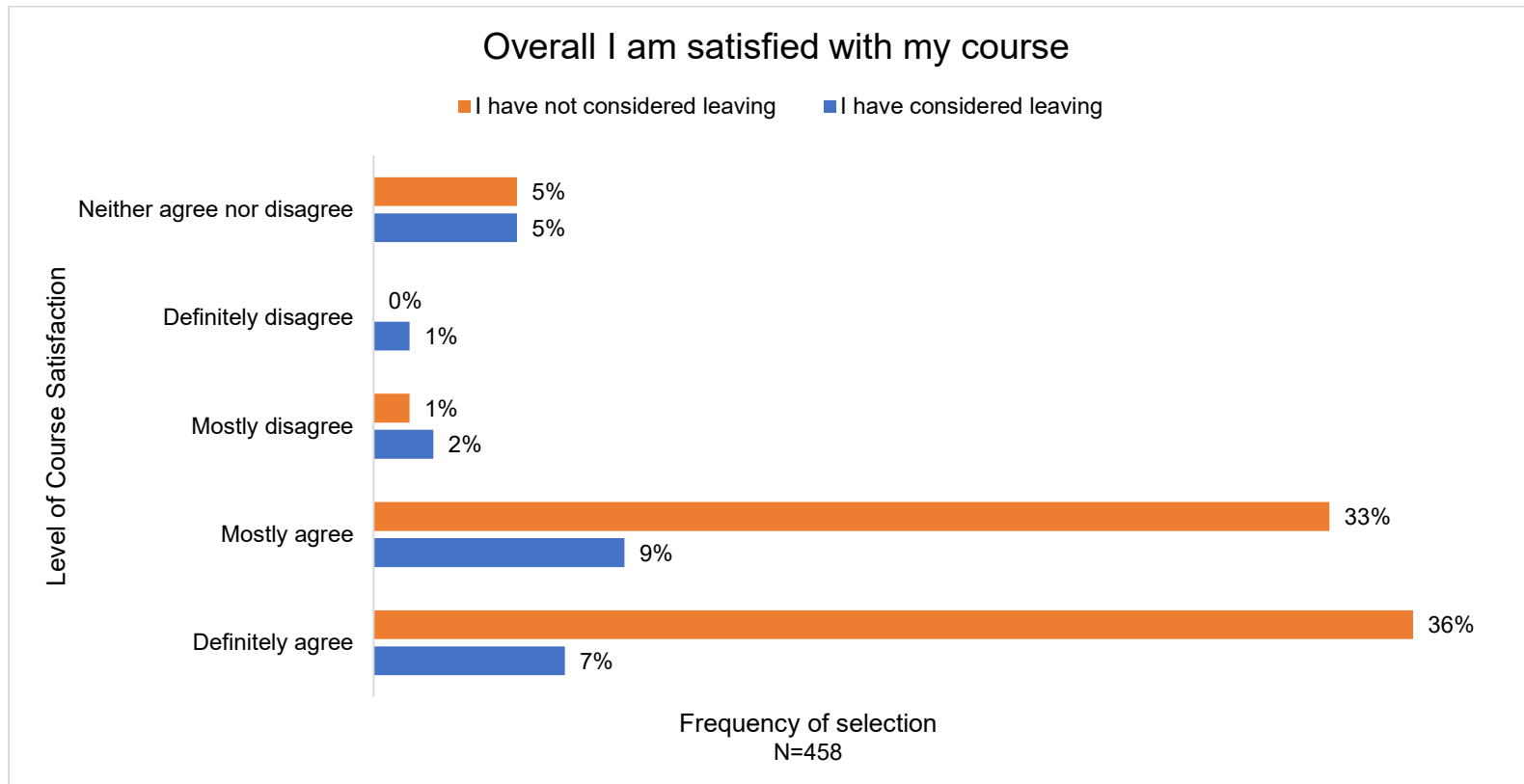


Figure 4-5 Course satisfaction by Intention to Leave



Students were able to give their reasons why they had thought about leaving. As part of the survey, students were offered a drop-down list to give further details.

Twenty two percent of respondents (57 people) gave the following reasons:

Table 4-6 Reasons for considering leaving, Wider UKES statistics, Advance HE, 2019

	<b>St Mary's Students</b>	<b>Wider National UKES</b>
Difficulty balancing study and other commitments	18%	11%
Family, health or personal problems	18%	19%
The course is not what I expected	11%	8%
Prefer not to say	9%	
Studying might not have been the right choice for me	9%	5%
Financial difficulties	7%	11%
I might have chosen the wrong institution	5%	5%
I might have chosen the wrong course	4%	9%
There is not enough support for my learning	4%	6%
There is not enough support for personal issues	4%	4%
I feel unsupported by my fellow students	2%	
I found this level of study difficult	2%	
There is too much work	2%	
Other	9%	

When comparing the responses given by St Mary's students to those in the wider national survey, it can be seen that the responses are similar across the HE sector.

#### **4.6) Other Reasons for Studying at St Mary's**

There were 23 students who only selected the 'other' option and no other factors.

This represents 5% of all respondents. There was a total of 69 comments made

within the free text 'other' box. For completeness, responses have been

categorised and summarised as follows:

Table 4-7 Details of 'other' reasons

	2018	2019
Geographic Location	4%	29%
Course content/type/structure	48%	17%
Course reputation	15%	7%
Friends/family/colleague recommendation	7%	12%
Unconditional offer	0%	5%
Vibe/personal touch/community	11%	12%
UCAS Points	0%	2%
Lecturer	7%	10%
Second choice	7%	2%
Work funded	0%	2%
Sports Scholarship	0%	2%

Example of free text comments made regarding the feel of St Mary's included:

"The strong sense of community that St Mary's has".

"It is all more personable and that we, as students, we are able to develop a relationship with our lecturers".

"Principally the size. I thought that a small uni will support and follow more its students".

These types of comments will be explored further during interviews with students and alumni.

#### 4.7) Summary

In conclusion, the top four reasons for students choosing St Mary's were pleasant/safe campus environment, geographic location, highly regarded academic reputation and size accounting for 53% of the total responses. These data were modelled on Gilbreath et al's (2011) needs-supply model. The findings are congruent with Gilbreath et al's (2011) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) depicted as follows:

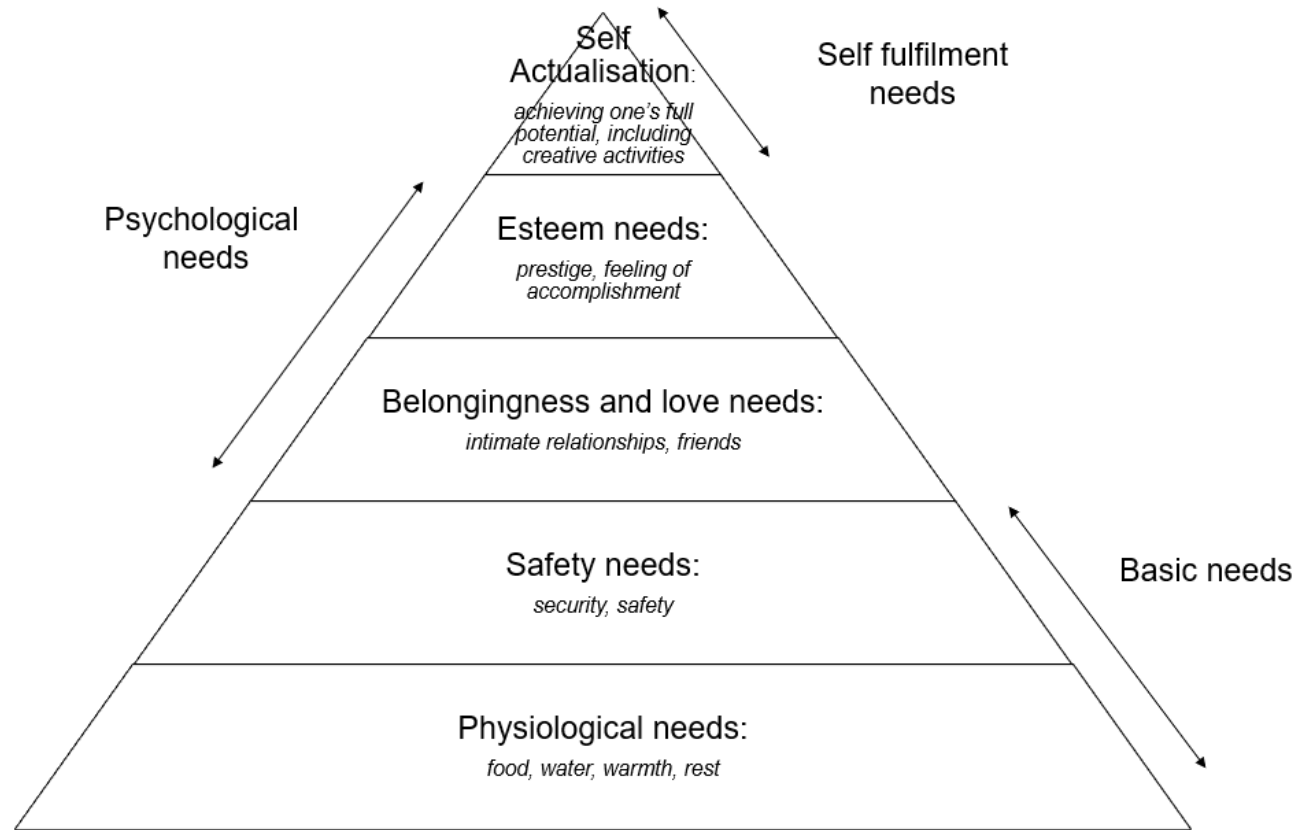


Figure 4-6 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) adapted from the front cover, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

Only 21% of respondents did not select any of the three elements within the physical environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that students primarily consider physical needs when selecting a university, as according to Maslow (1943), they are vital to survival. Whilst this research is not adopting Maslow's theory, it is of note how the data echoes the model in terms of the articulation of students' needs. As previously stated, Gilbreath et al (2011) established that satisfaction was highest when needs and supplies were congruent, either both high or both low. Similarly, the data analysis has evidenced that the two areas where students universally have expectations are the physical and academic environments. This includes accommodation, security, libraries, the Refectory cafeteria and academic staff. These are the areas where the majority of students have expectations but equally all universities supply, albeit in various degrees of quality and quantity. The third area for consideration is the social environment which is the area containing the most differences, both in terms of supply and demand. Maslow's (1943) pyramid theory includes belongingness which has shown to be part of the definition of fitting in: "to feel that you belong to a particular group and are accepted by that group" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Sixty six percent of all respondents selected an element from the social category, which included opportunities to interact with peers such as team sports and the students' union. These elements could be categorised as opportunities for students to feel they belong. This phenomenon is discussed by Strayhorn (2019), who states that if students are required to devote time to ensuring that their basic needs are met, such as food and safety, it leaves them less time and energy to devote to other activities such as studying and socialising. This, he claims, means that a lack of belonging leads to a negative impact upon achievement and well-being. This reflects how important belonging is to university students.

Figure 4-7 depicts the order in which students' needs are considered. Fit elements have been added, assigning person/environment fit to the physical environment, person/course fit to the academic environment, and person/group fit and person/organisation fit to the social environment. This mapping exercise is based

on the definitions of fit detailed in Figure 2-1 (Chapter 2) and comparing them to the elements within each fit environment. Person/environment fit was defined as ‘the correlation between the level of match between and individual’s characteristics and that of the environment they are in’ whilst the physical environment category contains geographic location, affordability and pleasant/safe campus environment. Person/course fit was defined as ‘the correlation between high levels of course satisfaction and commitment to the institution and the course,’ and that of the academic environment category which contains academic reputation, intellectual climate, size and academic facilities. Finally, the social environment was mapped against two groups: person/group fit, which was defined as ‘the correlation between high levels of student satisfaction and commitment to the institution but particularly relationships with peers leading to shared common goals, good communication and decision making,’ and person/organisation fit, which was defined as ‘the correlation between high levels of student satisfaction and commitment to the institution but less so with the course’. The social environment contains: Catholic ethos, diverse student body, enjoyable social life/great students’ union, great non-academic facilities, great support services, highly regarded sporting reputation and sports and recreational opportunities. This model (Figure 4-7) will be refined using the data from Phase Two and will be expanded to include students’ personal values.

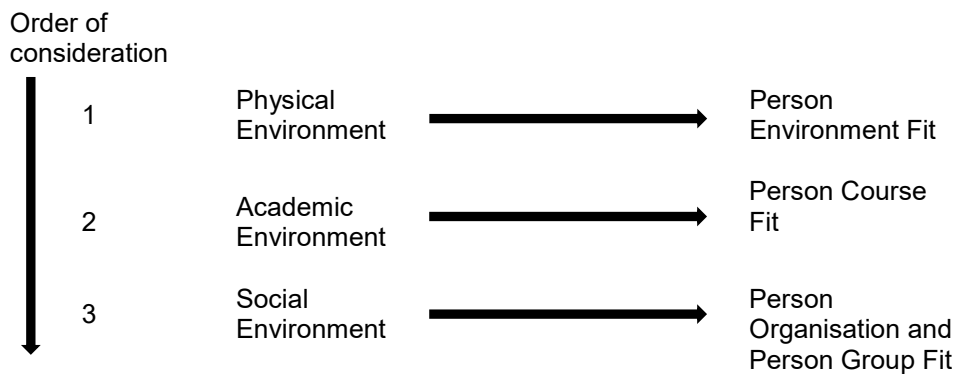


Figure 4-7 Students’ environmental need and relevant person/fit category

The next part of this research which is documented in Chapter 5, will focus on the questions raised by Phase One, and the factors that differentiate universities from each other so students can make the judgement about whether or not they will belong. During interviews in Phase Two, areas for scrutiny included choice factors for commuting, first generation, mature students and students of colour, widely referred to as WP students. Also, of interest was the sporting environment and reputation and whether the impact of this was wider than just one faculty and whether St Mary's Catholic ethos impacted upon the student experience. These outcomes are now discussed in Chapter Five, which details the findings of Phases Two and Three, including interviews with students.

## Chapter 5

### Qualifying why students selected St Mary's

#### 5.1) Introduction and Aims

This chapter documents and discusses the findings from the data collected during Phases Two and Three of this research by utilising students' first-hand accounts, thus offering a rich and authentic narrative (Cohen et al, 2009). The data from Phases Two and Three resulted from semi-structured interviews with twenty-two participants and focussed upon why students chose to study at St Mary's University, Twickenham. As part of the interview process (Phase Two) the photographs from within St Mary's 2019/2020 Undergraduate Prospectus were examined (Phase Three). The findings from Phases Two and Three are presented together as parts I, II and III within this chapter. Together, the three parts document the emerging themes which are presented utilising each of the three HE environments namely: physical, academic and social.

Contributing to the overarching research into student fit, the aim of Phases Two and Three was to consolidate and build on the findings from Phase One. This was achieved by investigating the expectations and experiences of students and alumni by obtaining examples and evidence. As Phase One drew on quantitative methods, it was unable to grasp the students' voice, whereas Phases Two and Three adopted qualitative means of data collection, enabling the opportunity for rich insights, first-hand accounts and "illustrative information" (Queriós, Faria and Almeida, 2017, p. 370).

Phase Three utilised the prospectus photographs as a catalyst for conversation and exploration, and asked participants to identify photographs that were meaningful to them and to explain why. The use of pictures was adopted to create an opportunity for the expression of feelings which are often difficult to articulate with words alone. This expression was evident when participants selected photographs and spoke passionately about them including the ordinary, everyday pictures within the prospectus: those of the Refectory, the piazza, the Halls of

Residence and the communal areas. Research undertaken by Barone and Eisner (2012) found that images can be more potent than language when trying to explain a situation and define art-based research as being like a “travel card, something one can use to get somewhere” (p. 9). Participants identified and discussed photographs they liked, disliked, related to or those which had no resonance for them. The use of images allowed for the elaboration and clarification of findings and gave the opportunity to add context and life to the data. As Barone and Eisner (2012) stated, “aesthetic and artistic material also perform a critical function in human understanding” (p. 160). Questions relating to the photographs were posed to see whether participants considered the prospectus was illustrative of their view of the brand. The photographs within St Mary’s prospectus are signifiers of the St Mary’s brand and contribute to one’s impression and expectations of the university. As noted in Chapter Two, a strong brand is designed to evoke long term brand loyalty from customers and consumers, in this instance, students. The brand is wider than a logo or colour scheme; it engenders the image of the institution including its culture and values and portrays how the institution wishes to be perceived.

Phase One articulated what students wanted from the university in terms of their needs, requirements and expectations, establishing that the most selected reasons for choice were physiological needs such as safety, location and a pleasant environment. Phase One also established St Mary’s differentiating characteristics based on frequency of selection. When excluding universal factors which are provided by all universities such as support services, social activities and the Students’ Union, the differentiating factors for St Mary’s were: the highly regarded academic reputation (3<sup>rd</sup>), size (4<sup>th</sup>), sports and recreational opportunities (6<sup>th</sup>), the highly regarded sporting reputation (8<sup>th</sup>), and the Catholic ethos (9<sup>th</sup>). Phases Two and Three addressed these specific differentiating factors which could also be described as St Mary’s unique selling points (USPs), to establish whether they were key areas which influenced university selection.



Phases Two and Three address students' expectations from two perspectives. These perspectives were compatible personal and institutional values and environmental requirements. Values were considered due to claims originating from Pervin and Rubin's (1967) research into student satisfaction which were discussed in Chapter One. Values are relevant due to the suggestion that students are more satisfied with their university experience if their core values are congruent with that of the institution. Similarly, Gilbreath et al's (2011) research which has previously been discussed, both within the literature review and within Phase One, demonstrates the importance of the congruency of HE environments, students' expectations and satisfaction. Pervin and Rubin (1967) established that one of the elements of student satisfaction was student/institution fit. Student satisfaction was defined in Chapter One and is similar to customer satisfaction, which is defined by Kotler et al (2008) as "the gap that exists between customers' expectations of service quality and the service quality experienced" (Kotler et al, 2022, p. 626). This means that students are more likely to be satisfied when their expectations and experience match: the smaller the gap between expectations and experience, the more satisfied a student is. Due to the increased competition for students driven by the removal of student number controls (2015/16) and a demographic dip in 18-21-year-olds, it is important for universities to attract students and for them to be satisfied in order to retain them.

One way universities seek to attract students is via the use of their prospectus. The prospectus is an example of physical evidence which communicates the quality of an intangible service, such as education. This concept was discussed within the literature review (Chapter Two, page 58). The university prospectus was selected as the source of imagery as it is a key permanent marketing tool used to promote the institution and the university experience, rather than the frequently updated website. St Mary's university prospectus will now be analysed.

## 5.2) The University Prospectus

The literature review in Chapter Two discussed the genre of the university prospectus and how the purpose of the prospectus has changed over the years from offering a list of courses to becoming a marketing tool which depicts a lifestyle (Winter and Thompson-Whiteside; 2017 Graham 2013). Askehave (2007) compared a range of international prospectuses and their design, noting that imagery was used to depict the local area and atmosphere including images of extra-curricular activities, facilities and campus life with less imagery relating to teaching. In an analysis of one institution there were 46 photos in the prospectus. Of these, 78% were of “students busy with outdoor activities or inside, relaxed and engaged in social activities with peers” (Askehave, 2007, p. 737). Thirteen percent of photos were related to studying and 2% in a student/teacher scenario. Askehave (2007) concluded that the prospectus aimed to portray a university experience (p. 739) rather than focusing on academia.

St Mary's 2019/20 undergraduate prospectus incorporates 82 photographs across 96 pages. Seventy two percent of the pictures include people which were mainly students but also staff. Of the images of people, 38% were male and 62% were female. This portrayal differs by 7% when compared to the actual 2017/18 student population which was 44% male and 56% female, therefore females were slightly over-represented. In the prospectus 77% were white people compared to 69% in the actual student population resulting in people of colour being under-represented by 8%. There were no pictures of people with a visible disability although there are two photos (3%) of students receiving support from student services. The low number of images relating to student support is incongruent with St Mary's values such as generosity of spirit, and the lack of imagery depicting support is a missed opportunity to effectively represent this element of St Mary's brand.

Similar to the prospectus examined in Askehave's (2007) research, St Mary's prospectus does portray a university experience. Unlike the prospectus Askehave (2007) analysed, the St Mary's prospectus has slightly more emphasis on

education, 17% compared to 13% and St Mary's prospectus included nine photos of educational spaces such as a lecture room, classrooms and study areas in the library. Such imagery portrays the importance of academia at St Mary's.

Fifty-four pages of the prospectus are dedicated to detailed programme information giving course descriptions by year, assessment methods, career opportunities, entry requirements, accreditation information and student testimonials. An example of course information is shown in Figure 5-1 which illustrates the level and depth of information within the prospectus for potential students.

**Business Management BA**

**CMI** **CABS**  
HR Partner Approved

**A dynamic discipline which combines a wide-ranging, academic and professional programme for today's world of business, with a specific focus on the exciting potential offered by the field of business management.**

- Successful completion of the degree leads to dual accreditation: Bachelors Honours degree and Level 5 Diploma in Management and Leadership awarded by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI)\*.
- Work placement opportunities integrated into the second and third year of the programme.

**Description**  
 Business Management as either a Single Honours programme or in combination with another academic subject will provide you with a degree that is very attractive to employers in the public, private and third sectors. This degree programme will equip you with the knowledge and skills required to successfully enter a range of business careers and to deal with the complexities of organisational management.

This programme combines coverage of the key business areas from finance and marketing, through to strategy and human resources, with the opportunity to study more specialist subject areas, including business law, management consultancy and digital business.

There are numerous opportunities to undertake a work placement as an integral part of your degree and to experience the benefits of combining academic theory with the practicality of the working environment.

**Level 4**  
 During the first year you will be introduced to the principal areas of the Business Management curriculum. This is designed to provide you with a firm grounding in the general business concepts and, as such, consists of a number of common cores across all the undergraduate Business Management programmes.

The course covers a thorough introduction to business management and involves the following subjects:

- Contemporary Marketing Practice
- Organisational Behaviour
- Introduction to Management Theory
- Financial Decision Making
- Human Resource Management
- Contemporary Business Issues

**Level 5**  
 In the second year, you will study two core modules, Fundamentals of Accounting and Research Methods in Business and Management, plus a further four module options from a list of over 16 modules. The key issues of business management are reviewed within the context of business strategy and provide students with a comprehensive understanding of this important discipline area.

The four optional modules can be selected from across the Business Management curriculum, including International Human Resource Management, Business Economics, Business Law, Starting a Business Venture, Leadership, and Corporate Finance, among others.

All students are encouraged to undertake a work placement during their second year to develop and utilise their business management knowledge and skills.

**Level 6**  
 In the final year, you will undertake three core modules. The Research Project in your specialist area is a 'double core' unit. The other core module is Contemporary Issues in Global Business.

In the Contemporary Issues in Global Business module, you will receive lectures from a range of business leaders, experts and professionals from a range of sectors. They will teach you about the latest trends and key issues in the field of business management.

You will also have the opportunity to undertake a piece of research on a particular aspect in the field of business management that will be presented in the form of a dissertation. You may also broaden your exposure to employment opportunities by undertaking a work placement within an organisation where enterprising business management students are welcomed.

**Teaching methods**  
 As well as highly interactive lectures, you'll be working in groups on case studies, listen to excellent lectures, and receive presentations from top management professionals, practitioners and leading researchers. Following lectures, you will be provided with seminars where you will have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of the skills you'll need to be an effective business manager. Individual tutorials are also available should you require further support in learning the subject matter. These approaches are supplemented by an online virtual learning environment where you can find additional learning materials.

**Assessment methods**  
 You will be assessed in a variety of ways to test knowledge, understanding and skills development throughout your degree. The programme uses a broad range of assessments including business reports, essays, practical exercises, presentations, case studies, examinations, assessed blogs, seminar and simulation exercises, as well as traditional exam-based assessments and coursework. Wherever possible, you'll be assessed using digital methods and online feedback.

**Find out more**

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 www.stmarys.ac.uk/undergraduate/business-management

**Single and Joint Honours**  
 See pages 94-95 for all combinations

**104**

**Entry requirements**

- Red level programme
- A levels: 104 UCAS points
- BTEC Extended Diploma DMM
- BTEC Diploma D'D
- GCSE Maths equivalent evidence of numerical skills

See page 90 for full details and other accepted qualifications

\*The CMI is the only chartered professional body in the UK dedicated to promoting the highest standards in management and leadership excellence. It is the only organisation awarding Chartered Manager status, the benchmark of any professional manager, and encompasses a membership community more than 100,000 strong.

For more information on the CMI: [www.managers.org.uk](http://www.managers.org.uk)

**Career opportunities**  
 You will develop a wide range of employment skills in communication, presentation, analysis, quantification, research techniques, teamwork and working to deadlines. This is designed to enhance your employability portfolio. Career opportunities for graduates include banking, insurance, law and business consultancy, as well as a wide variety of specialist and generalist management posts in leisure and sport, marketing and human resources.

38 St Mary's University Undergraduate Prospectus 2019/20

Figure 5-1 Page 38 of St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

### 5.3) Introduction to Themes

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide as depicted in Chapter Three, Figure 3-5, a thematic analysis of 22 semi-structured interviews was completed utilising the following process:

- 1) Familiarity with the data was acquired;
- 2) Initial codes were generated;
- 3) A search for themes was completed;
- 4) The themes were revised;
- 5) The themes were defined;
- 6) The findings were written-up.

In order to become familiar with the data, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, allowing for immersion. The interviews which were with a representative sample of students, alumni and a group of alumni who were also current members of staff took place over a period of three years. The initial codes were generated as the transcripts were read and annotated multiple times, resulting in a list of 139 basic themes. The initial themes were collated into a table, following clear ethical guidelines, and were then revised and defined into 39 general categories, assigned one of 17 codes and then distilled into seven global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The data and analysis summarising the themes, participants and their personal characteristics can be found in Appendix J and the distillation into seven themes can be found in Appendix K. The write up of the themes follows within this chapter, in summary, the seven themes, listed in order of frequency, were as follows:

- 1) The St Mary's way, values and reputation (25%);
- 2) Campus size, location and safety (23.5%);
- 3) Support from peers, academics and professional staff (15%);
- 4) Friendship and social life (13%);
- 5) Sporting reputation, opportunities and sports societies (9.5%);
- 6) Catholic ethos (8%);
- 7) Affordability (6%).

Within each of the following three parts of Chapter Five, the themes are discussed in greater depth. The following, Table 5-1, includes the definitions associated with the ten basic values as given by Schwartz et al, 2012 (p. 664). Using the value

definitions listed below, the themes arising from Phases Two and Three were assigned a human value.

Table 5-1 Conceptual Definitions of 10 Basic Values According to Their Motivational Goals, Schwartz et al, 2012 (p. 664)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Openness to Change</b>	Self-direction	Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring
	Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life
	Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself
<b>Self Enhancement</b>	Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence to social standards
	Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
<b>Conservation</b>	Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of self
	Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
	Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provides
<b>Self-Transcendence</b>	Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
	Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature

The mapping process contributed towards the creation of the Holistic Student Fit Model by incrementally illustrating portions of the model, which were later combined to create the final version.

#### **5.4) Holistic Student Fit Model**

As previously noted, an additional aim evolved during the research process which was to create a model illustrating personal values and institutional fit. Such a model is intended to make a significant contribution to the theoretical framing of personal values and institutional fit. The Holistic Student Fit Model consists of three layers: personal values, the HE environment and the resulting student fit.

The model considers how the institutional values and personal values coalesce. Institutional values are referred to by Crozier and Reay's (2011) research into student fit as "institutional habitus", (p. 147) relating to an institution's unique features including its culture and ethos.

Phases Two and Three explored students' understanding of St Mary's values, as to whether they knew them, whether and how the values were communicated to them and whether participants considered that St Mary's lived them.

Phase One utilised Gilbreath et al's (2011) needs-supply fit model which adopted three HE environments. These were the physical, academic and social environments which measured what students wanted in terms of their immediate surroundings, availability of resources and interactions.

For the purposes of Phases Two and Three, fit models predominately used within commerce and HR were drawn upon to reflect the outcome of fitting in. Within HR and commerce, fit models are used to measure the fit of the individual and that of the organisation as it is assumed that the greater the fit, the greater career success, job satisfaction, level of motivation and retention (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2009). A critique of generic fit models and definitions was detailed in Table 2-1 in Chapter Two. A focus was placed upon fit models because of the aforementioned claims about successful and satisfied students being those who best fit with the institution (Pervin and Rubin, 1967).

In addition to generic fit models, values models were also perceived to be relevant because of the influence of values in decision making. As discussed in Chapter Two and depicted in Figure 2-1, the most prominent human values model was created by Schwartz and Bilsky in 1987, latterly updated by Schwartz et al (2012; 1992). Schwartz et al's (1992) and Gilbreath et al's (2011) models were drawn upon to create a Holistic Student Fit Model which cumulatively builds upon the stages detailed in Figure 4-7 in Chapter Four.

The Holistic Student Fit Model was repeatedly shaped and challenged using the data from Phases One to Three. Segments illustrating the development of the model are depicted throughout this chapter and the final model is discussed in-depth in Chapter Six.

The following three sections will now present and discuss the findings from Phases Two and Three, categorised using the three HE environments and each of the themes identified and discussed within them.

# Part I

## 5.5) The Physical Environment

### Environment:

- Physical

### Elements of the physical environment:

- Geographic location;
- Pleasant safe campus environment;
- Affordability.

### Themes:

- Campus [size], location and safety (2);
- Affordability (7).

*Note that size is an element of the academic environment and will be discussed in Section II.*

This part discusses the findings and themes pertaining to the physical environment, starting with how the environment is portrayed within the university prospectus.

Forty three percent of the photographs within the prospectus were categorised as relating to the physical environment, including the inside cover and the first seven pages. The information relating to the physical environment was given the most prominent position within the prospectus and as previously discussed physiological and safety needs were the most important factors for all students. When asked how the prospectus was created, the marketing team stated that the pages were ordered “starting with ‘about’ the university, continuing in order of what we think are the most important things for people to read and then it goes on to courses” [MT2]. This approach to the design was based on experience and the prospectus did indeed lead with the key information students sought regarding the physical environment.

There were 36 photographs of the physical environment, including one which was both physical and social and one which was physical and academic. A breakdown of the imagery is as follows:



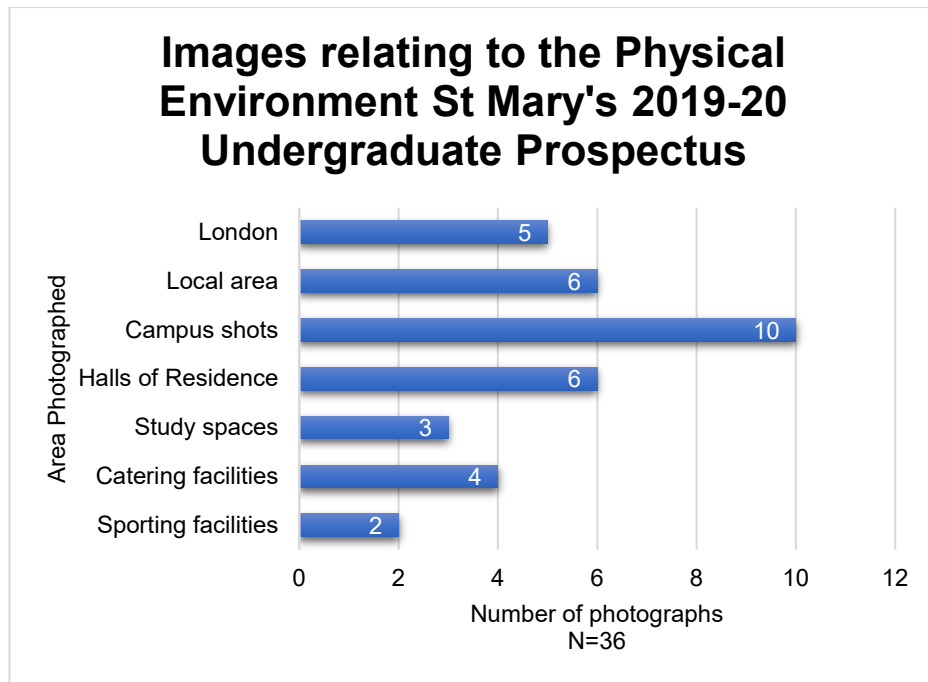


Figure 5-2 Images relating to the physical environment, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

The breakdown of the images illustrates the prevalence of campus photographs but also the quantity of photographs of London and the local area. There are almost the same number of both, promoting Twickenham, Teddington and London locations equally to students.

The three themes emerging from within the physical environment will now be discussed.

### 5.5.1) Geographic Location

The location of a university is a permanent aspect and is inherently part of the university's identity. The importance of location was established during Phase One which concluded that the most selected reasons for choice were consistently the pleasant and safe campus and location. Each of the participant groups spoke about St Mary's campus, sometimes referring to the size of the campus but all spoke of the importance of the location. Sixty percent of first-year students interviewed were from locations within the London orbital motorway, the M25.

When considering the entire group of participants, three students were international, and one was from Wales. A map illustrating the home locations of all

UK participants can be seen in Appendix O. Thirty six percent of the participants interviewed commuted to university whilst 64% lived in Halls.

Within the campus photos, the most popular were the aerial view of campus on the inside front cover, the piazza and the Refectory, both on page five. The aerial campus image portrays St Mary's location as being leafy, green and suburban and close to the River Thames, all of which are attractive attributes of the institution – see Figure 5-3. The aerial photograph depicted in Figure 5-3 drew comments from three first year students who felt that it positively portrayed the area using adjectives such as “pretty” [STU6], “really green, peaceful, historic” [STU8] and it depicted how compact the campus is. One student commented:

The birds eye view of the university, seeing the open space of it going across, seeing that you think that's it, that is the campus and the sports facilities and Halls and everything. That really appeals to me because everything is there at the reach of a hand. Rather than living here and my lectures are all the way over here and you have to leave like an hour [STU5].

This quotation resonates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) as this student and others articulated their requirement of a safe campus.

Eleven participants lived outside of the M25, London's orbital motorway. Several of these participants who lived further away, chose St Mary's because they were looking to 'escape' their home town. There were various examples of this with students originating from Cornwall [ALM5], Southampton [SAL5], Dorset [SAL6], Ruislip [SAL4], Wales [STU5] and Norfolk [ALM1], with one stating: “You don't get out ever if you stay in Norfolk... you're there forever. So, I definitely, I definitely wanted to get out of it...” [ALM1]. These students felt that Twickenham was more cosmopolitan than their home towns and offered the opportunity to travel to larger surrounding towns such as Kingston and into central London. Living and studying in Twickenham presented students the potential to experience nightlife and entertainment not available if they had stayed in their home locations. As well as the social and cosmopolitan benefits of London, some students valued a greener, safer suburban environment. An example of this desire is offered by SAL6 (over):



Figure 5-3 Inside Front Cover/Fold, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

I just found it [London] really overwhelming coming from where I'm from. So, when I went to St Mary's it was just kind of like this relief... like being in zone six... like it was a small community and it was leafy. I had the opportunity to travel in to London in 30 minutes but the comfort of knowing I would come out and be in a suburb, basically, I guess [SAL6].

This was echoed by several participants who lived further away from London including a student from Wales, one from Norfolk and two international students.

Two of the students who travelled the furthest, one of the international students from America [STU2] and another from Wales [STU5] spoke of the challenges of being so far from home. STU5 had never been away from home before and struggled with independent living including budgeting, laundry, navigating around town and was very homesick. STU2 travelled from the USA to study and had not left the country or owned a passport prior to travelling to St Mary's. This indicates STU2's leap of faith or sense of adventure, travelling on her own to attend a university thousands of miles from home with little knowledge or experience of England or of English culture.

When discussing proximity to London, the 'best of both' page generated discussion regarding accuracy. The 'best of both' is illustrated in Figure 5-4 and is a double page spread which features prominently on pages two and three of the prospectus and focuses on the location. The pages contain images of the campus, the River Thames, Hampton Court, Big Ben, Piccadilly Circus, the Embankment and St Paul's Cathedral. The page has an infographic detailing travel times walking, cycling and by train or tube to locations including Teddington, Twickenham, Kingston, Hampton Court, Richmond and central London. These pages were the most contentious; prominently located within the prospectus, they give the implication of priority information or key messaging. Some participants felt that the pages were misleading and implied that St Mary's was closer to London than it is and that the suggestion of proximity made the university more desirable with one stating "it [the proximity to London] is a big draw" [STU9]. Criticisms of the page included it being "far-fetched" [STU3] and "misleading" [STU9]. The ethics of marketing, particularly with reference to organisations in positions of authority such as universities, was discussed within the literature review.



# the best of both



St Mary's University is located in leafy Twickenham, which is just half an hour by train from the heart of London. This gives students access to the best of both worlds: a dynamic, bustling city and a tranquil, homely suburb. Many students choose to study at St Mary's because of its prime location.

**Amenities of the local area**  
Twickenham is the third highest city in the world with the walking distance of the University and home to a variety of shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs. As well as meeting up with friends, students will have a wide range of things to do in the local area, including the Royal Albert Hall and the Royal Opera House.

**Culture, history and heritage**  
In 2017 St Mary's became the proud sponsor of 'No Culture in Twickenham' - a newly built community centre that houses a 25,000 seat stadium, a public square and a park. St Mary's students are benefit from leading a life of history and the site, and drama students will enjoy their performances in the Royal Albert Hall. The Royal Albert Hall is one of the most famous buildings in the world and the public are so lucky to see the unique features of this building.

**Outdoor spaces**  
St Mary's is close to one of London's most beautiful parks and park and study park offer students hundreds of acres of green space, perfect for jogging and cycling. Twickenham, which is on the River Thames, is also close to the sea.

**Entertainment**  
The city is home to some of the best entertainment venues in the world. From the shopping centres, to the restaurants, bars and clubs, there is something for everyone. St Mary's students and staff are able to take advantage of the special deals available for students in the city.

**So close to some of the greatest cities in the world**  
St Mary's is only 20 minutes from the heart of London. There is no need to visit the city for English and other subjects. St Mary's students can enjoy the best of both worlds: a dynamic, bustling city and a tranquil, homely suburb. Many students choose to study at St Mary's because of its prime location.



- Find out more  
www.stmarys.ac.uk/location
- 10 mins Walk to Teddington
  - 15 mins Walk to Twickenham
  - 15 mins Bus to Kingston
  - 30 mins Bus to Hampton Court
  - 30 mins Train to Richmond
  - 30 mins Train to central London

Figure 5-4 Pages 2 and 3, The Best of Both, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

One participant felt that it would be beneficial to include places that students visit such as local coffee shops and pubs rather than the pictures of Hampton Court and boats on the river in Kingston as it would be “more representative of what students do” [SAL4]. This type of photograph would portray a more authentic and natural image of university life.

It is commonplace for universities to portray their specific location within their prospectus and to use it as a way of differentiating the institution from their competitors (Winter and Thompson-Whiteside, 2017) and of promoting the local area. St Mary's have opted to promote its proximity to London to foreground the potential social and cultural opportunities. This technique is intended to portray a lifestyle which is attractive to students seeking a similar experience, thus positioning the university within the market (Graham, 2013). When asked about the 'best of both' pages, the marketing team highlighted the proximity to London is a key selling point for St Mary's, particularly for students who live outside of the M25 and for international students. A member of the marketing team who had previously worked for a neighbouring competitor institute stated that they had also adopted a similar strategy claiming to be in London, despite being located in Surrey. Participant MKT1 highlighted the disparity between the aspirations of the recruitment team who wanted to appear close to London to attract students versus the marketing team's desire and legal obligation to reflect accurate information. Such moral dilemmas were discussed in the literature review in Chapter two stressing that most universities are reliant upon student tuition fee income as their main source of revenue. The financial reliance on fee income drives universities to recruit students to meet finance targets, therefore recruitment teams could be tempted to unduly influence claims within the prospectus with regards to location. This was not the case for St Mary's as the infographic does clearly state travel times, however the photographs were predominately London landmarks and could lead to false expectations regarding proximity.

The importance of location and proximity to home for potential students is consistent with literature pertaining to social mobility which states that non-traditional students are more likely to attend a university close to their family home (The Sutton Trust, 2018; Rolfe, 2002). This is relevant to St Mary's as typically 40% of the student body are the first in their family to go to university, 30% are from low income families (those with a combined household income of less than £25k) and around 30% of the undergraduates at St Mary's come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME). Historically students have moved away from home to attend university, an extension to boarding school. However, since the implementation of fees and the expansion of HE, this has changed. This change was evidenced by the participants within this study, the majority of whom came from homes located within the South of England. The next theme discusses St Mary's campus aesthetics and safety.

#### **5.5.2) Pleasant and Safe Campus Environment**

Pages four and five are titled 'campus life' and portray everyday life on campus including the coffee shop, Refectory, library and classrooms. Page four has a picture titled 'hanging out on campus' which drew comments from the research participants as it represented students in a social setting: "It's just everyone is enjoying themselves in that picture and getting on. That's something that stands out to me" [STU4]. Students also commented on the café, the Dolce Vita which at that time was branded as a Starbucks, which they felt was a good place to "work and hang out really" [STU7] as it was a central location with a relaxed atmosphere.





# campus



"What struck me about St Mary's was the relaxed, family culture, which you don't find at many universities," said Miaja Grims, a former Psychology and Philosophy student who graduated in 2015. And in the eight years since left St Mary's, the University has invested £10m in library development, state-of-the-art music production studios, and strength and conditioning suite, whilst enhancing its iconic hall community feel.

The campus, which of us consisted an beautiful 17 acres of nature green spaces and striking architecture from a rich, family atmosphere. Its small size means a sense of community isn't diluted. As students walk through the grounds they will always bump into someone they know. It's easy to see we're all here.



**Dolce Vita cafe**  
This 100-seat cafe has been selected as a top priority for the University's new 'Heritage' plan. It overlooks the main quad and is a great place to relax and socialise.



[Find out more](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/virtualtour)  
www.stmarys.ac.uk/virtualtour

# life



**The Refectory**  
The Refectory is conveniently located at the centre of the campus. It's open seven days a week during term time for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

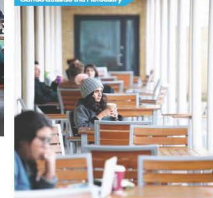


Figure 5-5 Pages 4 and 5, Campus Life, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus



When discussing location, some students wanted the buzz of London but felt it was not safe to live there. For this reason, they chose to live in the suburbs; examples of this fear of London came from STU5: "I stick to what I know in terms of areas and I rarely venture out. I'm terrified of getting lost" and ALM4: "I could find living in central London quite overwhelming... just because how chaotic everything is... like everything's just all go, go, go". One student [ALM3] referred to other campus visits he had made and mentioned that some Halls of Residence required key-cards to access them. Rather than this being a positive safety feature, he felt this represented danger, that the area was unsafe and required additional safety measures, making him view St Mary's as a safe and secure option. A female, first year student [STU4] was reassured by the presence of 24-hour security on campus, stating: "Security are really lovely... they are really nice but if someone is on campus who shouldn't be, they chuck them out" [STU4]. She referred to them as being friendly but firm thus offering a sense of security and comfort.

Pages six and seven are called 'a home away from home' and drew comments from the students living in Halls. The photographs of the Halls of Residence were a talking point, initiating discussion around relationships with roommates and antics which took place. Students felt that the prospectus did not include all of the information they wanted about the accommodation prior to moving in and commented that the photos were nicer than the Halls were in reality. Examples of comments relating to the images of the Halls were offered: "I feel like the pictures of the accommodation are quite deceiving. It's just they look more... a lot more lively on the pictures than the rooms, like especially the top floor of Old House. It is dark up there and narrow...." [STU6] another student spoke about the bedrooms:



**Find out more**  
 +44 (0) 20 828 04334  
 accommodation@stmarys.ac.uk  
 www.stmarys.ac.uk/students/acc  
 www.stmarys.ac.uk/students/acc  
 accommodation.htm

# a home away from home

**All St Mary's see understand that student accommodation is more than just a place to sleep and sleep. It is a place for you to become part of a vibrant and welcoming student community where you will have the chance to mix with students from around the world and meet people who will become your lifelong friends.**

**University accommodation**

We have a wide range of accommodation to suit all requirements, including catered and self-catered halls. Our university accommodation is on a large campus with student halls of residence to large catered Victorian houses, and houses of different sizes to suit your needs. We also offer a variety of accommodation including university accommodation, private accommodation and houses, which are particularly popular with international students. Our Accommodation Team works closely with the International Team to ensure you receive all the support you need at St Mary's.

Accommodation which is a short walking distance will sometimes only be a short walk away. The University is served by excellent public transport, making your journey to and from campus easy.

**Accommodation guarantee**

We guarantee to have an offer of university accommodation available to all UK first-year undergraduate full-time students who meet our terms and conditions. This includes accepting St Mary's as your first choice. Our accommodation guarantee is subject to further conditions which we have on our website. Please visit our accommodation website [www.stmarys.ac.uk/students/acc](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/students/acc) for more information.

**Support for students**

For our visiting friends and international student accommodation may be your first and last away from home. Our student accommodation allows you to enjoy your new and independent life, safely and supported by our staff. Our Residence Life Teams can help to help you settle in to your new student life at St Mary's.

**International students**

As an international student, you are sure to have a new country with a welcoming and exciting life to offer you. We offer a wide variety of accommodation including university accommodation, private accommodation and houses, which are particularly popular with international students. Our Accommodation Team works closely with the International Team to ensure you receive all the support you need at St Mary's.

**Accommodation costs**

Accommodation prices include internet and utility bills. Costs may vary if there are extra services included in budgets including catering and self-catered. Further information is available on our website. Please visit our accommodation website [www.stmarys.ac.uk/students/acc](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/students/acc) for more information.

**How to apply**

OFF holders will be sent an email in going with details on how to apply for university accommodation. The application process involves completing an online form and paying a deposit and holding fee. You will be able to apply as soon as the application system is open, if you have selected St Mary's as your first choice.

If you need assistance completing your application form, the Accommodation Office is available to help. Please contact us quickly so that we can process your application.

**On-Campus and On-Campus, The University**



**On-Campus and On-Campus**



**Accommodation advice and support**  
 In addition to supporting you with your first year's accommodation, we also help you find student accommodation and housing in the local area.

After the first year, students generally rent a house or flat with a group of friends or by meeting with a local family. We provide advice, guidance and support throughout the year and have a variety of websites specifically aimed at confirming student accommodation to move into private accommodation.

We have a website with information available to assist students, including a complete guide about private accommodation, which covers what to look for when searching for a property, the right to signing your contract.

On our website you will find the most up-to-date information about the local area to help you find private accommodation, along with costs, different types of accommodation, right to sign your contract.

Please note that there is no council housing available, with the exception of St Mary's houses in the city centre.

**You are all in the same position and you're starting about university life together.**  
 You are all moving into university accommodation.

**Living in Kingston has its benefits as being involved and making great friends. The transport is also good and you can get a bus or the train to work.**  
 Enjoy your time in Kingston.

“it’s interesting that they haven’t included room photos. That is something I was searching for... to actually find what the rooms looked like inside when I was looking at Cronin. It wasn’t great as the rooms are small and you can’t get stuff in them. In terms of accommodation, that was what I was looking for... to be comfortable” [STU6].

Students living in Halls were especially happy with the location in terms of being campus based and close to lectures and amenities: “I like my Halls because of the location of it, right by the track, really pretty, really nice. The rooms are better than I thought they would be. Bigger than my room at home so really good” [STU7]. This type of comment regarding the quality of the accommodation depended on the Halls the students were living in, but all were happy about the location.

Most of the first-year students interviewed were living away from home for the first time, therefore safety and isolation were forefront as the participants were young adults experiencing independent living for the first time. The OfS and UUK have championed a number of campaigns and initiatives supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students (UUK, *Minding our future: starting a conversation about the support of student mental health*, 2021; OfS *Insight brief: Mental health, are all students being properly supported*, 2019b) highlighting that the transition to university is stressful and some students struggle with living independently, budgeting and making new friends. This type of challenge was evidenced by [STU5] who said: “I was panicking a little bit at the start” and expressed anxiety about his laundry and budgeting.

Even something like washing and I come back [to his room] to washing that’s another thing. But my mum did the washing and did the food and I’d concentrate on schoolwork. I have life to worry about. I never thought about money and there is the financial aspect [STU5].

This statement from STU5 is similar to the findings established by HEPI and Unite who stated that students approached university with apprehension and excitement (2017). HEPI and Unite established that 75% of students were confident about budgeting but only 43% were prepared to pay bills and that students underestimated costs such as rent (HEPI and Unite, 2017, p. 29).

# visit

## Open events

We know that attending an open event and seeing the campus in person will give you a better picture of your decision about where to study. At all of our open evenings, come and see for yourself the opportunity to see our facilities and accommodation, talk to our current students, and meet academic staff who can explain our programmes in depth and answer all your questions.

Attending an open event and talking to staff and students from our community will give you a better picture of what it is like to be a student at St Mary's, which will help you decide whether the University is the right place for you.

Visitors to our campus are impressed by our friendly surroundings, the historic setting and our friendly atmosphere, so why not come and explore St Mary's for yourself?

Book your place online today  
[www.stmarys.ac.uk/visit](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/visit)

## Campus tours

If you are unable to attend an open event and would like to visit St Mary's, we offer weekly campus tours, managed by either one of our experienced student ambassadors or the Student Recruitment Team. Contact us via email at [enquiries@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@stmarys.ac.uk) or on our website [www.stmarys.ac.uk/visit](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/visit)

## Getting your questions answered

The Student Recruitment Team are here to help you find out all you need to know about the programmes at St Mary's and how to apply. We want to support you in your journey to university by answering any questions you may have in subject areas such as:

- Your UCAS application
- Finance issues whilst studying
- The difference between studying at school or college and at degree level
- What it is like to be part of the St Mary's community as a student

Ask an expert now!  
[enquiries@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@stmarys.ac.uk)  
 +44 (0) 201240 2294



If you have attended a UCAS higher education convention in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, you may have already met the team, which is typically our leading new prospective students throughout the year. In addition to this, the team attends school and college fairs, talks and other exhibitions, promoting our university life and supporting prospective students with their application decisions.

## Widening participation

The Student Recruitment Team are widening participation (WP) events throughout the year to encourage younger students and those who may not have been thinking for higher education to consider university instead.

The range of widening participation outreach activities includes bespoke sessions for groups of looked after children at UK-based primary schools for students in years 11 and 12. If you are interested in helping along a group to visit St Mary's and get underway with their academic offering, please contact the Student Recruitment Team.



*St Mary's enabled me to acquire knowledge across a broad range of topics during my degree, which fuelled my interests in further study. This helped me to become a Sport and Exercise Psychology student at Brunel London University, where my way of learning has been influenced by my lecturers at St Mary's.*

James Fairhead,  
 Coach with Sport Science



## Success!

**Belle Brookings** graduated with a BSc in Psychology. After graduating she started a graduate management training programme at Expedia, a global logistics company. She is now working there as a project executive.

Figure 5-7 Pages 26 and 27, Visit, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

Later in the prospectus, pages 26 and 27 (see page 167) are titled 'visit' with a focus on open day visits. Page 27, as depicted in Figure 5-7 has a compilation of photos including one of open day and of outside social space by the Halls of Residence. The picture of the students on benches received similar comments to the rooms with students feeling that it was staged: "The one outside of Cronin, that one that's never as busy as that" [STU3]. This image crosses over with the social environment, containing pictures of students in casual social situations. These photographs portray an expectation of students having friends, leisure time and the opportunity to socialise on campus.



Figure 5-8 Inside Back Cover, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus  
 The inside back cover of the prospectus has a compilation of photographs including one of Strawberry Hill House. Strawberry Hill House was built in 1747 as

a summer house by Horace Walpole, a historian and the Earl of Orford. The house was built in a gothic style, inspired by Walpole's Grand Tour of Europe and his fascination with the medieval architecture in northern Europe. Following Walpole's death, the property was bequeathed within the family and in 1846 became the property of Lady Frances Waldegrave. Lady Waldegrave expanded the house building the Waldegrave Drawing Room, Billiard Room and Dining Room. In 1923 the property was purchased by the Catholic Education Service and housed the Vincentian Fathers who founded what was to become St Mary's University (Strawberry Hill House, 2020). In 2007 the house was leased to the Strawberry Hill Trust who received a UK Heritage Lottery Fund grant to restore the house to Walpole's original gothic castle. The rooms built by Lady Waldegrave remain as part of St Mary's University (St Mary's, History and Heritage, 2020a). The image of the house was selected by two participants, one a member of staff stating: "I would say my favourite one is that one" [SAL4] and the other student who simply said they loved it. Participants chose the image because they liked the picture but were unaware of the historical relationship between the house and the university. The inclusion of images of a historic building could be viewed as adding gravitas to the institution by illustrating St Mary's longevity and history. This point was not highlighted by the marketing team who collated the images for the prospectus; instead they selected pictures of Strawberry Hill House because it was photogenic.

The narrative pertaining to the location and campus represent examples of person/environment fit. Person/environment fit is the correlation between the level of match between an individual's expectations, personal characteristics and that of their environment. The model in Chapter 4, Figure 4-7 was considered within the context of theme two, incorporating the data from all three phases and extended to include human values. The value of conservation, as defined in Table 5-1, has been assigned to theme two because the definition for conservation includes security and safety.

### 5.5.3) Affordability

This theme examines affordability within the context of quality of accommodation, food, travel costs and value for money. The pictures of the Refectory (see Figure 5-5 on page 163) created discussion about the food on offer on campus. The Refectory, or the Ref as it is fondly referred to, is the only location on campus for catered students to eat and therefore is a natural meeting point for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The pictures of the Refectory evoked strong feelings from some students with regards to the quality of the food offer which some students liked and others did not. "I am quite fussy, not badly fussy but there are options" [STU5] and quality "I'm not going to lie, it isn't Michelin star standard food... you get used to it" [STU7]. Included within the accommodation fee, students living in Halls are allocated a number of points daily for meals. Whilst some were satisfied with the food quality and quantity, others spoke of the lack of options, navigating the points-based system and timings of meals. Breakfast is not available at the weekend and instead, students are offered brunch. Some students found this to be inflexible and incompatible with their lifestyles, for example those who were balancing part time work with their studies. Difficulties included the opening hours of the Refectory, which closes at 7.30pm, as students who worked in the evening did not have time to have their evening meal, although they had paid for it within their accommodation contract. As all meals are only available in the Refectory, it is a busy location as portrayed in the image, described by one student as a picture that "evidences daily life on campus and is truly representative" [STU3]. Students felt it was a good social space "it's a great place to catch up.... You always bump into everyone" [STU7]. Conversely, one student looked at the picture and said "I hate the Ref. I hate entering the Ref" [STU3]. When asked why he felt so strongly he gave two reasons: "it's like everyone is watching you when you walk in" and the quality of the food: "don't get me started on the food... it's horrible. Breakfast is really nice, but the dinners are horrible" [STU3]. Such comments offer evidence of how students perceive the quality of their experience as all interactions accumulate towards students' overall level of satisfaction.

Commuting students spoke of the expenses they incurred when travelling to university, especially during peak times. Due to the way the timetable is structured, students stated that they paid for daily travel rather than purchasing a reduced rate season ticket. Weekly, monthly or annual season tickets were not cost effective as students were only on campus for up to three days a week and around 26 weeks of the year, depending on which programme they were studying. Daily travel was costly, with one student paying approximately £15 a day to commute from Tottenham during peak times. Some students, including the student commuting from Tottenham, spoke of the financial support they had received from the university. They spoke of the speed of support and level of compassion they had experienced and how they had benefited from bursaries and grants.

STU2, an American student, stated that travel costs prevented her from travelling home as often as most students, but she did return home for Christmas. This student chose to study in the UK as even when accommodation and travel costs were included, the tuition fees were considerably less than in the USA and she could complete her degree one year quicker than the four-year requirement in America, thus offering value for money.

Some commuting students, those who relied upon public transport to get to university, complained about the transport links, the time spent commuting, the lack of trains to Strawberry Hill, their timetabled classes, whether that be early starts or late finishes as well as the cost of travel. Some of the commuting students spoke of their regret of not living in Halls, feeling that they had missed out on the social life and participation in campus life. It was perceived that students living in Halls had more fun. A body of research exists regarding the lack of engagement of commuter students and terminology such as 'live at home', 'learn and go' and statements such as 'superficial engagement' (Thomas and Jones, 2017). Such statements are at odds with the narrative from students who expressed the desire to engage but that there was a lack of opportunity. Due to



the association with the social environment, participation opportunities for commuter students is discussed further in Part III.

Financial support and affordability were intertwined and money was forefront for a high proportion of students. STU8 spoke about meeting student services to discuss financial support, so it is likely that she was experiencing financial difficulties. Her concerns regarding affordability related to her commute which cost around £160 a month, depending on her timetable and whether she was travelling during peak or non-peak times. She was living at home to save on rent costs which she estimated at £160 a week were she to stay in Halls. In fact, the cost of living in Halls at that time ranged from £146 a week sharing a small twin room with shared bathroom facilities to £236 in a room with an en-suite bathroom, both fully catered so she had estimated correctly (St Mary's, Accommodation, 2019e). Interestingly, STU8 did not state affordability as her main motivator for commuting but instead said that she and her family believed she would study harder and be more focused if she remained living at home.

The narrative from STU8 is aligned to research by Archer et al (2007) who found that working class students viewed HE as an “unthinkable lifestyle option” (p. 231) and Reay et al (2010) who established that students who remained living at home whilst studying felt a “sense of safety and reassurance” (p. 112). This was evidenced by STU8 as she did not consider that leaving home was a viable option due to both financial and cultural barriers.

Chapter Two, the literature review, discussed the change in attitude created by the implementation of fees, in terms of students' expectations and value for money (Bunce et al, 2017; Rolfe, 2002,). Finances and affordability were a high priority for two of the mature students who referred to value for money and availability of lecturers. STU1 calculated the time she had spent in lectures and compared it to the fee she had paid, calculating a rate of £40 per lecture. She spoke of her frustration when lectures and seminars were cancelled and her disdain for revision and reading weeks calling them a “piss take” as her expectations were to receive

nine hours of face-to-face teaching per week, which in itself she did not feel was value for money, but anything less was unacceptable. She also felt that this view was not shared amongst her younger peers who were delighted to finish class early or have a lecture cancelled as their priority, she felt, was having fun and not studying. ALM6 was equally dissatisfied with the value for money his degree had offered; as an international student ALM6 was required to pay a higher fee for his course. ALM6 stated that the contact hours on his course were so low, that in his home country the course would be considered part-time. To elaborate, in the US there is a minimum requirement of fifteen hours attendance per week for a degree course to be considered full time, whilst ALM6 stated that he received around eight hours teaching per week at St Mary's plus time in labs. ALM6 felt there should be more lecture time and had researched the Vice Chancellor's pay and benefits, stating the money would be better spent on additional academic staff to enhance the student experience and that these steps would make the course more academically rigorous.

Students had expectations of more lecture time than they had received both in terms of the number of hours each week and the number of weeks during the term. They felt reading weeks were worthwhile but should have been in addition to the scheduled teaching and not in replacement of lectures. This is similar to research by Bates and Kaye (2014) who found that participants in their study linked financial investment to contact time in a similar fashion to the mature students within this study.

The narrative pertaining to the theme of Affordability maps to both the academic and physical environments. This intersection is because Affordability transcends the values of security and power. Within this context, Affordability been allocated to person environment fit as once again, it is the association between the level of match between an individual's expectations, personal characteristics and that of their environment. Affordability has two strands relating to tuition fees and the quantity of lecture time (power) and the cost of commuting, quality of

accommodation and food (security). The values of conservation and self-enhancement, as defined in Table 5-1, have been assigned to theme seven because the definition of conservation includes security and power.

#### **5.5.4) Physical Environment Summary**

Location and safety, together with size from the academic environment, were the strongest themes from within the physical environment throughout all three phases of data collection and elicited comments regarding distance from London, being campus based, the community feel at St Mary's and friendships established within the Halls of Residence. Affordability was prominent and students highlighted the quality and availability of catering, the amount of time they spent in lectures and the cost of commuting. Together this narrative reflects the participants' opinions relating to value for money.

Collectively, the pictures within St Mary's 2019/2020 prospectus that were used to portray the physical environment have positioned St Mary's as welcoming and safe but also with access to the excitement of central London. Graham (2013) found that post-1992 universities, such as St Mary's, position themselves in this manner to portray inclusivity and to appear culturally familiar to some groups of students. This is similar to findings by Winter and Thompson-Whiteside (2017) who established the balance between portraying excitement and a "comforting and familiar environment" (p. 244). The emphasis on safety is likely to be popular with parents who, Winter and Thompson-Whiteside (2017) describe as the "secondary audience" (p. 242) for the university prospectus.

The next section, Part II, will discuss the themes relating to the academic environment.

## Part II

### 5.6) The Academic Environment

#### Environment:

- Academic

#### Elements of the academic environment:

- Intellectual climate;
- State-of-the-art academic facilities;
- Highly regarded academic reputation;
- Size.

#### Themes:

- The St Mary's way, values and reputation (1);
- Campus size, location and safety (2).

This part discusses the findings and themes pertaining to the academic environment. Neither of the two academic environment themes are wholly within the academic environment, but includes the elements of academic reputation and size. The next section starts with how the environment is portrayed within the university prospectus.

Within St Mary's 2019/20 prospectus, there are fourteen photographs of the academic environment (16%), including six which were both academic and social and one was academic and physical. Following directly after the seven pages portraying the physical environment are four pages relating to the academic environment.

A breakdown of the imagery is as follows:

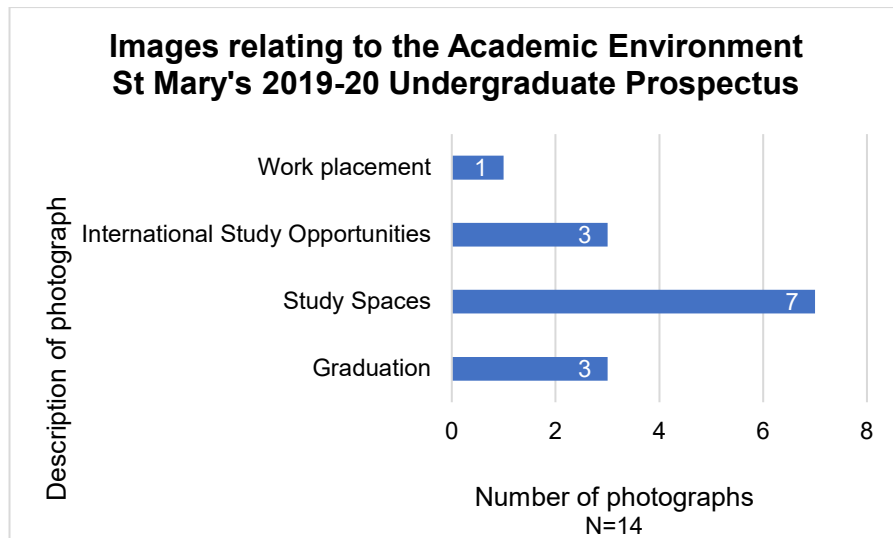


Figure 5-9 Images relating to the academic environment, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

Depicted within the academic related imagery are nine photographs of academic areas such as a lecture room, classrooms and study areas allocated in the library. Included within this total are pages eight and nine which comprise of two students and a paragraph of text regarding St Mary's receiving Silver status in the Teaching Excellence Framework. None of the participants in the study commented on these pages or referred to St Mary's Silver status, instead discussing to other factors which were important to them.

Although there was limited discussion regarding the photographs classified as representing the academic environment, there were 54 text-based pages within the prospectus which are dedicated to academic course information. The detail offered within the course pages was previously evidenced in Figure 5-1 which was offered as an example. Brown and Sen (2010) established that students rated the academic course information, content and description as being the most important components of a university prospectus, compensating for the lack of academic images.

### 5.6.1) Size

During Phase One, one of the options for participants to select regarding university choice was size. Size was not defined within this study and therefore was open to interpretation by the participants and therefore the theme relates to the size of the campus, the student body and class size. There is little literature pertaining to whether the size of a university in terms of the student body or the campus footprint impacts upon student experience. However, research into transitions from Further Education (FE) to HE highlights that class sizes in FE are generally much smaller than those in HE when lectures can accommodate several hundred students in large lecture halls. Large class size, according to Scanlon, Rowling and Weber (2007), impacts upon the social interactions between tutors and students, leaving students to feel anonymous and at risk of dropping out. Similarly, Soilemetzidis, Bennett, Buckley et al (2014) established that there were clear educational gains from small classes in HE with students reporting benefits with classes of fifteen students or less. Class sizes at St Mary's are typically small and students consistently acknowledged knowing staff and peers by name which was seen as a benefit of the size.

Several participants referred to the size of the campus particularly in conjunction with safety as this was important to a number of students. Safety was discussed within the physical environment where the data reflected that the small campus footprint made students feel safe and secure. Students stated that because the campus is small it meant they knew most people by face if not by name and they enjoyed everything being in close proximity on campus. Adjectives such as 'family', 'caring' and 'intimate' were used to describe St Mary's. First year students spoke of their anxiety about leaving home and becoming independent and maintained that the size of St Mary's made them feel less intimidated, unlike other universities they had visited at open days:

I kind of always preferred a smaller community but one that's a bit more caring and a bit more personal and St Mary's kind of fit that bill for me [STU5].

STU5 expressed concern about attending a university in London. However, he chose St Mary's because it was "small" which he stated "really affected my decision coming here" and that "I stick to what I know in terms of areas and I rarely venture out. I'm terrified of getting lost". The convenience of a campus-based university was echoed by several students who liked the compact nature of the campus and by residents who did not have to travel far to lectures. An example of this is seen in the following comment:

I liked the fact that everything was in one place so you could get around. It wasn't like it was ginormous and a concrete jungle, it had a personality and I think that really attracted me to St Mary's [SAL4].

These comments complement those made during interviews regarding how participants would describe St Mary's when they used adjectives such as a small and safe campus. It is for this reason size, location and safety are all within one theme as they are interwoven. There were however some disadvantages due to the size which included a prevalence for gossip and everyone knowing everyone else's business. An example is offered from STU6:

It just means that everyone knows your business. If something happens everyone knows the next day [STU6].

Wilson (2004) acknowledges that gossip "flourishes in close knit communities and facilitates social bonds" (p. 116) which suggests that gossip can sometimes enhance the social environment and friendships. Wilson (2004) continues to suggest that gossip can "communicate rules, values and morals. It facilitates the diffusion of organizational tradition and history..." (p. 117) which can explain why gossip within a small, campus-based community such as St Mary's is embedded as part of the culture.

### **5.6.2) Highly Regarded Academic Reputation and Intellectual Climate**

Phase One established that the academic environment was of greater importance to students in EHSS (14%) than students in SHAS (8%). This finding was echoed during interviews as the academic reputation was of importance to students on the BA in Primary Education and one of the students taking a BA in Theology, Religion and Ethics. St Mary's has a longstanding reputation for teaching courses, having

been established as a teacher training college and also for theology due to its Catholic orientation and heritage. Predominantly it was students who were studying on a teaching programme who spoke about St Mary's academic reputation. St Mary's longstanding reputation includes an outstanding ranking by Ofsted, the highest possible, and 98% of students from this course are employed or in further study 15 months after graduating (St Mary's University website, Annual Review 2020b). Students spoke positively about attending a teaching course at St Mary's and comments repeatedly included the adjectives 'excellent' and 'professional'. Such examples suggest that the teaching staff within the Institute of Education were excellent, professional teachers who model behaviour for their students to emulate in their own practice. This is also an example of how St Mary's live their values which will be discussed later in 5.7.1, The St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation.

A drama alumnus spoke of the difficult decision he had made between attending a traditional drama school with more prestige compared to taking a degree in Acting. He stated that Drama St Mary's had a good reputation and felt that he had made the right decision: "the training is good at St Mary's but it did cross my mind initially... when I finished ...that maybe... No... I wouldn't change it" [SAL6]. The fact that SAL6 was hesitant, pausing and suggesting 'maybe' he should have attended a traditional drama school alluded to doubt about his decision being the right one.

Intellectual climate was not a common thread within interviews and the examples related to a lack of an intellectual climate rather than a positive one. One example was from a dissatisfied student who felt that his course was too easy, that assignments required very little effort and he completed them the night before handing them in [ALM6]. Another alumnus implied that St Mary's students were less intellectual than at other institutions, stating "the thing is... like let's get it completely straight ... it is not Cambridge... it is not Oxford... like it's not, they're not that smart" [ALM4]. These remarks are contrary to those made by the students



studying teaching degrees who were favourable about the professional elements of their studies, their course reputation and credibility.

The photographs from within the academic environment did not generate much discussion apart from page ten, titled 'study' which shows the 24 hour I-learn café and the Naylor Library. The Naylor Library is off-campus and houses collections for teacher education. It is unsurprising that the picture of the Naylor Library was only chosen by students studying teacher training, as the library hosts teaching collections. Students liked the space and used it for group work, specialist books and teaching resources, describing it as "amazing" [STU7]. One student was initially disappointed that the Naylor Library was off campus however believed he was "over thinking" and that the ten-minute walk was beneficial as "the walk... it calms you down before you get there. Doing this walk now... I do a plan in my head, so you have time before you start, making notes or writing your essay" [STU5].

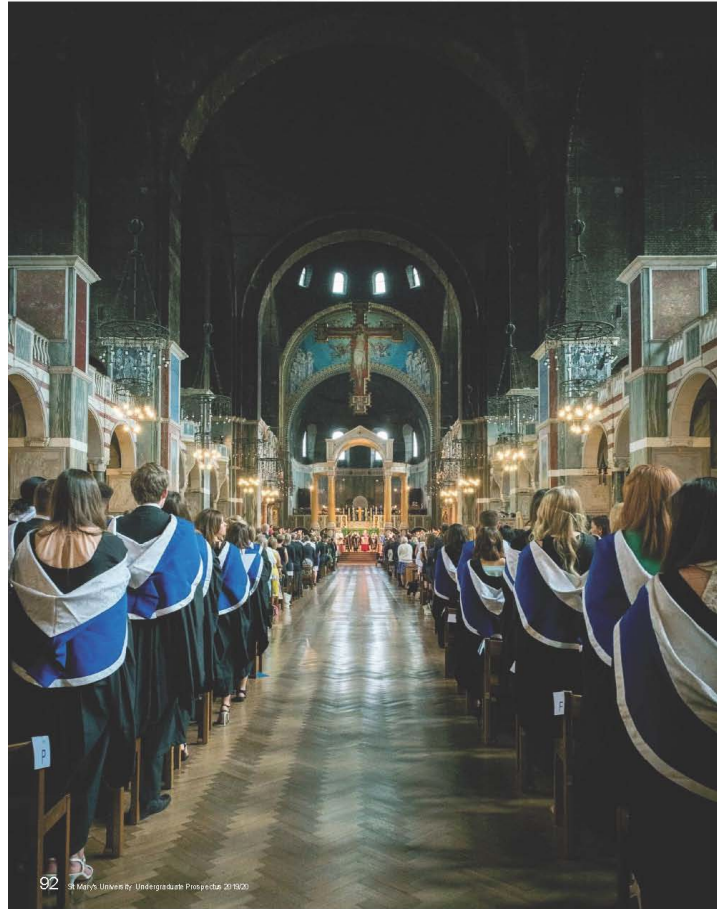


Figure 5-10 Page 92, Graduation, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

Catholic imagery was discreet within the prospectus making up 6% of the total, which is discussed further within the social environment. However, a prominent photo is on page 92 which has a large image of graduation at Westminster Cathedral in London. St Mary's host two graduation events a year, one in the spring on campus and again in the summer at Westminster Cathedral, a Catholic cathedral located in central London. The Archbishop of Westminster is Cardinal Vincent Nichols who was installed as the first Chancellor of St Mary's University in 2015 when St Mary's gained its university title. When reviewing the prospectus, several students paused at the photographs depicting graduation. For the first-year students the image represented their aspirations whilst for alumni the pictures represented a memorable day celebrating their achievements with family and

friends. Students found the photo inspirational stating: “that is a goal for me. That is beautiful. I’ve never been to Westminster” [STU8] and another: “I say a picture that probably best describes St Mary’s best is that one there” [SAL4]. These motivational comments continued as the inside back cover has a compilation of 12 photos including one of graduation hats being thrown in the air at Westminster Cathedral with one student feeling the photo inspired “just happiness and the feeling of success” [STU4]. The photographs of graduation garnered comments regarding pride in graduating from alumni and the aspiration of graduating from first year students.

Depicted as Figure 5-11, pages 14 and 15 are titled ‘go global’ and refer to international study. Together with page 15, titled ‘study abroad’ which has pictures of Sydney, Tokyo and San Francisco, students discussed international study. Several first years had intentions of studying abroad. Comments included: “I always wanted to go to Australia; I only looked at universities who offered a study year abroad” [STU6] and “I do want to study abroad. I don’t think I will be able to, but it is definitely something I am looking towards doing” [STU8]. STU8 was enrolled on a degree in primary education hence the uncertainty about whether study abroad was possible. A member of staff commented on how the study abroad scheme had influenced her application to St Mary’s: “I met study abroad guys and I was like oh my God that’s what I want to do. I applied and then I got in” resulting in a semester in America [SAL4]. SAL4 stated that her year abroad was “the best year of her life” and her experience was such that she considered further study abroad.

# go global

## International students

St Mary's University warmly welcomes applications from international students and offers them a safe and exciting place to live and study in one of the world's most exciting cities. Studying at St Mary's and living on our residential campus means international students are engaged in a community that is both local and global.

Whether you are a new undergraduate student, a fully trained, non-EU/EEA student, or an existing postgraduate student, St Mary's offers an international student support service at our London headquarters which is just a 20-minute journey by train, an orientation to help you settle in, so effective support that you can meet with your studies. At the beginning of your first year, you will be given help with academic study skills in order to ensure you succeed in the UK. For non-English speaking students, English language classes can also be arranged to help enhance your communication skills.

**Orientation**  
At St Mary's you will be fully integrated into our vibrant campus community at the beginning of the academic year, and will participate in an orientation that will put you in touch with students from the same country, continent as you, as well as those from around the globe. During your orientation, our international student ambassadors will help you explore the university campus, the local area and London. They will have tailored to the Students Union so you can fully participate in the wide offering of exciting events.

New international students take part in our international orientation programme, which includes walking tours of the local area and a scavenger hunt around London – a great way to get to know the capital. There are other social events organised specifically for international students by the International Department during the year, which includes a Christmas dinner and summer BBQ.

As an international student, there are a few examples of how to be part of our global community:  
 • Join the International Student Society  
 • Copywriting and creative bookkeeping for small business classes at Ullswater Institute  
 • Join our Global Peer Mentor Scheme – a buddy system for new students  
 • Do a work placement (one day a week) through the Centre for Workplace Learning



**How to apply**  
There are three ways for international students to apply for undergraduate programmes at St Mary's:

1. Directly online to St Mary's – for students who only want to apply to St Mary's
2. Through UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) – if you are applying to more than one UK university
3. Through the Common Application – if you are applying from the USA you may prefer to apply through the Common Application

More information on applying, entry criteria including English language requirements, fees, funding, scholarships and study visas can be found on page 24.

The University has a dedicated UK Office in Chicago. Contact details can be found on our website at [www.stmarys.ac.uk/usa/usa](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/usa/usa).

International students can also purchase the St Mary's Social Programme, a compulsory paid course package including activities throughout the year in London and across the UK. The programme includes a term sheet and details any booking information on sports, activities, theatre and arts at St Mary's.

**Cost of the campus**  
If you wish to visit the campus but can't travel to one of our open days, contact the International Department, which will be happy to meet with you and give you a tour of the campus. A virtual campus tour is also available on our website under 'events' at [www.stmarys.ac.uk](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk) if you aren't able to visit in person.

Contact the International Department by phone on +44 (0) 203 546 8124 or email [international@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:international@stmarys.ac.uk).

**Accommodation**  
Our students live on campus, in homelike, air-conditioned, modern accommodation. We know you'll have your own needs and budgets. We know you'll also want to be close to the city. Our Accommodation Office will discuss your housing needs.

For more information see page 24. You can also call +44 (0) 203 546 8124, email [accommodation@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:accommodation@stmarys.ac.uk) or visit [www.stmarys.ac.uk/usa/usa/usa](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/usa/usa/usa).

## Study abroad

St Mary's is committed to helping its students become global citizens. One of the most exciting ways to do this is to spend a semester in your second year studying at one of our international partner universities. We regularly send students to visit and receive students from our sister networks of partners in the USA, Australia, Europe, South Korea, China and Japan.

When you study abroad for a semester you:  
 • Earn credits towards your St Mary's degree  
 • Gain new perspectives on a life-changing academic experience  
 • Develop an awareness of other cultures  
 • Pay your normal tuition fees to St Mary's  
 • Continue to earn via living through student finance  
 • May also be eligible for an award grant  
 • Are responsible for your own accommodation and travel costs

The International Department runs St Mary's Worldwide to give you detailed information about our options and a free you, personalised with your own package. We'll also be able to answer any questions you have, who apply for international opportunities. As part of the application process, you'll need to demonstrate your progress in your degree.

**International summer programmes**  
If you can't wait to study abroad, St Mary's students can benefit from shorter summer opportunities in the locations mentioned above. On these programmes, students are made up of a mix of students to have more than one experience in a short holiday, meeting people from all over the world in the process.



**International Department**  
44 (0) 203 546 8122  
[stmarys@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:stmarys@stmarys.ac.uk)  
[www.stmarys.ac.uk/global-study-abroad](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/global-study-abroad)

**“**

I chose to study in Perth, Australia, at the University of Notre Dame, and over the next few months of my life, so far, I made lifelong friends from around the world and had the opportunity to meet and work with amazing lecturers, students and staff members. As a female student I was able to explore different pathways within my course, such as journalism and photo journalism. I got the chance to travel to Sydney, and other areas of mainland Australia. This whole experience made me grow as an individual and gave me a new global mindset.

The best advice I could give those considering a study abroad placement is to be in long-term thinking you can make the most of your journey to make sure you get the most out of your placement and placements out of the way right from the start. I also enjoyed picking modules that you wouldn't be able to take at your home university so that you can learn something new and exciting – though make sure it's still relevant to your course.

Theresa Tibbo,  
Student studying in Perth, Australia

Figure 5-11 Pages 14 and 15, Go Global, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

### **5.6.3) Academic Environment Summary**

Size was the strongest theme from within the academic environment throughout all three phases of data collection and is interwoven with location and security. The small size of the institution in terms of both student body and campus footprint made students feel safe and secure and part of a community and was a prominent 'pull factor' for students. When discussing the size of the campus, students referred to feeling safe and secure and these elements combine to offer an environment with which the students could feel familiar which, according to Strayhorn (2019), are the conditions required for students to feel a sense of belonging. An absence of belonging heightens feelings of exclusion and loneliness resulting in students feeling left-out and unwelcome (Strayhorn, 2019). Students offered negative examples relating to the compact size of St Mary's including overfamiliarity and the size and quality of the Students' Union bar. Examples of overfamiliarity related to gossip and rumour whilst those relating to the bar pertained to the quality and variety of stock.

Reputation had two strands: academic and sporting. Academic reputation was the third most selected reason for selecting St Mary's and was selected by half of EHSS students compared to 14% of students in SHAS. The reason for this was not clear although St Mary's academic reputation was important to students on teaching courses. The sporting reputation falls within the Social environment therefore it is discussed in Part III, the social environment.

Two students who were dissatisfied with their student experience both felt they did not belong academically. One felt picked on by her lecturers and the other felt ignored by their lecturers. The students in Phase One who had considered leaving, were less satisfied with the quality of their course (16%) when compared to those who had not thought about leaving (69%).

The narrative outlined within the academic environment represent examples of person/course fit in terms of the academic reputation but also of person/environment fit where this overlaps with location and security.

## Part III

### 5.7) The Social Environment

#### Environment:

- Social

#### Elements of the social environment:

- Enjoyable social life/great Students' Union;
- Sports and recreational opportunities;
- Highly regarded sporting reputation;
- Great support services (eg. careers service);
- Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre);
- Diverse student body;
- Catholic ethos.

#### Themes:

- The St Mary's Way, Values and [Reputation] (1);
- Support from Peers, Academics and Professional Staff (3);
- Friendship and Social life (4);
- Sporting Reputation, Opportunities and Sports Societies (5);
- Catholic Ethos (6).

Phase One established that when asked why students chose to study at St Mary's University, Twickenham, 66% of all respondents selected an element from the social category which included opportunities to interact with peers such as team sports and the Students' Union. The social environment is the largest of the three environments which will now be discussed, starting with how the environment is portrayed within the university prospectus.

Of the 59 photos showing people in the prospectus, 27% are within a social setting, 22% are partaking of sporting activities, 17% are studying, 17% are in a general area such as the Refectory or Reception, 3% are acting in drama productions and the remainder are close ups/head shots (10%) and 3% student support images.

There are two pictures of successful and well-known sporting alumni Sir Mo Farah and boxer Joshua Buatsi. A breakdown of the photographs within the social environment is as follows:

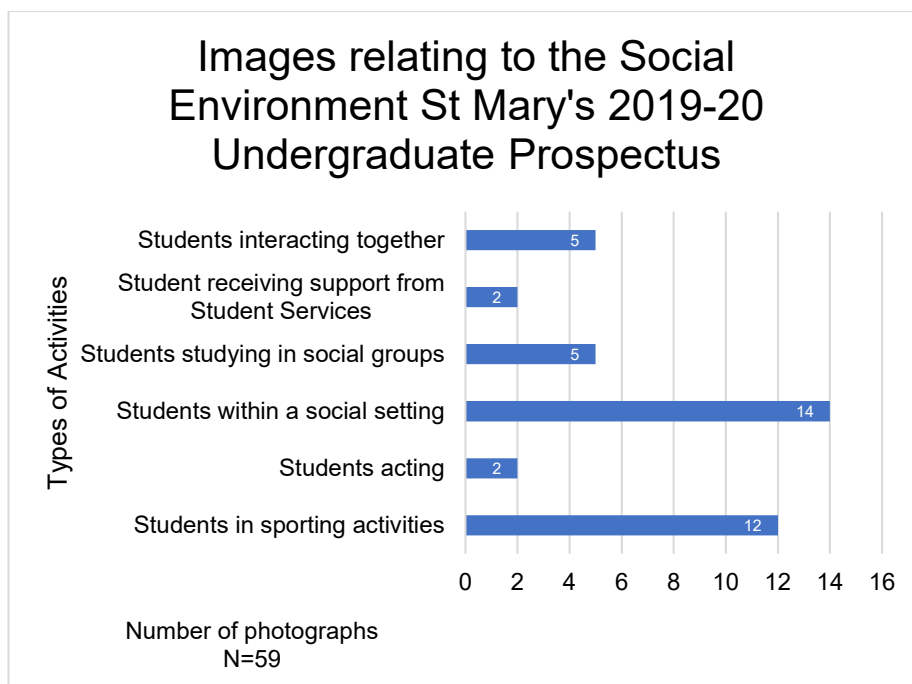


Figure 5-12 Images relating to the Social Environment within St Mary’s 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

Within the social environment photographs, the most chosen pictures were of students in informal, social settings (35%) followed by student sport (30%). The most chosen page was page 21, which is a compilation of sport facilities, famous sporting alumni and student teams.

#### 5.7.1) The St Mary’s Way, Values and Reputation

This theme was difficult to classify as it contained elements from all three of the HE environments. However, it has been categorised as being social due to its connections with the student body and Catholic ethos. Participants referred to ‘The St Mary’s Way’ or struggled to name the ‘je ne sais quoi’ that St Mary’s has or had for them, that created a feeling of nostalgia and an identity as a ‘Simmie’. The term ‘Simmie’ was often used in conjunction with the word ‘community’, suggesting a strong connection between students, the Students’ Union, sports teams and societies who refer to themselves collectively as ‘Simmies’. Previous chapters have discussed the concept of habitus as being unconscious and like a community code, shaped by the people you socialise with and made of deeply ingrained characteristics, habits and skills (Reay, 2004). Habitus is relevant to this theme as

institutional habitus stems from the features, culture and ethos of an organisation which in turn influences and impacts students (Reay et al, 2010).

The ethos and values of an organisation are traditionally the centre of their identity, in other words, their brand (Rutter et al, 2017). St Mary's brand, could be what students struggled to articulate. As noted previously, organisations use their core values as the centre from which to build their brand, and a strong brand evokes loyalty (Rutter et al, 2017) and a strong identity. Examples of organisations who have done this successfully are the Body Shop who aim to be "the world's most ethical and sustainable global business" stating that business should be about "public good not private greed" (Body Shop, 2022) and parkrun, a charitable organisation who offer a free 5k run every Saturday worldwide which are "free for everyone, forever" (parkrun, 2019). Customers loyal to both of these brands are likely to be able to describe their values without needing to read them as they are synonymous with their experience.

St Mary's has four core values: inclusiveness, generosity of spirit, respect and excellence (St Mary's, Mission and Purpose, 2019a). The importance of the brand was discussed in the literature review which highlighted that students' perceptions of an institution are created through institutional branding (Rutter et al, 2017) which contributes towards their expectations.

Participants were asked whether they knew what St Mary's values were and whether they felt St Mary's lived them, and if so, how were they manifested. Most students could not recall the values despite them being prominently displayed on the wall in the Refectory. Once shown a list of the values, most could give examples of how these values were exhibited, apart from generosity of spirit as most were unsure what that meant and struggled to articulate examples of how this could be demonstrated. The only examples were how lecturers were generous with their time, as discussed under the theme of 'support'. Students gave generic responses about the values of respect and excellence in terms of lecturers being excellent, the course reputation being excellent and respecting peers. As



discussed within the academic environment, the trainee teachers from within the Institute of Education spoke about being ranked as outstanding by Ofsted as an example of excellence along with professionalism and standards. They stated they had learned about these elements during their induction.

Staff who were also alumni were the most critical of St Mary's living their values. Upon analysis it appeared that the longer their relationship with St Mary's, the more negative the participant became, citing a restructure in 2018, known as 'case for change' as the catalyst. Staff felt change was implemented too quickly: "it's massively changing, I've had to adapt to these changes" [SAL3] and some lamented that it would never be the same again. Within a university context, Taylor (2021) referred to the benefits of clear values when managing change, stating that "through clearly articulated and lived values, a secure, authentic and familiar foundation is brought to what are often messy large-scale change projects". Taylor (2021) continues to discuss the benefits of "strong, stable values that remain constant" and the "comfort and confidence" that lived values bestow. It would appear that the staff within this study would have benefitted from such clarity and the absence of clear values resulted in their criticism.

Staff also referred to 'the St Mary's way' which referred mainly to behaviours that their colleagues displayed. Several felt that they and their colleagues lived St Mary's values but were critical of senior members of staff who they felt did not.

One participant stated:

So, in the departmental levels yes, we do live by those [values], maybe even at faculty level we may even live by it, but as it gets higher up... I'd say we do less of living by the values [SAL3].

When asked for examples of senior staff not living the St Mary's values, the following statements were made:

[Previously] Everybody knew the senior management team it wasn't like you can't touch them and you have to go through this and that before you can meet them. I'm sorry but, like you know, this open-door policy that we get told about... when you try and see the person they go no, go and see someone else [SAL2].

And:

There's still the whole part of the university that is like we can't advertise anything for gay people because it's not Catholic and it's a bit questionable the inclusive one... about what they are actually doing to meet that value [SAL1].

These statements illustrate a sense of nostalgia in a changing environment, as discussed in Chapter Two when referring to the HE landscape.

It was less apparent how students matched their personal values to those of the university and whether they had considered them at all. Telling signs were comments about St Mary's culture which were given following experiences at open days where people were friendly and held doors open. When the marketing team were asked how St Mary's communicated their values, MKT2 said:

Our Catholic values are super important, and they have, they give the university a real purpose and structure, but we don't need to, we don't need to position them in a way that is overly religious. We can have values that we feel passionate about and share and that we are in line with those values, but we don't have to necessarily push forward with them in the way we do it. We can talk about generosity of spirit which I think is exhibited within our student community within our staff community because of our size and because of our purpose [MKT2].

Inclusiveness, also referred to as diversity was the value most frequently highlighted by students. Although equality and diversity are not the same, participants used the words interchangeably. Multiple examples were given, although diversity and inclusiveness had multiple definitions and meanings to different people. For example, and not exclusively, mature students viewed diversity through the lens of age, Catholic students through the lens of their religion and for students of colour, through the lens of their ethnicity. Students gave positive examples of inclusivity but also negative examples, highlighting the lack of diversity of staff, particularly in senior roles, the lack of female professors and the volume of mature students. Diversity within academia has been studied by Tzovara, Amarreh, Borghesani, Chakravarty et al, (2021) who highlight the areas of discrimination within academia including gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality and promote the advantages of diversity, particularly in terms of increased productivity. Gender inequality was evidenced within St Mary's 2019 Gender Pay Gap Report which states:

Female staff still typically occupy support roles with the lowest pay rates, such as campus services and administrative functions. Women make up over 70% of staff in quartiles one and two (the bottom 50% of the pay scale). We have a disproportionately high number of females employed in lower level roles (grades A-C), for example, Catering Assistant, Cleaner, Student Ambassador, and also in grades D-F where we find many administration/support roles.

(St Mary's University, 2019f, p. 4)

The marketing team had made efforts to portray the institutional values using imagery but whilst it is easy to depict inclusivity, it was not obvious how to depict respect, excellence or generosity of spirit. It was also a challenge to ensure internal stakeholders were represented fairly and to ensure balance and equity across programmes and faculties.

The photographs elicited discussion regarding diversity as it is the one value that can be easily communicated visibly. When discussed with the marketing team, they felt that the prospectus implied the values subtly by depicting the St Mary's community and the "sentiment behind all the values" [MT2] rather than directly referencing them.

Figure 5-13 depicts the front cover of St Mary's 2019/20 undergraduate prospectus. It features an ethnically diverse group of students in the grounds of the university. MKT3 confirmed that this picture was staged as part of a photo shoot for the prospectus. When considering the research by Graham (2013) regarding the constitutive effect of imagery, it could be inferred that by using this photograph prominently, St Mary's were attempting to attract an ethnically diverse student body as at the time the 2019/20 prospectus was created, 31% of the student body identified as BAME. Therefore, the front cover of the prospectus overrepresents St Mary's ethnic diversity.

As stated, 77% of the photographs of people utilised within the prospectus were white compared to 69% in the actual student population. There are thirty images of BAME students across twelve pages in the prospectus, although on further analysis, pages 16 and 17 are a duplicate of the front cover reducing the percentage from 23% to 20%.

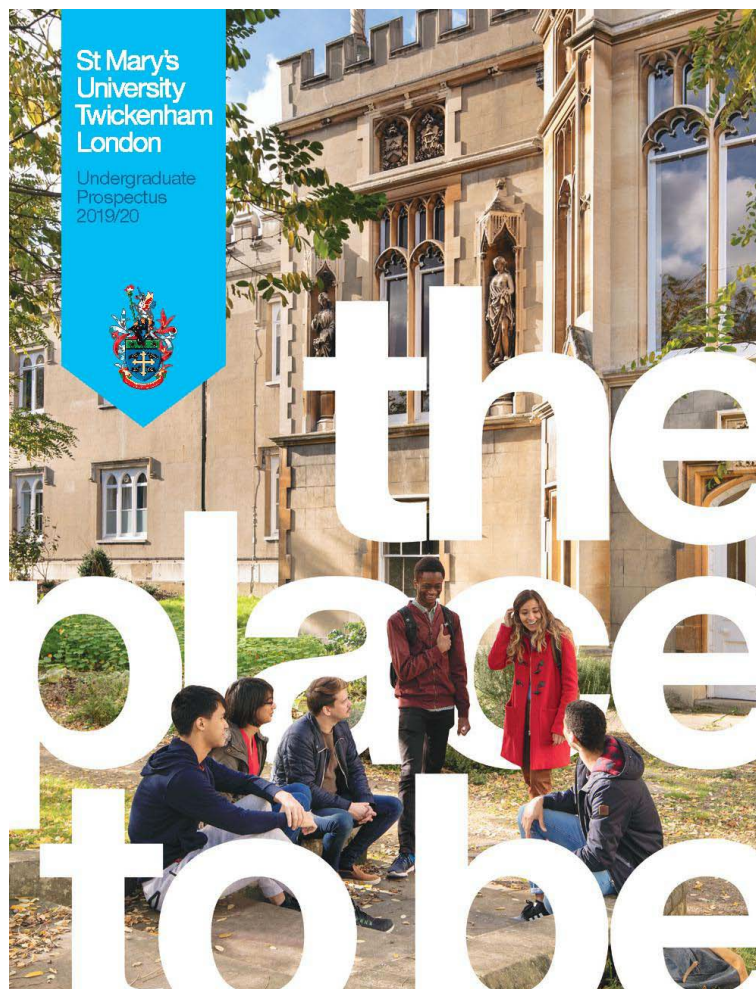


Figure 5-13 Front Cover, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

As part of the interview process students were asked whether the prospectus was representative of their experience. Students were free to interpret 'representative' according to their own experience and perspective. A mature student [STU9], a white male, referred to the diversity of the institution prior to discussing the photographs within the prospectus. STU9 compared the diversity of St Mary's to one of its key competitors, Kingston University stating: "if you look at them [Kingston] there is a mixture of races, colours, creeds. Personally, in today's society I think that is a healthy thing to have". With reference to imagery, STU9 reiterated that he sees predominantly "white faces" on campus. Staff who were alumni were candid about diversity with one BAME member of staff stating: "So

straight away there are not a lot of different cultured people, but we do have loads of them. I found some!" [SAL2] and another white member of staff stating:

I do actually [think it's representative] because the majority of people are white at this institution at this time. I think now the student body is changing more, becoming more diverse. The pictures need to be updated and not have as many white people in it and have different races. [SAL4]

At the time the prospectus was produced, 69% of St Mary's student population were white whilst 77% of people within the prospectus were white, therefore people of colour have been underrepresented.

STU7, a student of colour, felt that St Mary's was inclusive and offered opportunities for students of all ethnicities and religions:

There's something for everyone your culture, your religion, there's like for instance if you are a minority group, there's stuff for minority groups. There is ACS which is the African Caribbean Society and or you've got like international students coming over and I just feel like whatever your kind of needs are, they are met here [STU7].

SAL3, an alumnus who graduated in 2014 chose to discuss the diversity of her cohort. Notwithstanding her ethnicity, SAL3 was a person of colour, she referred to age and gender only.

They were very down to earth, very friendly, we were all kind of like the same sort of ages with families and children, responsibilities which is why we were there. There was a wide age range and there were two men, only two men. We all had the same interests, same goals and same kind of backgrounds I guess [SAL3].

Similarly, mature students spoke about the differences between them and their younger peers. One example reflects the challenges of being a carer:

Other students are 'I'm so tired'.... I'm up at 6.30, ironing shirts, preparing bags, making packed lunches and then come to uni. But you learn coping skills and strategies as you get older. I have to look after kids. They are my priority [STU9].

One student referred to hidden disabilities and the absence of pictures within the prospectus of people who have a visible disability. Only one participant, a female student of colour, referred to the number of females depicted in the prospectus.

The analysis reflected that 38% of the photos within the prospectus are male and 62% are female whilst the actual population at St Mary's was 45% male and 55%

female. Although females were slightly over-represented, STU8 felt they were under-represented stating: “based on what I’ve seen I would assume that in terms of more woman go to university now so I would expect to see more in the prospectus” [STU8]. When compared nationally, HESA data (2021) shows that during the academic year 2017-2018, 44% of undergraduate students in HE in the UK were male and 56% were female so St Mary’s student body is comparable, and females within the St Mary’s prospectus are still are over-represented.

Strayhorn (2019) highlights that students have a greater sense of belonging if they socialise with a diverse range of students, from different backgrounds. This specific point regarding socialising with a diverse group of students did not arise within the interviews, conversely students stated that they wanted to study with students who were similar to themselves, again in terms of age, religion and ethnicity.

A word count from the interview transcripts established that the most frequent word participants used was ‘people’. Despite the volume of data pertaining to the HE environment, the dominance of the word ‘people’ represents the fact that universities are made up of people, collectively creating the community. A member of staff said:

I think there are definitely people that display all of St Mary’s values to a tee but there are other members of staff who don’t and ultimately, we are the people who make up the institution [SAL4].

The catch-all described as ‘The St Mary’s Way’ encapsulated the organisational culture, values and academic reputation. Organisational culture is defined by Deal and Kennedy (1988) as “The way we do things round here” (p. 4). This definition aptly captures the essence of the St Mary’s way theme as it relates to the invisible, unwritten and undefined shared values and beliefs that permeate the walls, emerging from people’s shared experiences. These are examples of person/group fit and person/organisation fit which is the correlation between the level of match between an individual’s expectations, personal expectations, personal characteristics and characteristics of the people around them. The themes are from within the academic and social environments. The values of self-

transcendence and conservation have been assigned to theme one because these values include benevolence, universalism and tradition.

### **5.7.2) Support from Peers, Academics and Professional Staff**

Support was the third most selected reason during Phase One and was a strong theme in Phases Two and Three. Blake et al (2022) established that “well-defined, clearly articulated, inclusive support systems and networks are fundamental to building a sense of belonging” (p. 6) and this was corroborated by my research. Students spoke openly of four different aspects of support: from their peers, academics, financial support and mental health/counselling services. STU2 had travelled from abroad and intimated that she had limited world experience. STU2 stated she had relied upon peers and tutors for emotional support during the year, and due to a history of mental health issues had specifically sought out a university with counselling support:

I have chronic mental health problems so that was something I had to work out moving to another country where I don't have things that I normally have... I have someone in wellbeing who I meet with every week. Not one of the counsellors, I don't remember their title but someone who helps me organise my life so I don't turn into a ball of anxiety. Things like that definitely influenced it [the choice of institution] [STU2].

This quote from STU2 highlights the importance of support for students.

Participants selected photographs from the prospectus which depicted students receiving support which instigated discussion and examples of how the support they had received had exceeded their expectations. Participants gave multiple examples of support given from staff including reference to availability of lecturers, for example “the open-door policy stuff with lecturers... I could always drop into their offices at any point and just chat” [SAL5] and support offered to students on placements. Two students in the first year of the BA in Primary Education were unhappy or struggled with their primary teaching placements for various reasons including location, the environment within the school and lack of confidence. An example of the support they received from their tutor is as follows:

That did set me back a little bit actually [problems in the placement] but with their support... they said no, you can change schools... we'll sort this out for you... and my tutor was amazing. At that time, if I didn't have that

support I thought I can't do this, I couldn't be a teacher and couldn't carry on [STU7].

In several examples, students stated that if it had not been for such support from their tutor, they would have dropped out of their course. Students also gave examples of the help they had received from support services including financial and emotional. The types of support offered to students was depicted on page 11 (Figure 5-14).

**support**

**Find out more**

Student Wellbeing Service  
+44 (0) 2072414333  
wellbeing@stmarys.ac.uk  
www.stmarys.ac.uk/student-support/wellbeing

**We give a high priority to the quality of support and guidance we offer our students. You will find a student-focused approach to your tutoring and all the student support services you might need during your time at St Mary's.**

**One-to-one support**  
As a class and community we have a complete network of support services to ensure you enjoy your student days and to help you sort out any minor issues or occasional major headaches if they crop up along the way.

The Student Services centre provides a full range of personal support for all students through its wellbeing and academic support services.

**Student Wellbeing Service**  
We are able to offer support and advice to any student who feels they have a query or concern about their experience and studies at St Mary's. This may range from general issues as to who you need to contact for a specific problem to more in-depth support needs.

We can discuss in confidence any issue, for example, feeling isolated, upset or dealing with commitment and balance. We will also refer you to other services if needed as an individual and respect the diverse background of each student. Where appropriate, we can refer students to dedicated teams within the Student Wellbeing Service (Counselling, Disability and Dyslexia, and Mental Health Needs).

**Counselling**  
We have a team of professionally trained counsellors who are registered with the British Psychological Society and Health Care Professions (BAHCP). They have a wealth of experience of working in a mental health setting and also in education.

Our counsellors are available by appointment, offering a free and totally confidential service to all St Mary's students who are experiencing emotional distress or difficulties. Counsellors may contribute to recordings and group sessions offered as part of the Student Wellbeing Service's programme of support.

**Disability and Dyslexia**  
Within the Student Wellbeing Service we have our Disability and Dyslexia team which can provide advice and support to students with additional requirements, not providing the time at St Mary's but also before and during the application process. We offer ongoing support to students with disabilities, specific learning difficulties, mental health conditions, medical conditions and students on the autistic spectrum.

**Students**  
**STUDENT SERVICES**  
Pastoral  
Students

**The reason I chose St Mary's University is because I believed I would be treated as an individual and not a "number". I am really happy that I discovered this wonderful university. I would strongly encourage anyone who wants to go to university to consider St Mary's, because it is definitely the place to be.**

Mate Lapato Ricotta,  
Nurturer and Sport Science, 2017

Applicants are encouraged to talk us about their particular requirements in advance so they can be discussed and support measures can be placed. This service also assists with the application for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and provides students with individual support where needed through support workers, tutors and the more.

St Mary's is working in partnership with DisabledGo, an independent organisation that makes the accessibility of the University's buildings and routes between them. DisabledGo has produced a series of online access guides, which provide detailed information about each of the main buildings on campus so that students, staff and visitors can find out what they are able to go to when they need to in advance.

As well as the University will also help applicants assess the facilities and decide whether St Mary's is the right place for them. See page 26.

**Mental Health Advice**  
The Student Wellbeing Service has a dedicated mental health adviser, along with colleagues, to see students in distress and/or those with diagnosed mental health conditions that require additional support and signpost them to other relevant services both within and outside the Student Wellbeing Service.

**Health centre**  
St Mary's has an on-site health centre, which is open over an extended opening time. There is a clinical practice of The York Medical Centre which is based in Tropicium. Students need to be registered as patients with the practice and can see the nurse practitioner without an appointment. If needed, students can be referred to see a GP at the main practice.

**Childcare**  
www.childcare.co.uk is a useful resource for those seeking information about childcare options in their local area.

Figure 5-14 Page 11, Support, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

The support page detailed the services available for students offered by student services including wellbeing, counselling and support for people with additional requirements such as dyslexia. Seventy seven percent of students interviewed had engaged with student services. An example to illustrate the type of support that students received from student services was offered by STU8 as follows:

"It was the place I went to when I talked about finance. I remember it very, very clearly. Because I know where they are now so if anything, else happens I can find them. They are useful because at the beginning I didn't



think I would have to go to a support area. Now I know how to go.... they treat you well, so I am happy to go back there again" [STU8]

These claims are supported by Robbins (2012) who found that personal and academic support systems increased levels of progression and retention.

According to the participants within this study, it was the pastoral support offered for challenges outside of their studies that enabled them to continue which is why this theme has been categorised as being within the social environment. This type and level of support was cited as examples of respect, excellence and generosity of spirit.

Research into student expectations, previously discussed in the literature review, highlighted students' expectations in terms of contact time and support from academics, particularly in relation to value for money (Bates and Kaye, 2014). There is less research available regarding student expectations of support from professional services who offer financial and emotional support. There is a growing body of research relating to mental health and wellbeing of university students, promoted by the OfS, championing students' rights and encouraging wide-ranging support for students (OfS, 2019c). Blake et al (2022) stated that "poor mental health creates a major barrier to belonging and inclusion" (p. 7). The narrative from students within this study regarding their need for support was clear and consistent with claims from the OfS that students who are living away from home, learning how to balance, studying and working require pastoral support as they mature and develop coping strategies. These types of mental health challenges were revealed by participants during interviews. According to the report published by the OfS in 2019, 3.5% of full-time students in 2017-2018 reported having a mental health condition, although the OfS felt this was underreported due to the stigma associated with mental health (OfS, 2019b).

It is considered by organisations such as The Cathedrals Group that faith-based universities, including their members, offer more pastoral support than other types of universities. It is claimed that this is due to their founding principles and that faith-based institutions provide a supportive and caring environment in which

students can thrive (Cathedrals Group, 2022a). This is likely to be contested by other universities who state they offer a caring environment and offer students additional support. An example is London Southbank University, a former polytechnic, who state:

At LSBU we provide advice and support for students on a wide range of non-academic and educational needs. Our aim is to enable all students to achieve their potential while studying, by providing an approachable and reliable service that students can trust.

London Southbank University, 2022

The support theme offers an example of person/group fit which is the correlation between the level of match between an individual's expectations, personal characteristics and the characteristics of the people around them. The values of self-transcendence and openness to change have been assigned to theme three because these values include benevolence, universalism and self-direction.

### **5.7.3) Friendships and Social Life**

Friendships and Social Life was the fourth most selected reason for selecting St Mary's University. Meeting people and making new friends is prominent in the prospectus and pages 16 and 17 are titled 'meet' (see Figure 5-15). The 'meet' image crosses a double page and is a large colourful photograph of students sitting in the gardens.

One student felt that this photo represented St Mary's to her, stating: "You see everyone outside in the sunshine socialising. I think that it's definitely representative of it" [STU6]. The students on pages 16 and 17 are ethnically diverse and also feature on the front cover, albeit in a different pose. The picture looks staged rather than a natural group, a supposition that was confirmed by MKT3 who said:

"we needed to move away from these really staged photos and that was the consensus and then we ended up with potentially the most staged photo of all time on the front cover" [MKT3].

A strong theme, particularly amongst first year students was Freshers Fortnight. Most students spoke positively about Freshers Fortnight, the two-week period of

daytime and evening events arranged for new students. Students felt it presented an opportunity to make friends, often describing new friends as 'friends for life'. The commuting students participated less in organised social events including Freshers due to caring commitments and the distance travelling home. Some students were critical of the volume of alcohol related events during Freshers and how this was counterintuitive to a learning environment. An example of this was given by ALM6 who said during Freshers: "You're hung over, sweating all the alcohol out, and I'm just wanting to go back to my room... It's not really conducive to learning". Participants claimed that there were not enough alternative or suitable events for those who chose not to drink alcohol or chose not to socialise in the evenings.

Regular events, other than Freshers Fortnight, which were organised by the Students' Union were not discussed by participants. However, participants did describe activities at other universities' Students' Unions rather than their own. Students gave examples of going to events with their friends where the SU was bigger and better and had popular groups, for example one saw Scouting for Girls at Winchester University [ALM1]. It was generally stated that the SU was small. For example, STU7 said: "I mean, it sort of reminds you of a year six disco room but you just sort of go".



Figure 5-15 Pages 16 and 17, Meet, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

Participation at university-led social events was of relevance to this study due to the body of research detailed in Chapter Two, the literature review, undertaken by Rolfe (2002) which found that commuting students were less likely to participate in social clubs as they retained their existing social scene. Non-traditional students are more likely to commute to university for financial reasons and constraints such as caring commitments (HEPI 2018). Research by Rolfe (2002) has also shown commuters do not participate in the social activities as much as those who reside in Halls which can result in a diminished student experience. In addition to reduced participation, research reflects that students are spending less time on campus, impacting social interaction. Lack of participation is driven by commuting and juggling part-time work (Scanlon et al, 2007). The data reflected that approximately a third of St Mary's students commuted to university, 37% lived locally and 30% lived in Halls of Residence.

There was little variation between the cohorts in Phase One, when selecting an enjoyable social life and the Students' Union as a reason for attending St Mary's. This finding contrasts with Rolfe's research as all students were equally engaged in the social environment regardless of where they lived. The reason for this is unclear but it may be due to changes in behaviour and the range of social activities available within the intervening two decades. However, during Phase Two, commuting students spoke of the difficulties getting back home late at night after social events which was a barrier for their attendance. In some cases, lack of participation was a source of disappointment and students believed that they would have had a better experience had they lived in Halls as they perceived it to have been a lost opportunity for fun and friendship. When interviewed, STU7 spoke of her two-hour each way commute on public transport to university which she described as being "stressful", particularly the cost of travel, concerns for her security during the winter months when travelling in the dark and dissatisfaction with her timetable. STU8 did not join any clubs or societies and felt she was excluded from social events as she had no knowledge of them. For example, the interview took place at the end of the summer term just prior to the annual summer

ball which traditionally includes a fairground installed on campus. STU8 said she did not know why the fairground had appeared and was not aware of the ball stating: "I had no idea about it. I would have liked to go. I could have planned my time better". She also said she had no interest in Freshers and did not really know what it was.

I mean people told me, you know you go to parties and drink and stuff which isn't really my kind of... what I like doing anyway. I like to keep to myself. I'm the sort of person you see at the library rather than places like that. No, I wasn't able to go [STU8].

She [STU8] acknowledged that her lack of participation had negatively impacted her ability to make friends and felt that she had missed out on the "university experience".

Another mature student [STU9] had returned to study for a career change and was juggling his studies and caring responsibilities for his young family. STU9 had rushed to participate in the interview from trawling local charity shops as he was looking for fancy dress costumes for his children to wear for World Book Day the following day. He gave the impression that his life could be quite hectic as he looked after his children as his wife had become the main breadwinner, supporting his decision to return to study to retrain as a primary school teacher. STU9 commuted to university, sometimes by bike and sometimes by car depending on his family's needs that day. When he drove, he would park in nearby streets as there was free parking and due to the lack of parking for students on campus. STU9 was incredibly positive about his university experience but felt there was a disadvantage to commuting:

If you are a commuter student you might be older, might have a family. Your time is again, reduced from reading and study and writing things [STU9].

Page 19 (Figure 5-16) is titled 'SMSU' and has two pictures of the Students' Union. The students living in Halls were more drawn to the images of the SU, stating they enjoyed a drink and watching sport plus it was less expensive than local pubs. Students in sports societies also commented on the SU, for example:

You know everyone in there and it's great in the day. I love the pool table and a couple of drinks and in the evening the sports socials and freshers was good in there. Obviously, it would be good if it was bigger but it's not where you are but who you are with [STU7].

smsu

Find out more

stmarysstudentunion  
@stmarysu  
www.stmarys.ac.uk

St Mary's Students' Union (SMSU) is a registered charity run by students, for students. SMSU holds elections every year to give you your say on who should be voted in as your main representatives and leaders of the Students' Union. Roles include the SU President, Vice-President Sports and Societies, Vice-President Community, part-time student officers and student trustees.

By becoming a student at St Mary's you automatically become a member of the SU. This means you can access all of the services that the SU has to offer, including representation and democracy, advice and guidance, sports clubs and societies, and activities and events.

We have a large number of sports clubs and societies that provide the perfect platform for you to develop your skills, meet friends and socialise, these range from Rugby, Football, Futsal and Chess to cycling to Drama, the Christian Union, Afro-Caribbean Society and LGBT+.

Students outside the SU bar



Events

Throughout the year we put on a number of major events for you to enjoy, plus regular weekly events. The first major event of the year is Welcome Fortnight, which is an opportunity to help with the transition to university life.

Then we have RAG (Raise and Give) Week, where we raise money and awareness for various charities. Our biggest sporting event, the West London Varsity (a one day sporting contest with our nearest rivals, Brunel University), is held either on campus or away at Brunel on alternate years.

The Summer Ball and the Boat Party are the academic year perfectly, they give our students the chance to celebrate the year and all of their achievements. All of these events are organised to bring students from different backgrounds and cultures together, to share in the St Mary's experience.

By being a St Mary's student you have the opportunity to rise on various levels, the opportunity to bring about change and the opportunity to make a difference. You also have a university experience that you won't find anywhere else.

Clubs and societies

There is nothing for everyone amongst the Students' Union clubs and societies. If there is something a bit you want to do, there is the opportunity to start something new. All you need is ten like-minded students and we can fully support your activity.

Societies

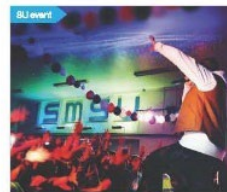
- Afro-Caribbean
- Applied Physics Society
- Catholic Society
- Chess
- Choir
- Christian Leadership
- Christian Union
- Cocktail Society
- Creative Writing
- Dance
- Debating
- Drama
- Enterprise
- Film
- First Love Church
- Geography
- History
- International
- Islamic
- Labour
- Law Society
- LGBT+
- Long Sword
- Maths
- Nature Health
- No Ordinary Society
- Nutrition
- Film
- Psychology
- St Mary's University Campus
- StMUO Radio
- Student Angels
- Show Show

Events and activities

- Boat Party
- Bus2Club
- Christmas Festival
- SMSU Elections
- Ski Trip
- Sports Clubs Awards Dinner
- Societies Awards Dinner
- Summer Ball
- RAG Week
- Welcome Fortnight
- West London Varsity

Sport

To find out about sport at St Mary's, turn to page 20.



50+ clubs, societies, events and activities

Figure 5-16 Page 19, SMSU, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

There are no photos within the prospectus which depict alcohol, but the small image on page 19 (as illustrated in Figure 5-16) suggests a party or rave. Winter and Thompson-Whiteside (2017) claim that some institutions deliberately downplay nightlife and drinking culture due to “cultural sensitivities” and in an effort to reassure parents that the institution is a serious environment (p. 242). It would appear that consciously or not, St Mary's is not portraying itself as a university which promotes clubbing or a drinking culture. The portrayal of St Mary's image is likely to be driven by its Catholic ethos. The image within the prospectus is at odds

with the findings pertaining to the events organised for Freshers Fortnight which some students criticised as being alcohol-centric.

The friendship theme illustrates the diversity of the student body and their individual requirements. It also illustrates the students' desire to be part of a community. Strayhorn (2019) states that "humans go to almost any length to *feel* as if they belong or to "find their people..." (p. 9). Strayhorn (2019) states that these 'lengths' include making financial investments and/or changing their appearance in order to gain acceptance. An example of trying to fit in was evidenced by ALM6 who drank excessively during Freshers events which impacted his ability to study, but did so to join in. Contrary to ALM6, STU8 did not participate in social events which led to her feeling isolated from her peers.

From the data, it can be inferred that the students who were thinking of leaving the university had not considered, or were not looking for a social environment or to 'join in' with the community. The lack of participation in social activities could be driven by a variety of reasons such as caring or work commitments and commuting restrictions (HEPI 2018; Thomas and Jones, 2017; Rolfe, 2002). These scenarios correspond with Rolfe's (2002) finding who determined that some students chose to retain their social scene, established prior to university and were not looking to engage with university life in the same way as those residing in the Halls of Residence. This lack of engagement had a negative impact on overall satisfaction and consequently upon student experience.

These examples from students regarding friendships and their social engagements are congruent with Strayhorn (2019) who states that social support on campus offers students the opportunity to feel connected, valued and cared-for. Given that it is human nature to want to belong somewhere and that the opposite of belonging is to feel a sense of alienation (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), it becomes clear why friendships are so important to students and why it was such a strong theme.

These are examples of person/group fit which is the correlation between the level of match between an individual's expectations, personal characteristics and those



of the people around them. The values of self-transcendence and openness to change have been assigned to theme four because these values include benevolence, universalism, stimulation and hedonism.

#### **5.7.4) Sporting Reputation, Opportunities and Sports Societies**

When considering St Mary's sporting reputation and the opportunity to feature sporting imagery, just 20% of the total pictures within the prospectus reflect sport. Phase One established that sports and recreational opportunities was the fifth most chosen reason for selecting St Mary's (26%) and sporting reputation was the sixth (25%). There were some statistically significant differences when the responses were analysed by gender, with more males selecting sports related reasons than females, and also by faculty with more SHAS students selecting sports related reasons than students studying in EHSS. Details can be found in Appendix I, Tables I-3 and I-10. These specific differences were further explored during interviews.

Students from both faculties spoke of how joining sports teams and societies had helped them to settle into university life, make friends and feel like they fitted in. STU5 was concerned that there would be few Welsh students and was worried about discrimination and was concerned about living in Halls, however he made what he described as being friends for life in Halls, within the football society and on his course.

There were people who felt like me, all the societies and different things on offer so I knew I would fit in with someone [STU5].

Students spoke at length about their friendships and antics as members of sports teams and societies. For students who were homesick or struggling with being away from home, the sports teams offered support and a sense of belonging and acted as a surrogate family. The positive benefits of sport, particularly regarding mental health were discussed in Chapter Two. Grasdalsmoen, Eriksen, Lønning and Sivertsen (2020) found that students with lower levels of physical activity experienced mental health issues including poor sleep, risk from alcohol related disorders, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Certainly, many of the

participants within this study spoke enthusiastically about their positive experiences with sport in its many guises: elite level, recreational sport and the associated social activities.

Similar to current students, the positive impact of sport was a theme echoed by alumni who reminisced about their friendships and antics when they were part of their selected sports team or society. One even spoke enthusiastically about her tattoo; apparently all the members of the ladies' football teams from 2010 to 2015 have them. The camaraderie fostered by sports teams and societies was highlighted by British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS), the national governing body for Higher Education Sport in the UK. BUCS published a report in 2020 into the value of sport and physical activity at university. This report established that engagement with student sports can "counter student isolation, nurture belonging and friendships, as well as increase attainment and graduate outcomes" (p. 4). BUCS research established that students who participated in sport whilst at university had higher wellbeing and inclusion scores than their less-active counterparts. In addition, participation in team sports has been found to improve "social and psychological health" (Anderson, Otterman and Thing, 2019).

In line with the wider, national UKES findings, the St Mary's data from Phase One also reflected that students who participated in sports and societies were less likely to think about leaving university (Advance HE, 2019). The data reflected that 30% of students who had not considered leaving had selected 'sports and recreational opportunities' as a reason for selecting St Mary's, compared to 16% of those who had considered leaving. One student who was dissatisfied with her course stated that her membership of a sports team was fundamental in her being resilient enough to complete her degree.

Research into the benefits of exercise and sport within a university context consistently highlights the benefits to students, both physically and also pertaining to emotional wellbeing (Grasdalsmoen et al, 2020). The findings discussed above, relating to fit within a sporting context are congruent with Strayhorn's (2019)

findings who established a positive correlation between participation in campus-based sports activities and a sense of belonging. These claims are also consistent with the research conducted by BUCS which established a correlation between sports participation and improved wellbeing and retention (BUCS 2019). A literature search found there to be an absence of research stating any negative impacts of sports participation whilst at university, with the exception of team initiations, also known as hazing. Team initiations are pranks or rituals which can sometimes be designed to humiliate or harm participants and are banned by most UK universities (Thompson, Johnstone and Banks, 2018).

Two students, both enrolled onto primary education courses in EHSS spoke passionately about the importance of St Mary's sporting reputation when considering which university to attend. One female student linked the successes of St Mary's high-profile athletes to her own aspirations:

In my mind when I was doing the research [on which university to attend] I thought if Mo Farah can make it ... I can make it as well [STU8].

The pages relating to sport are 20 and 21 and are simply titled 'sport' (Figure 5-17).

The pages have a compilation of sports activities, including pictures of two famous sporting alumni Mo Farah and Joshua Buatsi wearing their Olympic medals. The reputation of famous sporting alumni did influence some students, for example:

When I went on the campus tour, they said Mo Farah come here. I was like really... I think he is one of the best positive aspects of this university and it really shows how good the sports programme is at the university because you have so any Olympic athletes who make it [STU7].



Figure 5-17 Page 21, Sport, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

A mature male student, not on a sports related degree, spoke of comparing St Mary's to two other local competitors: Kingston and Roehampton Universities. He selected St Mary's explicitly because of its sporting reputation:

St Mary's, Kingston or Roehampton were all credible places to study which were also close to home.... I had an affinity with this particular University because, because of the sports elements. I've actually played badminton here before in the sports hall, so I was kind of familiar with my surroundings in some way and also because Mo Farah came here. That was actually a quite significant driving force as well oddly enough. I sometimes think to myself, if this was further away than say Roehampton geographically, would I still have that draw and would I still go further [STU9].

These statements corroborate research by Briggs (2006) as St Mary's and their brand benefitted from the positive association with Mo Farah. Conversely, there are possible risks to this association. For example, there have been newspaper articles and a BBC Panorama programme negatively associating Farah with his

disgraced former coach Alberto Salazar. Salazar was investigated and found to have links to the use of performance enhancing drugs which resulted in a four-year ban and the closure of the Nike Oregon Project where Farah had been based for six years (Daly, BBC Panorama, 2020).

It should be acknowledged that despite the benefits of associating with famous alumni, there are also risks involved should they fall from favour. An example of this is Rebekah Brooks who is an alumna of the London College of Communication, part of the University of Arts London (UAL). Ms Brooks was awarded an Honorary Fellowship for her considerable contribution to journalism. Following her association with the News International phone hacking scandal in 2011 whereby journalists hacked the voicemails of celebrities and people of interest, UAL became embroiled with negative press coverage due to their relationship. UAL faced calls from staff and students to remove Brooks' Fellowship as her alleged actions were contrary to the university's principles (Shepherd and Batty, 2011). Similarly, in 2019 London Metropolitan University were quick to respond to a vote of no confidence in HRH Prince Andrew, a patron of the university. The Prince resigned from his position following a vote instigated by the Students Union due to his association with the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The university moved to protect their reputation by stating the university's position on "discrimination, abuse, human trafficking and any activity that is contrary to the university's values" (McIntyre, 2019).

The marketing team were aware of the attraction of St Mary's sporting reputation and sporting opportunities to potential students and the benefit of using it as a marketing tool however, they were cautious of historic feedback from other departments who felt sport was being over represented and that it was not relevant to their students who could find a competitive sporting environment off-putting. One example of this was offered by a member of the marketing team who quoted an academic colleague saying "the more you talk about sport the harder it is for our students to engage with the university. It is a delicate balance" [MKT2]. All three of

the marketing team who were interviewed unprompted and independently referred to this conundrum as follows:

I was told that there was a there were a lot of other departments within the university that were quite frustrated that they didn't get as much coverage as sport [MKT1].

Some of our academic colleagues and our management colleagues are sensitive about us shouting about sport [MKT2].

We get told off for it being too sporty and so there are only a handful of sport photos. Yeah, like a such a continual issue... we have people denying how important sport is at St Mary's [MKT3].

These concerns by academics appear to be at odds with participants in the study who were overwhelmingly positive when discussing sports related imagery, including the students on non-sports related programmes. Two students studying primary education selected the picture of Sir Mo Farah and cited his association with St Mary's as one of the reasons they were attracted to the institution:

In my mind when I was doing the research I thought if Mo Farah can make it that, not just sports there's actors and stuff and I can make it as well. [STU8]

I've actually played badminton here before in the sports hall, so I was kind of familiar with my surroundings in some way and also because Mo Farah came here. [STU9]

British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) published a report in 2020 into the value of sport and physical activity at university which highlighted the 'brand pull' sports has, attracting students and offering group identity (Hardcastle, 2018).



Figure 5-18 Pages 22 and 23, Achieve, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus

One example of the use of sporting imagery to promote the university is depicted on pages 22 and 23 (Figure 5-18) which are titled 'achieve'. Rather than academic achievement, the photos depict a rugby match, presumably to illustrate the achievement of winning the match. Rugby is very popular at St Marys and participants chose this image "because it's rugby" [SAL3] another stating: "I love the rugby boys" and that "everyone's running banter is about the rugby boys, they are so good" [STU7].

The use of sporting opportunities within the prospectus is, according to Graham (2013), an attempt to make the institution appear "vibrant" (p. 80). Graham continues to state that the use of imagery portraying students participating in sport depict an "ideal prospective student" (p. 83). These statements were not evident within the discourse from St Mary's students. The sporting imagery within this study was more likely to be associated with friendship, team players, support and social interactions. Adjectives used to describe sport at St Mary's included "huge" [STU5] that is was the "biggest pull" [STU9] and sport societies were described as close-knit friendship groups offering support and camaraderie. Sports teams were cited multiple times as being the place where students felt they fitted in or belonged.

As predicted by the marketing team, two drama alumni articulated disappointment at the volume of drama photos (2%) compared to sporting ones (20%). The sports imagery led one participant to state that there were too many sporting societies in comparison to non-sporting ones and that this was due to under-investment in non-sporting areas. In reality, there are eighteen societies and students are free to create new ones with the support of the Student Life President and the Students' Union. As at February 2021, the following societies were available: Afro Caribbean, Anime and Manga, Business, Catholic, Criminology and Sociology, Drama, Film, Fishing, Football Coaching, Mature, International, Law, K-Pop, LGBTQ+, No Ordinary Society, Nutrition, Psychology and Simms Radio Society (St Mary's Students' Union, Societies, 2021c). In addition, although not to be



confused with societies, there were twenty-four sports clubs available, some with multiple teams offering both at competitive and social standards.

Another drama alumnus felt that there should be more drama pictures within the prospectus but, having shared Halls with students on sporting programmes said that the sports clubs were inclusive, although his example highlighted and challenged some stereotypes:

There was none of that like jocks sort of versus drama kids' thing you get in in my high school films or anything. I'm sure there were like odd comments... people would be like oh... drama fairies' kind of stuff, but they would always come to the pantomime and stuff and enjoy it. I think everyone was really inclusive. [SAL6]

Theatrical imagery could be equally if not more visual than sporting imagery, so it is representing a missed opportunity that drama pictures were not included within the prospectus. There was just one double page spread in St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus.

Two theology participants did not make any reference to sport whatsoever during interviews. However, a theology alumnus was an active participant within the sports societies but commented that her course peers and friends in societies did not socialise stating, "they really didn't mix or cross paths" [SAL4]. It is not clear why theology students did not choose to participate in sport or sports societies.

Sporting reputation and opportunity were consistent themes throughout all three phases and elicited comments regarding team participation, feelings of inclusion and belonging, aspirations and an identity as a 'Simmie'. This is consistent with research by BUCS who highlighted the influence of sport on health, well-being and retention and emphasised the sense of belonging sport can imbue (2020). BUCS indicated that membership of a sports team and participation in team sport offered students a sense of identity; particularly wearing the sports kit fostered a sense of belonging. This was evidenced multiple times, for example: "That [hockey] was like my highlight of uni... that element of it" [ALM4] and [STU5] "everyone [on the team] is a university student the same age as you. It's like a brotherhood. It feels really nice".

The sports theme offers examples of person/group fit which is the correlation between the level of match between an individual's expectations, personal characteristics and those of the people around them. The values of self-transcendence, openness to change and conservation have been assigned to theme five because these values include benevolence, universalism, stimulation and tradition.

#### **5.7.5) Catholic Ethos**

As the study was based at St Mary's, attention was paid to the influence that religion may have when selecting a university. During the quantitative data collection, Catholic ethos was categorised as part of the social environment and within the value category of conservation, specifically tradition. The two-year data collection within Phase One established that 45% of St Mary's student body identified as having a religion. When comparing this to nationally available data this is lower than average; Advance HE found that 50.2% of HE students reported they had a religion (2020). This is despite St Mary's being a faith-based university, one of only fifteen in the UK (Cathedrals Group, 2022b). Catholic imagery accounts for 6% of the total, although one showed the Chaplaincy in the distant background and one was of graduation which appeared twice; adjusting for these, the total is only 4%.

As previously addressed within Chapter Two, the majority of research into religion and students within higher education stems from American studies. The American studies are not directly comparable as faith-based institutions in the USA generally adopt a religious identity with greater vigour than those in the UK. An example of this is Regent University in Virginia, founded in 1977 with a mission to "train capable men and women for the challenge of representing Christ in their professions" (Regent University, 2020). The staff at Regent are required to be "strongly devoted to the faith" although the criteria is not the same for students and Regent "even" accepts non-Christian students (Swezey and Ross, 2010 p. 229). American research reflects that students who engaged spiritually experienced

higher levels of student satisfaction. These students described universities with a religious affiliation as being supportive, accepting, caring, compassionate and friendly, due to the overarching religious environment rather than the specific religious affiliation (Bowman and Denson, 2014; Burchell, Lee and Olson, 2010; Swezey and Ross, 2010; Mayrl and Oeur, 2009).

When considering religion and its influence on university choice, there is little data available. The literature review drew on faith-based primary and secondary schools in the UK. Within the discussion, it was highlighted that The Telegraph 2018 Guide to Schools ranked the top 100 primary schools. The top five schools were all faith based (Kirk, 2019) but this ranking was not replicated by UK Catholic HEIs who are lower in the rankings, ranging from 51<sup>st</sup> to 118<sup>th</sup> (The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2023, 2022). The literature review also discussed research by The Sutton Trust (2008) who highlighted that students from selective state schools, such as those who are faith-based, are more likely to transition to Russell Group Universities. Anecdotally at university working groups, it is assumed that St Mary's religious environment is considered attractive for students of all faiths. The data from Phase One did not corroborate this assumption as in 2018, none of the students who identified as being Muslim, Hindu or Sikh considered the Catholic ethos when selecting a university compared to 29% of the cohort of 80 Christian students who did. This is an area that was further investigated during the interviews.

Sixty percent of student participants in their first year of study identified as being Catholic. Two students were members of the Catholic Society, known affectionately as Cath-Soc. These two students were the most passionate about St Mary's being a Catholic institution. The participants who were members of the Catholic Society were both also enrolled onto the BA in Theology, Religion and Ethics. Both students said that the ability to attend mass daily on campus was one of the reasons that attracted them to St Mary's. These two students spoke about social events organised by the Chaplaincy including the home comforts café, which

was held monthly as an opportunity for tea, cake and board games (St Mary's Students' Union, Home Comforts Café, 2020c) and day retreats. Both students also explained that the Chaplaincy was where they felt they fitted in.

...the chaplaincy. For me that was something that was super helpful, having other Catholics [around] as faith is a big part of my life... [STU2].

Conversely, the consensus amongst most students was that the events organised by the Chaplaincy were dull and they had not engaged with them, preferring the events organised by the Students' Union as these were perceived as being more dynamic. Additionally, some students initially had reservations about attending a Catholic university. Despite being Catholic, one student said:

I was very concerned [about going to St Mary's] because of my sexuality. I asked another student what people were like and was told to keep it quiet.... It is amazing what you think. I thought it would be less fun and more strict but it wasn't [STU1].

Stated by another:

People did say do you have to be Catholic to go there and I said I don't think so, not in this day and age [STU9].

One of the participants, who did not have a religion was very concerned about the lack of sexual health advice for Freshers which he considered to be "essential" [ALM1]. ALM1 stated that "everyone's having sex. It's just the way it is" describing students who are away from home for the first time and relishing their new-found freedom. He expressed a real juxtaposition between St Mary's being "lovely" and everyone being "really nice" but when it came to sexual health "they don't want to talk about it. They don't". ALM1 felt that the lack of advice and unavailability of condoms on campus was at odds with the university's values of respect and inclusiveness. ALM1 stressed he "did not want to cause offence" but felt that the Catholic Church's view on contraception was given greater prominence than the sexual health and wellbeing of students. ALM1 felt that the latter should be more prominent and health and wellbeing should trump religious beliefs therefore he could not reconcile the two opposing principles. The principles ALM1 was referring to included Catholic doctrine which opposes the use of contraceptives on the basis that it prevents conception, which is against natural law (Benagiano, Carrara,

Filippi and Brosens, 2011). The Catholic Church's stance against the use of contraception for safe sex has been widely criticised across the world, particularly relating to unwanted pregnancy but more so relating to the prevention of disease and infections such as HIV and Aids (Benagiano et al, 2011).

The tangible evidence of St Mary's Catholic ethos is demonstrated by the large chapel located in the piazza. Student and staff alike described the piazza as the "heart of the campus" [SAL2] and it "has that feeling of St Mary's" [STU3]. Although you cannot see the chapel in the picture, students spoke of the view from the chapel, especially the students who were members of the Catholic Society, stating: "I like how the chapel looks over everyone" [STU7] and:

it's the main area and throughout all my time here I've spent a lot of time in that room there, in the chaplaincy and we people watch through the window. Also, a lot of time in the chapel where this picture would have been taken from, so for me that is what I associate most [STU2].

As a continuance of the chapel, the page titled 'chaplaincy' is page 18 (Figure 5-19) of the prospectus and has pictures of the interior and exterior of the chapel.

Figure 5-19 Page 18, Chaplaincy, St Mary's 2019/20 Undergraduate Prospectus  
When referring to the photos on this page, participants used adjectives such as "beautiful, soothing and peaceful" [STU8] and as "an iconic building in the centre of campus. It has a focus" [SAL3]. Students spoke of visiting the chapel when they felt stressed, for example:

When you go in there your worries wash away which I think is amazing. I really needed that at times. It's a nice place to go to when you just want to think about things. I do, I really love the chapel [STU8].

# chaplainscy

Find out more

[www.stmarys.ac.uk/students-life/chaplainscy](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk/students-life/chaplainscy)

The Chaplaincy welcomes all students from different faiths and backgrounds who make up the student body, and provides a multi-faith prayer room in the heart of the campus.

The Chaplaincy offers faith, friendship and hospitality. The aim is to help students to know themselves and nurture a solid spiritual and intellectual foundation for life. Nearly every student looks back at their years at university with great fondness and our hope is that in the years ahead the Chaplaincy will figure in those memories.

Alongside the Chaplaincy ministry to the individual spiritual needs of students, staff also facilitate and organise group events, such as faith formation discussions and social activities, and develop leadership skills, retreats and outreach opportunities. For those students who wish to participate in the life of the Chaplaincy there are many activities with which to become involved, whether in liturgy or personal outreach.

The ethos of the Chaplaincy is Catholic and daily Mass is offered in the Chapel, along with other regular liturgical services. In 2016, the Sisters of the Assumption opened a new community home in Twickenham at the invitation of the University to be a praying presence at St Mary's. The Sisters are actively involved in the life of the University.

Chaplainscy groups and activities include:

- Inter-faith activities
- Trips and pilgrimages
- Sacramental preparation
- Home comforts café
- Fundraising for charity
- University choir



*The years spent at university are precious moments in which to develop your intellectual abilities, your wider interests and perhaps even to renew your faith in the light of the new found freedom of university life.*

*The Chaplains see their role as a wide remit to encourage those who practice their faith, to accompany those who are reflecting on matters of faith, and to offer pastoral care and support to those students who wish for such care.*

Account from Chaplain Fr Peter Newby

The marketing team addressed the challenge of how to visually portray St Mary's Catholic ethos and values without deterring those ascribing to other religions or none. At the time of the research, the majority of students attending St Mary's stated they did not have a religion with 45% identifying as having a belief. The proportion of students identifying as Catholic or Christian attending St Mary's (35%) was slightly higher than the UK average of 32.9% (Advance HE, 2020). A representative number of students participated in the research which reflected that there were no statistically significant variances between responses when analysed by religion. Anecdotally, staff believed that students of other religions chose to study at St Mary's due to the Catholic ethos. However, this was not reflected in the data as in 2018 no students categorised as 'other religions' selected the Catholic ethos. Evidence reflects that faith-based primary and secondary schools have a high proportion of students who are religious due to their selective admissions

criteria. However, this is not replicated at St Mary's. The data is not publicly available to see if this is consistent with other faith-based HEIs in the UK.

These examples fall within person organisation fit which correlates with high levels of student satisfaction and commitment to the institution but less so with the course and also person/group fit, which correlates with high levels of course satisfaction and commitment to the university but particularly relationships with peers. The values of self-transcendence and conservation have been assigned to theme six because these values include benevolence, universalism and tradition.

#### **5.7.6) Social Environment Summary**

The most selected photographs depicted images from within the social environment and the social environment elicited the most themes, indicating the importance the environment holds for students. This is similar to the findings in Phase One which found that an enjoyable social life and a great Students' Union was the seventh most popular reason for selecting St Mary's.

The narrative relating to St Mary's sporting reputation and opportunities demonstrates the positive 'pull factor' sports has for students and the importance sport plays in a positive environment. The sporting environment offers students the opportunity to support each other and achieve a sense of belonging. This is echoed by Strayhorn (2012) who found that students derived a greater sense of belonging by socialising with their peers outside of classes, establishing that the more time students were involved in a club or organisation, the greater their sense of belonging.

The Catholic ethos theme was the most capricious with some students relishing the opportunity to practice their faith whilst others felt stifled. Students who participated in mass, the Catholic Society or events organised by the Chaplaincy articulated a sense of belonging. Some of the students who were interviewed were staunchly Catholic and attended daily mass in the chapel on campus and felt a sense of belonging within their faith. This sense of belonging is corroborated by Strayhorn (2019) who stated that students who are members of religious clubs

exhibited a greater sense of belonging than non-members (p. 22). The frustrations of the students who felt stifled or repressed were equally strong.

Blake et al (2022) established that “students report that having structured social time without an academic focus was important in creating a sense of community” (p. 6) which has been corroborated by my findings which reflect and underpins the importance of the social environment for students’ sense of belonging.

Having discussed parts I to III, the next section discusses a supplementary question relating to fitting in, before concluding the chapter.

### **5.8) Supplementary question - Fitting In**

Towards the end of each of the interviews, participants were asked whether they thought they fitted in at St Mary’s and if so, where. Without exception, every example the participants gave was categorised as person/group fit. Person/group fit correlates with high levels of course satisfaction and commitment to the organisation but particularly relationships with peers leading to shared common goals, good communication and decision making. Some of the responses were as follows and focus mainly around friends in Halls and societies as well as peers on their course.

STU2, an international student, was concerned about fitting in and struggled with understanding British accents and sense of humour.

I would say I fit in for example with the theology department... so I fit there and then also with the chaplaincy...also it is aided by living in Benedict House. They are my people [STU2].

STU6 said that she struggled to fit in at first and considered moving back home.

However, she persevered and made friends within the cheerleading society. She said:

Whoever you are you would fit in but I feel like whether you are academic or sports based or you want to go out or don’t want to go out there is a place for everyone where other universities I looked at, I felt they were more for one particular type of student [STU6].



STU3 felt self-conscious, particularly in the Refectory and felt like he only partially fitted in. He felt most comfortable with other Catholic students:

I'm part of Cath-Soc and it's a catholic university so that is probably considering fitting in coz that is basically fitting in a group with similar people [STU3].

STU8 was a commuter student who did not participate in the social elements of university life. She was concerned about fitting in prior to starting university and had discussed it with her mother but her opinion changed: "My group, I love my group we don't have any arguments" [STU8].

STU9 was a mature student and was confident in his choice of university, based mainly on location and reputation as it allowed him to study around his caring commitments. Fitting in was not of high importance but he was concerned about the age difference between himself and his peers. Due to this, STU9 joined several societies to make friends, but chose those taking place in family-friendly hours such as badminton and the mature student society.

That is the reason why I wanted to join the badminton club or a club was to get a different experience because I'm not going to be a part of it on site, like there's nothing I can do about that now, I'm still a part of other groups [STU9].

Age was a factor considered by the mature students; STU1, another mature student was concerned about the age gap:

I worried very much about that and it was a huge issue and they told me that psychology has the highest rate of mature students which I don't think is true. That is one thing that was putting me off doing it, being in a classroom with 18-year olds. I struggled with that; I still do [STU1].

STU7 was very confident and was not concerned about fitting in. When asked about this further, she felt that her values matched those of the university. When asked for an example she said:

It's silly things like when we first got here and the student ambassadors show you round, opening doors and that sort of thing, the culture of what the place is like and how people are and what their personal qualities are. I thought that as soon as I got here and fitting in as well [STU7].

Conversely STU4 described herself as being shy and was concerned about fitting in, "I did think about it because again I am quite a shy person, meeting new people.

I did think about whether I would fit in" [STU4]. STU4 found her fit within her Halls of Residence and within the athletics society.

STU4's concerns were similar to a large proportion of students. HEPI and Unite established that 47% of students were anxious about living with people they had never met before (HEPI and Unite, 2017, p. 22). These concerns were more prevalent for students in lower socioeconomic groups who felt less prepared for living away from home.

Two student participants were not satisfied with their student experience. One student, ALM6 was unhappy with the standard of education he received feeling it lacked academic integrity and insufficient contact time. He felt that staff would listen to his feedback but that staff were then ineffective and did not act upon it. ALM5 felt that her tutors did not support her claiming that her tutor made her cry during her viva voce. Although dissatisfied, both students felt they 'fitted-in' at the university and enjoyed their social experience with friends made in their Halls of residence and within sports societies. Both ALM5 and ALM6 completed their undergraduate degrees, although one appealed a termination decision and won whilst the other submitted a formal complaint.

Neither of the dissatisfied students had visited St Mary's before starting their university programme; both had chosen the university based on publicly available information and on location. For one student [ALM5] St Mary's proximity to London was a factor whilst ALM6 chose St Mary's as he had relatives nearby. Both of the dissatisfied students did successfully graduate. Both dissatisfied participants articulated their friendships and support, one within the hockey society and the other made friends whilst living in Halls of Residence stating that across the three years of his course, "everyone just kind of stuck together" [ALM6]. Research into student satisfaction undertaken by Tinto (1975) found that students can find a sense of belonging within a niche such as a sports team which can compensate for a lack of fit with the institution. The two dissatisfied students articulated how their

respective networks enabled them to complete their studies by offering support and a feeling of belonging.

Fitting in, or belonging has been shown throughout this data to be essential for wellbeing and this is in agreement with Strayhorn (2019) who sees this as fundamental for all people. Strayhorn claims that it is this need that motivates people to join events even though they may be alien or unfamiliar. Examples specific to St Mary's might include Freshers Fortnight events, mass or sunrise yoga.

## **5.9) Conclusion**

The understanding at the start of this chapter was that the differentiating factors, or USPs, between universities are the main influencers for those selecting a university. When using St Mary's University, Twickenham as a case study, the differentiators were found to be the highly regarded academic reputation, size, sporting and recreational opportunities, celebrated sporting reputation and Catholic ethos.

Demonstrated through the analysis of the data and evidenced with selected quotes, the differentiators were unearthed, analysed and translated into themes. The quotations evidenced the importance to participants of St Mary's famous sporting alumni, the sporting facilities and the opportunities to participate and make friends in the numerous sporting teams and societies. Likewise, the prevalence of St Mary's longstanding teaching reputation was evident. An illustration of this reputation was offered by 18% of participants who stated they applied to St Mary's following the suggestion of a teacher who had themselves graduated from St Mary's and so the legacy and tradition continues. The Catholic ethos was a strong theme with a combination of positive, negative and neutral comments. To be precise, as a result of this research the following list of USPs has emerged:

- St Mary's highly regarded reputation for training teachers;
- St Mary's singular campus and community;

- St Mary’s sporting opportunities at competitive and recreational levels and sporting social societies;
- St Mary’s highly-regarded sporting reputation and successful sporting alumni;
- St Mary’s Catholic origins and ethos.

Table 5-2 below captures the seven themes discussed within this chapter, the overarching value, relevant fit model and HE environment. This is building upon Figure 4-7 in Chapter Four, adding more context and will be developed further in Chapter Six.

Table 5-2 Initial theme mapping

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Overarching Value</b>	<b>HE Environment</b>	<b>Fit Model</b>
St Mary’s Way, Values and Reputation	Self-transcendence, conservation	Physical and social	Person organisation, group, and environment fit
Campus size, location and safety	Conservation	Physical,	Person environment fit
Support – peers, academic and professional staff	Self-transcendence, openness to change	Social	Person group fit
Friendships and social life	Self-transcendence, conservation	Social	Person group fit
Sports opportunities, reputation and societies	Self- transcendence, openness to change and conservation	Social environment	Person group fit,
Catholic ethos	Self-transcendence and conservation	Social environment	Person group fit
Affordability	Self-enhancement, conservation	Physical and academic environments	Person environment fit, person course fit

When considering the HE environments which captured each of the seven themes, the most frequent were the social arising within five of the themes, followed by

physical in four and academic which appeared in two. The most relevant model assigned to each of the seven themes was person/group fit arising within five of the themes followed by environment in two and organisation in one.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that the social environment and person/group fit were important to students. It is in these areas where universities can differentiate themselves and where students' cultural capital is most relevant. The requirement for a suitable social environment is consistent with research undertaken by UCAS in 2016, referenced in Chapter Two, which concluded there are "stark differences in applicants' views of universities and perspectives of HE depending on their social background" (p. 3) and their cultural capital. These factors impact strongly upon university choice. UCAS (2016) concluded that disadvantaged students were less likely to consider fitting in at university and were more likely to be anxious about the practicalities of university life such as transport and accommodation. Potentially, this is because more non-traditional students commute to university. Archer et al (2007) established that social factors were a barrier to participation in HE for some disadvantaged students.

The second supposition was:

Students are happier and more satisfied with their university experience if their core values are congruent with that of the institution and are more likely to be unhappy, unsuccessful or dissatisfied, if there is a misfit of these. When considering the values assigned to each of the seven themes, the most frequent values were conservation (38%), self-transcendence (31%), openness to change (19%) and self-enhancement (13%).

Conservation includes security, conformity and tradition and these values, can be described as relating to harmony, religion, respect, norms and customs. Self-transcendence encompasses benevolence and universalism that can be understood to relate to the welfare of others, relationships and being part of the 'in-group'. Openness to change embraces self-direction, stimulation and hedonism, connecting to the individual, their thoughts, actions, challenges, pleasure and

gratification. Self-enhancement includes achievement and power and joins with the theme of affordability.

People do not exist in separation from their experienced environment and students view the institution through the lens of their own values. Although students did not expressly articulate their values by name, they gave multiple examples of them. Examples of benevolence were offered when talking about friends in Halls, joining teams and societies and the importance of the welfare of friends, being part of a group and of fostering relationships. The two dissatisfied students reflected a misfit of their core values. One did not feel he had received value for money and was unhappy with the quality of education he received [ALM6], an example of a mismatch of self-enhancement (achievement and power). The other [ALM5] felt that she had not been supported by lecturers reflecting a mismatch of conservation (security) and self-enhancement (achievement and power). Both of the dissatisfied students found a sense of belonging within a specific group of students: a sports team and a group in Halls, being positive examples of benevolence.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that students are indeed happier and more satisfied with their university experience if their core values are congruent with their choice of university and are more likely to be unhappy, unsuccessful or dissatisfied, if there is a misfit of core values. An addendum to this is that a misfit of values can be offset by a sense of belonging elsewhere, such as within a sports team. Membership of a sports team could support values such as openness to change offering opportunities of excitement and challenge during matches as well as values within self-enhancement offering opportunities for respect and achievement or conservation due to the values of security and feeling cared for. Therefore, membership of a team can offer the potential to dilute any unhappiness and dissatisfaction a student may be experiencing from another part of their university experience and offset it with a sense of belonging elsewhere.

The next chapter reviews the concept and development of the Holistic Student Fit Model, showing how it can be applied and offering examples using the data from this body of work.

# Chapter 6

## The Holistic Student Fit Model

### 6.1) Introduction

This chapter addresses an aim that evolved during the research process, which was: to create a model illustrating personal values and institutional fit. As stated throughout this thesis, this research has focused upon whether students considered 'fitting in' and their congruence with institutional values when applying to university. When analysing the data from Phases Two and Three, it became clear that there was a link between personal values and students' expectations; one driving the other. Students' expectations comprised of various elements of the three HE environments and students felt a sense of belonging or fit if their values, expectations and environments matched.

This chapter will focus upon the existing theories which were drawn upon to underpin the Holistic Student Fit Model (HSFM), how it was developed, constructed and structured. It then continues by applying the model to the data from this body of research and then offers examples of how the model can be utilised using case studies. These case studies are described by Yin (2013) as 'embedded units of analysis' or as "the case in a case study" (p. 241), in this instance, five individual students from within the main case study institution. Each section of the model is interrogated utilising each of the three HE environments and the seven themes which were detailed in Chapter Five.

In addition to offering case studies, this chapter includes examples of how the Model can be applied from the perspective of both traditional and non-traditional students. Towards the end of the chapter, St Mary's values are examined and then my own personal values are depicted to challenge and contextualise my own relationship with St Mary's, within the context of the HSFM, as I myself am a student at St Mary's.

When considering fit models, it should be noted that people are complicated and multidimensional, not transparent as the model depicts. It is probably impossible to



accurately map all the internal and external, tangible and intangible elements which contribute to behaviour, fit and satisfaction. This approach is consistent with the interpretivist philosophy adopted for this research. Unlike a positivist philosophy which adopts a repeatable scientific approach which is measurable, an interpretivist approach was adopted and was focused upon a small group of individual participants, their experiences and narratives at the time. The model reflects the outcomes from the interviews from this body of research. The Holistic Student Fit Model suggests that when considering a university, there are competing demands of values and cultural capital alongside practical demands such as location, cost and programme.

## **6.2) Personal and Institutional Values**

My findings show that when students' personal values were aligned to those of the university, students found themselves in an environment where they felt a sense of belonging. This claim is evidenced within this chapter utilising five student case studies. As previously discussed, personal values, their congruence with those of the institution and fit were explored following seminal research carried out by Pervin and Rubin (1967). These researchers concluded that when students do not feel that they fit with an institution, they are more likely to be unhappy, unsuccessful or dissatisfied, particularly if there is a misfit of core values. This claim was questioned within this body of work, leading to examples of misfit illustrated by some of the case studies which follow within this chapter. The cumulative result is reflected in the HSFM which demonstrates the outcome, or level of fit, by tracking personal values and their compatibility with the HE environment.

Participants in Phases Two and Three were asked: 'Do you know what St Mary's values are?' and 'Can you give an example of how St Mary's live those values?'. Students were rarely able to recall St Mary's values and when they were identified, students felt that the values were generic and similar to multiple organisations. It became clear that very few students had actively sought information regarding St

Mary's values as part of the application process. Although they could not name them, once they were informed of them, in most cases students could give concrete examples of how St Mary's lived their values. The exception was *generosity of spirit*, as most did not really know what that meant and were not able to give an example. Alternatively, staff were sceptical about the values, often giving a wry smile, and gave mixed messages about whether they felt the values were reflective of their own experiences. It also was not clear how the values were communicated to students, apart from them being painted on the wall in the Refectory cafeteria and some students being informed of them during their initial induction. What was clear from the students' narratives was that St Mary's has its own culture, charisma, charm or ethos. People did struggle to articulate the essence of St Mary's which resulted in the term '*The St Mary's Way*'. This theme is discussed in depth later in this chapter. The next section will discuss the development of the HSFM which centres around students' values.

### **6.3) The Development of the Holistic Student Fit Model**

The complete HSFM is presented later in this chapter as Figure 6-9. It is also presented in Table 6-1 in written form. The model is difficult to present in written form as the values, environments and outcome are part of a continuum and therefore are better represented visually whereas a table cannot easily reflect how the contents detailed at the top and bottom join and interrelate, they are merely a list. The development of a model is described by Havenga, Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2014) when they write:

A model is viewed as a form of knowledge within the empiric patterns. It provides a broad theoretical conceptualization that describes the relationship between concepts and is presented symbolically in words and graphic diagrams (Havenga et al, 2014, p. 149).

These researchers detail the two steps required to create and develop a model. The steps are the construction of conceptual meaning and then the structuring and contextualizing of the model (Havenga et al, 2014, p150-153). These steps will now be discussed.

### 6.3.1) Construction of Conceptual Meaning

The construction of conceptual meaning is defined by Havenga et al (2014) with reference to Chinn and Kramer (2011):

Conceptual meaning was constructed by selecting the concepts from the findings of the study and formulating criteria from the concepts (p 150).

There was a discussion In Chapter Three regarding the utilisation of both deductive and inductive strategies and the interplay between the two. Havenga et al (2014), again with reference to Chinn and Kramer (2011) stated that “in order to select the concepts as building blocks for the model, the researcher used an inductive theory-generative research design” (p. 150). When creating the HSFM, the inductive theory arising from the data in Phases Two and Three was that personal values were the principles which drove belonging and fitting in, and that a lack of fit between personal and institutional values led to lower student satisfaction due to an incompatible HE environment. The resulting elements of the model were therefore personal values, the university environment and fit models. The initial concept for the model is depicted in Figure 6-1 which reflects the starting point from which to build the relationships between the elements and layers.

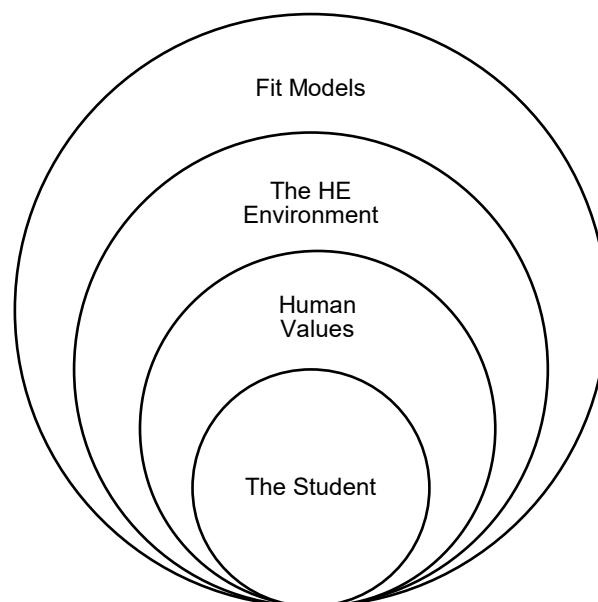


Figure 6-1 Initial concept of the Holistic Student Fit Model, Version One

Due to the prominence of human values within the Model, this section will now describe Schwartz's human values models (Schwartz et al, 2012, 1992). Two of Schwartz et al's values models were depicted in Chapter Two, Figures 2-1 and 2-2 from 1992 and 2012 respectively. The values within both of Schwartz et al's models are fundamentally the same; the later version expands upon the earlier version, increasing from ten human values to nineteen. For example, the 1992 version includes power but the 2012 model splits power into two strands: dominance and resources. The later version also details both the focus and motivation factors associated with values. Schwartz et al (2012) suggest that researchers have the:

Option of working with as large or as small a set of values as is appropriate to their purpose. They may choose to work with all nineteen values or to combine values and work with the original ten, the four higher order values or even two subsets (Schwartz et al, 2012, p. 665).

As the values model was being integrated with other models (HE environment and fit models), the 1992 version was utilised visually, although reference is made and consideration was given to the additional elements of the 2012 model. The 1992 model contains less detail and therefore was less cumbersome for modelling purposes. The personal values in both the 1992 and 2012 versions of Schwartz et al's values models are recognised in all societies and are defined as "trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group" (Schwartz et al, 2012, p. 664). The 1992 ten values are: self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism. These ten values are set within four categories known as higher-order values which are: openness to change, self-transcendence, self-enhancement and conservation.

The four higher-order values are organised in a circle; the values on opposite sides of the circle are competing values or opposites. For example, self-transcendence and self enhancement oppose each other. Within the higher-order value of self-transcendence is benevolence; words to describe benevolence include loyalty, friendship, caring and honesty. Within the opposing higher- order value is self-

enhancement which includes power; words to describe power include authority, control, wealth, public image and recognition. An example of the opposition between values is friendship and loyalty which contrast the values of control and authority.

Schwartz et al's 2012 model also details the focus of the higher-order values. Openness to change and self-enhancement have a personal focus whereas the two higher-order values of self-transcendence and conservation represent a social focus. A personal focus is defined by Schwartz (2012) as "regulating how one expresses personal interests and characteristics" (p. 13), whilst a social focus is defined as "regulating how one relates socially to others and affects them" (p. 13).

The values were defined in full in Chapter Five, Table 5-1. Within this chapter, Table 6-1 extends the definitions to include descriptors relating to the individual values and the corresponding HE environment. The three HE environments have been mapped against human values as they make up the middle section of the HSFM. The final section of Table 6-1 relates to generic fit models which were mapped to reflect the predicted outcome if one's personal values are congruent with the environment, thus giving the desired conditions for the outcome to be achieved. Generic fit models were discussed in Chapter Two and are detailed in Table 2-1. The models detailed above have been defined and rigorously tested by the academics who created them. Using these models, the second version of the HSFM expanded on the first to include more detail of the existing theories. Version Two of the concept model is depicted in Figure 6-2 and details the elements of each layer but not where they sit within the spectrum.

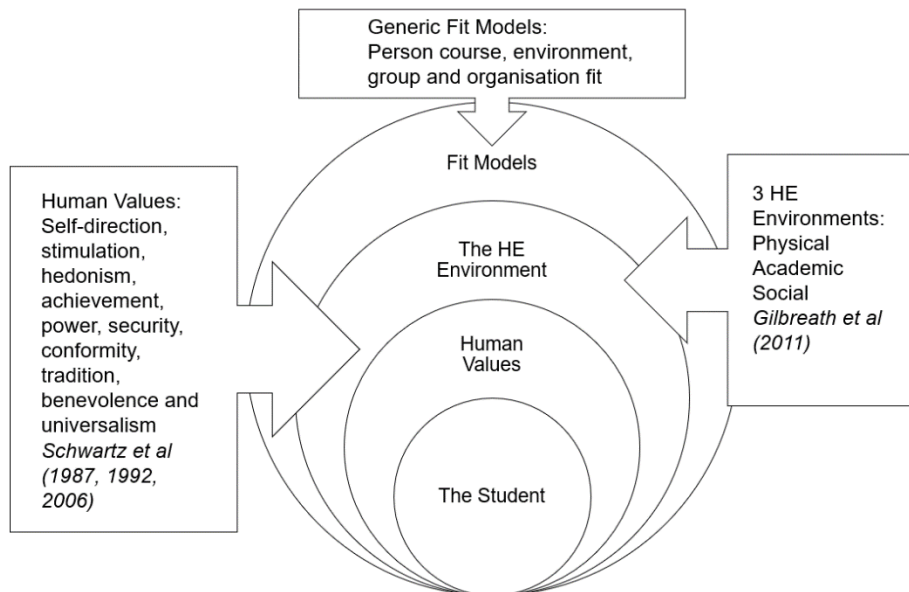


Figure 6-2 Elements of the initial concept of the Holistic Student Fit Model, Version Two

As version two of the HSFM had considered the concepts, and the theory narrative, the next step in the development of the Model was structuring and contextualizing it.

### 6.3.2) Structuring and Contextualizing the Model

The second step in the creation of a model was described by Havenga et al (2014) as structuring and contextualizing the model. This process requires the formulation of links between the concepts. During this step, several iterations of the Model were created to challenge the relationship between the layers of the HSFM whilst it took form. Further details of each of the versions can be found in Appendix P.

Version Four of the Model is depicted in Appendix I, Figure I-6. Within this version, the second layer includes and mimics Schwartz et al's (1992) four higher-order values of conservation, self-transcendence, openness to change and self-enhancement. This version simply matches values to fit models and environments using colour to reflect any overlap. This version reflects the overlap between the social and academic environments, but it neglects the ten values within the four overarching categories.

Version five of the Model is depicted in Appendix I, Figure I-7. The fifth iteration illustrates the ten values within the four higher-order values. This version uses colour to indicate the overlap of the social and academic environments, specifically within the openness to change portion of the Model. Version five of the Model does not include the fourteen elements within the three HE environments as these are yet to be considered and positioned with relation to the other sections.

Versions Four and Five were simplistic versions of the Model, initially a starting point. These versions were unable to address the nuances of intersecting areas. The next step in the development of the Model was to include all ten values and the fourteen elements within the three HE environments. The process of matching values to HE environments was depicted in Chapter 5, Table 5-1. Table 6-1 collates the strands of the mapping process, starting with the human value, its higher-order value, definition, description, HE environment and fit model. In essence, Table 6-1 describes the HSFM narratively.

Table 6-1 Mapping exercise to create the Holistic Student Fit Model

Higher-order value	Value	Definition	Description	HE Environment	HR Fit Model (Outcome)
<b>Self enhancement</b>	Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Intelligent, capable, successful, ambitious, influential, aspiring	Academic Environment: Intellectual climate, State-of-the-art academic facilities, Highly regarded academic reputation, Size	Person Course Fit Correlates with shared common goals, good communication and decision making
	Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	Social recognition, wealth, authority, social power, public image, control, possessions, respect	Physical Environment: Geographic location, Pleasant/safe campus environment, Affordability	Person Environment Fit. The correlation between the level of match between and individual's characteristics and that of the environment they are in.
<b>Conservation</b>	Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self	Healthy, sense of belonging, cared for, family security, social order, clean, reciprocation of favours, national security, stability		



Table 6-1 Mapping exercise to create the Holistic Student Fit Model (cont)

Higher-order value	Value	Definition	Description	HE Environment	HR Fit Model (Outcome)
<b>Conservation</b>	Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	Self-discipline, politeness, honouring of elders, obedient, courteous, respect	Social Environment: Enjoyable social life/great Students' Union, Sports and recreational opportunities, Highly regarded sporting reputation, Great support services, Great non-academic facilities, Diverse student body, Catholic ethos	Person Organisation Fit Correlates with high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace/organisation but less so with the job role.
	Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides	Humility, detachment, devout, respect for tradition, moderate, accepting my portion in life, faith		
<b>Self-Transcendence</b>	Benevolence	Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group')	Caring, mature love, helpful, forgiving, honesty, loyalty, responsible, meaning in life, true friendship		Person Group Fit Correlates with high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace/organisation but particularly relationships with co-workers.
	Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature	Broadminded, social justice, wisdom, inner harmony, unity with nature, a world at peace, protecting the environment, a world of beauty, equality, tolerance		

Table 6-1 Mapping exercise to create the Holistic Student Fit Model (cont)

Higher-order value	Value	Definition	Description	HE Environment	HR Fit Model (Outcome)
<b>Openness to change</b>	Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life	Excitement, novelty, challenge	Social Environment: Enjoyable social life/great Students' Union, Sports and recreational opportunities, Highly regarded sporting reputation, Great support services, Great non-academic facilities, Diverse student body, Catholic ethos	Person Group Fit Correlates with high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace/organisation but particularly relationships with co-workers.
	Hedonism	Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself	Pleasure		
	Self-direction	Independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring	Freedom, independence, curiosity, creativity, imagination, self-reliance	Academic Environment: Intellectual climate, State-of-the-art academic facilities, highly regarded academic reputation, Size	Person Course Fit Correlates with shared common goals, good communication and decision making

The HSFM has the student at the core as their personal values contribute towards their sense of identity and can influence decision making (Verplanken and Holland, 2002). The Model then undulates outwards, like the ripples created by a stone thrown in a pond. To further examine the steps utilised in the creation of the Model, each section will be deconstructed and depicted per HE environment. Each of the three segments are discussed using the themes arising from Phases Two and Three. Table 6-2 (over) summarises the seven themes arising from the thematic analysis and their relevant value. The two dominant values were self-transcendence and conservation, which highlights the dominance of the social environment. Following Table 6-2, the themes arising from this study are depicted in Figure 6-3. Figure 6-3 illustrates the frequency of each of the themes within its overarching value category. Figure 6-3 reflects the dominance of the value of conservation.

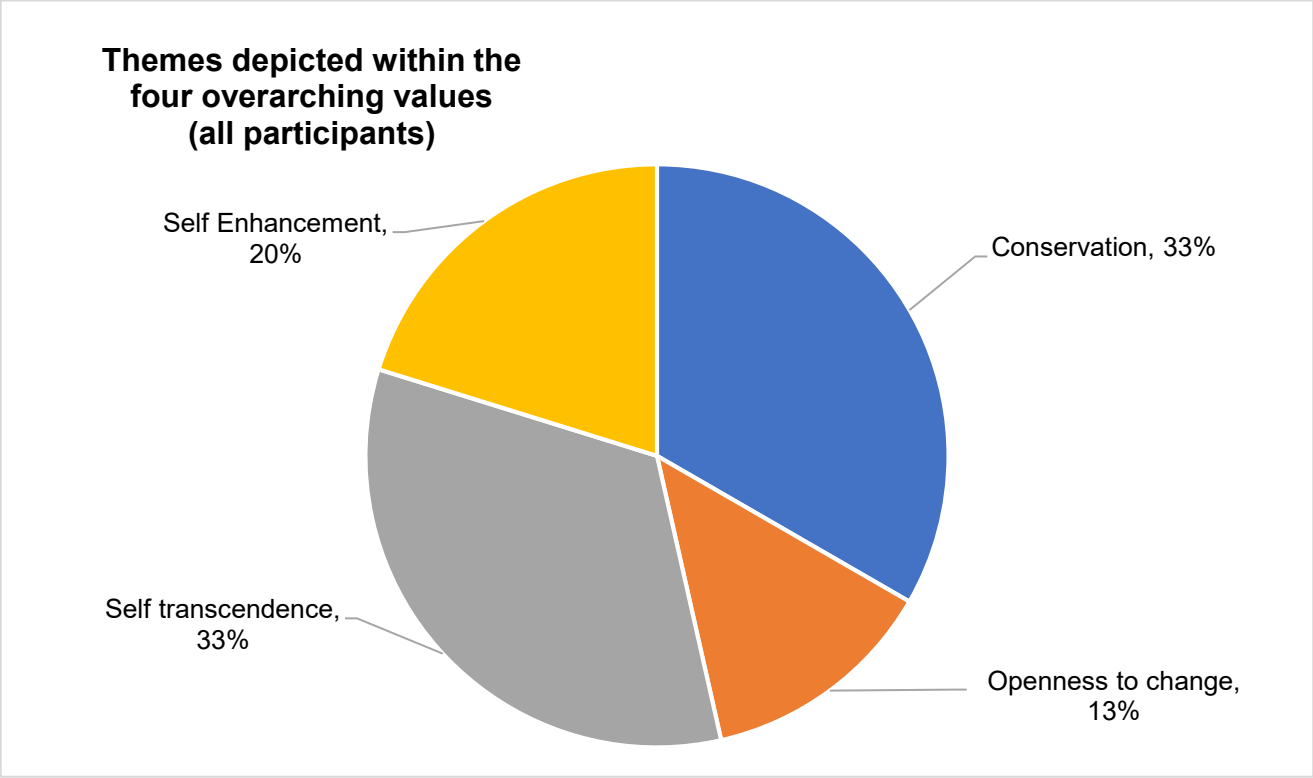
Following Table 6-2, each portion of the HSFM will be discussed. Each of the three sections begins with the illustration of the relevant section of the Model and is followed by the themes within that environment. The section continues to offer student case studies to provide examples of how the Model can be applied using the data from participants within the study. The examples were employed to test and challenge the Model to establish whether it was credible. Such an analysis is described by Yin (2013) as “enhancing the insights into the single case study” (p. 56) by incorporating additional embedded case studies within the overarching case study itself.

Table 6-2 Themes Mapped against values, fit model and Environment

Theme		Overarching value	Fit Model	Environment	
<b>1) St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation</b>	Institutional values	Universalism Benevolence Tradition Achievement	Self-transcendence Self-enhancement Conservation	Person Organisation, Group, Course and Environment Fit	All
	Academic reputation	Achievement Power	Self-enhancement	Person Course Fit	Academic Environment
<b>2) Campus size, location and safety</b>		Security Achievement	Conservation	Person Environment Fit	Physical Environment
<b>3) Support – peers, academic and professional staff</b>		Benevolence	Self-transcendence	Person Group Fit	Social Environment
		Universalism	Conversation	Person Environment Fit	Physical Environment
<b>4) Friendships and social life</b>		Benevolence Universalism Hedonism	Self-transcendence Openness to change	Person Group Fit	Social Environment

Table 6-2 Themes Mapped against values, fit model and Environment (cont)

Theme		Overarching value	Fit Model	Environment
<b>5) Sports opportunities, reputation and societies</b>	Opportunities and Societies	Benevolence Universalism	Self-transcendence Openness to change	Person Group Fit Social Environment
	Reputation	Achievement	Self-enhancement	
<b>6) Catholic ethos</b>	Faith	Tradition	Conservation	
	Environment	Benevolence Universalism	Self-transcendence	Person Group Fit Social Environment
<b>7) Affordability</b>	Accommodation and Catering	Security	Conservation	Person Environment Fit Physical Environment
	Tuition Fees	Power	Self-Enhancement	Academic Environment



N=139

Figure 6-3 Themes depicted with the four overarching values

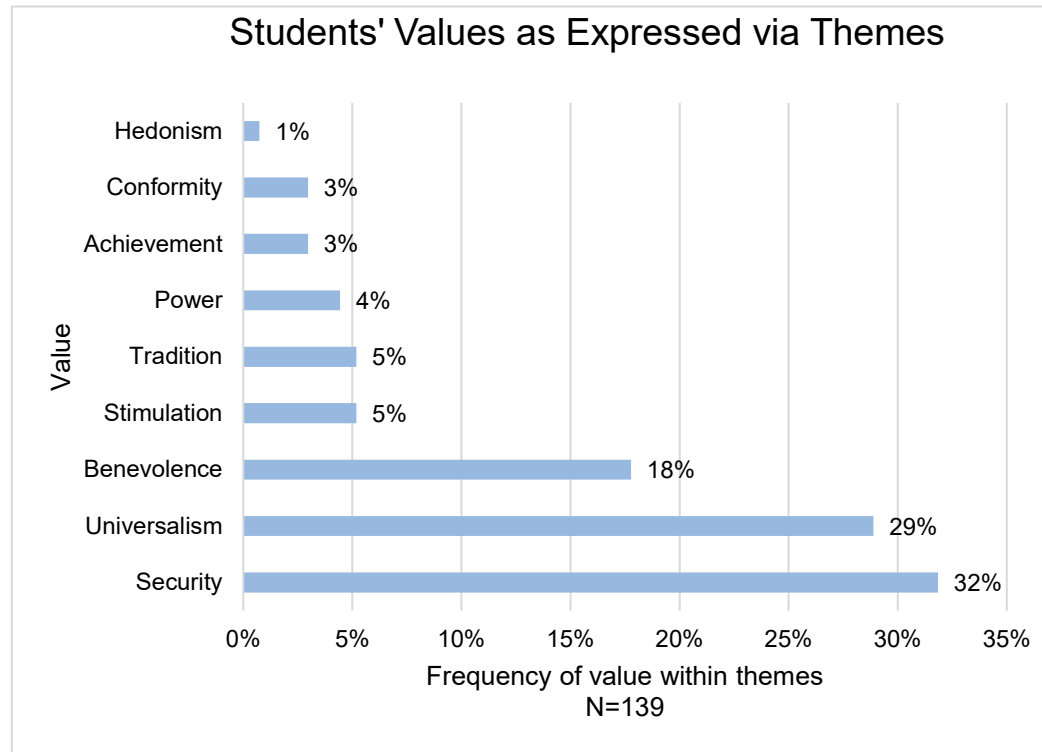


Figure 6-4 Themes and values arising from the thematic analysis

## 6.4) Physical Environment

# Physical Environment

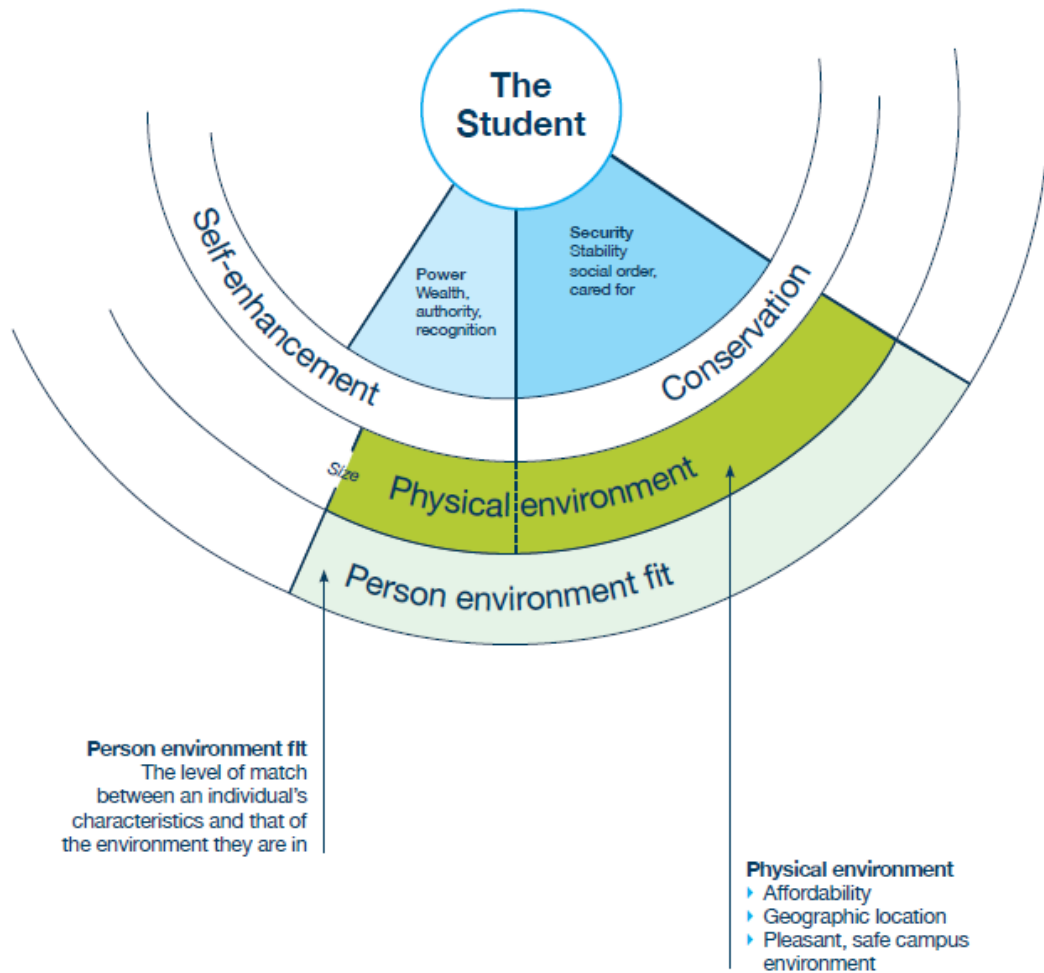


Figure 6-5 The Physical Environment section of the Holistic Student Fit Model



The physical environment, which consists of the location, pleasant and safe environment and affordability, has been deconstructed and depicted in Figure 6-5. This section of the Model, proportionally the smallest of the three environments, begins with the human values of security and power within the higher-order values of conservation and self-enhancement. Conservation values are categorised as having a combination of both personal and social focuses. Conservation also includes the values of tradition and conformity but these have been mapped to the social environment. This mapping was due to the correlation with the social elements of the Catholic ethos and diverse student body. These elements will be discussed within the social environment later in this chapter.

In earlier iterations of the HSFM, power was included within the academic environment. Elements of the value power could fall within the academic environment, particularly authority, public image and respect. Schwartz (2012) clarifies 'power' as having a focus on self-esteem but with an emphasis on attainment. The dominant theme relating to power focused on wealth and control, therefore, after much consideration, power was finally placed across both physical and academic environments, but proportionally more so within the physical.

Key values from within physical environment section of the Model include security, stability, wealth and recognition. The data from Phase One illustrated that students most frequently selected the physical environment. This preference demonstrates that students require a physical environment which supports their safety allowing them to feel protected and secure. This requirement for safety and security is congruent with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) as this part of the Model includes such areas of needs required for survival (self-conservation), for example cleanliness, order and stability. Therefore, although the physical environment is proportionally the smallest part of the HSFM, it is the most essential.

The two themes arising from this study which fell within the physical environment were:

- 2) Campus [size], location,

## 7) Affordability.

Both of these themes demonstrate the values of security and conformity from within the higher-order value of conservation. The HSFM illustrates that students with the values of power and security are more satisfied when they feel a level of fit within the tangible, physical environment. The tangible, physical environment within a university consists of elements such as classrooms, the Halls of Residence and the quality/quantity of food available. The themes from within the physical environment will now be discussed.

### 6.4.1) Theme Two: Campus [size], Location and Safety

Campus location and safety both map to the value of security, representing the immediate campus environment. The element of size presented a conundrum relating to where to place it within the Model as it crosses between both the physical and academic environments. Chapter Five discussed size which was not defined within this study and therefore was open to interpretation by the participants, unlike Gilbreath et al (2011) who defined size as being a factor of the academic environment because it was with reference to school size. The themes within this body of research relate to the size of the campus, the size of the student body and class size. The lack of clarity relating to size made it difficult to position it within the Model. As previously stated, earlier iterations of the HSFM did not consider the fourteen elements of the HE environments at a granular level. However, once this deeper level of analysis did take place, it became evident that size was relevant in two places. These two strands are differentiated in Table 6-3 which details where they are allocated in the HSFM.

Table 6-3 The mapping of the theme Size

Theme	Value	Environment
• Campus size	Security	Physical Environment
• Class size	Achievement	Academic Environment

Campus size was referred to multiple times during Phases Two and Three and was discussed previously in Chapter Five which offered examples of students' experiences. Specifically, Chapter Five highlighted the attraction a smaller campus had for some students, making them feel safe and fostering a sense of community. Participants referred to class size less frequently than campus size, however it was inferred by students who discussed how lecturers knew them by name and supported them suggesting a close student-tutor relationship. Such relationships are less attainable in large groups of students in packed lecture theatres. Such a scenario was described by Scanlon (2007) as resulting in students having "no personal connection with lecturers who they saw as people who stood there and talk at them" (p. 233), highlighting the benefit of smaller classes. These examples illustrate the social focus associated with the value of conservation, motivated by self-protection.

#### 6.4.2) Theme Seven: Affordability

Affordability has two strands which are power and security. These strands are differentiated in Table 6-4 which details where they are allocated in the HSFM.

Table 6-4 The mapping of the theme Affordability

Theme	Value	Overarching value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition fees</li> <li>• Quantity of lecture time</li> <li>• Cost of commuting</li> </ul>	Power	Self-enhancement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of accommodation</li> <li>• Quality of food</li> </ul>	Security	Conversation

Tuition fees, the quantity of lecture time and travel costs are mapped to the value of power as they relate to wealth. The 2012 version of Schwartz et al's model separates power into dominance and resources. Dominance relates to "power through exercising control over people" and resources "power through control of material and social resources" (p. 669). Tuition fees are relevant to both of these scenarios as the cost of fees and the ability to pay for tuition constitutes control over a students' ability to pay for a university education. Alongside fees, there are costs for the material and social resources associated with a university experience.

The quality of accommodation and quality of food are mapped to the value of security, particularly personal security, as they relate to a students' basic needs. These examples illustrate the personal focus associated with the value of self-enhancement, motivated by self-protection.

Having outlined the physical environment, next follows a case study, case study one, from an interview with ALM6. ALM6's strongest themes were within the physical environment as follows: power (40%), security (20%), hedonism (20%) and benevolence (20%). This case study is offered to reflect the type of environment a student who portrays the value of power requires to achieve a sense of fit or belonging. ALM6's case study includes a step-by-step breakdown of how the assumptions were made utilising the holistic student fit model as it was applied to his narrative. The same process and assumptions were also adopted for case studies two to four.

### **Case Study One:**

ALM6 was a male, mature, international student studying Sport Science. He resided in the university Halls of Residence for the duration of his programme. ALM6 had chosen to study at St Mary's because his parents had suggested relocating to the UK from America and his mother had originated from West London. He highlighted that the costs and duration of a UK based degree were less than the equivalent in the USA. He had considered Kingston and Greenwich Universities and settled on St Mary's due to its location stating: "it is kind of close to all my family... it was just, kind of like a matter of... it was close to where I knew".

There were five themes arising from ALM6's interview as follows:

- He felt that his Sports Science degree lacked academic rigour;
- He felt the degree offered poor value for money and insufficient contact and lecture time;
- He found the quality of food counterintuitive with the sporting environment and felt that the quantity and quality of food within the Refectory were poor;

- He was critical of the drinking culture, especially during Freshers Fortnight and sports society events. He believed that the events organised by the university were too alcohol-centric;
- He had established a good group of friends in Halls.

Three of ALM6's themes were from within the physical environment and his strongest theme was power: the academic reputation (achievement/power), value for money (power) and the quality of food (security) indicating these elements were of importance to him. ALM6 referred to his degree as an expensive piece of paper, stating: "when I look at it, it's kind of like £33,000 plus, and that's not including, you know, living costs... for a piece of paper". ALM6 said:

I just feel like I would pay maybe half of what I paid for it. I think that would be fair. I just don't think, I don't think when you're charging the same amount as Oxford and Cambridge and every other university...you can't really sit there and justify taking that much money.

When referring to the quality of food for resident students ALM6 said the following, implying such a breakfast lacked nutrition:

For a sports university that prides itself on sports and athleticism, the fact that your breakfast options or, or at least when I was there were a fry up...

The theme relating to Freshers Fortnight falls under hedonism but ALM6 was critical of the event meaning his personal values are likely to include tradition and conformity as he felt conflicted by the alcohol-centric events, stating:

My friends couldn't believe it when I told them, like the Freshers Week, that they do, two weeks of, you know, putting on parties and clubs, like, you know...getting you into clubs with tickets and things like that. It's a bit... I don't want to... like, I don't want to take it away, but I just think there needs to kind of be like... I don't know, for me....it wasn't my cup of tea.

It was the absence of tradition and conformity which led to the theme in opposition to his personal values.

ALM6 did not offer many examples of his opposing values of benevolence or universalism, apart from his friendships within Halls. Although making friends in Halls, ALM6 frequently referred to his friends established before coming to university, as demonstrated in the quote above regarding Freshers Week.

Despite ALM6's dissatisfaction with his course, he said he would recommend St Mary's to students who "want to have more fun than actually studying". However, he wanted to be challenged academically, as he put it: "you want to be pushed and, I kind of need... I need the quizzes and the tests... to kind of push me to get me to like study all of it", once again highlighting his lack of academic fit.

When asked if he felt he had 'fitted in' at St Mary's, ALM6 said he wasn't really that bothered about it, stating:

You know... I'm like... no matter what you're interested in, you're going to find a group of people or community that fit your similar interests. I don't think there is any like...there wasn't really any like pressure, you know, to fit in, you could kind of do your own thing. People encourage you to go out to meet people. I got one... must be program people encouraged me to go out. You know there's days where I was really hung over, and my liver just needed a break or like I wanted to sleep in. But ya know, it was kind of like, I never really went or like kind of worried about fitting in. I think I'm kind of fortunate in that way. So yeah, if, you know, having a sport made it easy, and yeah, I wouldn't say I worried about it or thought about it much.

The next section will examine how this case study was constructed, offering a step-by-step breakdown of how the holistic student fit model was utilised within this scenario. The same process and assumptions were adopted for case studies two to four.

#### **a) How the HSFM was applied**

ALM6's interview transcript was analysed as detailed in Chapter Three, section 3.5.2. His five themes have been detailed above and will now be examined:

The first two themes were from within the academic environment:

*ALM6, theme 1: He felt that his Sports Science degree lacked academic rigour;*

*ALM6, theme 2: He felt the degree offered poor value for money and insufficient contact and lecture time;*

As previously detailed in Chapter Three, section 3.5.2, step two, a total of 139 basic themes were identified, these were grouped into 39 categories. ALM6's first theme was categorised as 'academic reputation'. This theme was coded as such

due to the student's narrative which implied that his course lacked academic credibility by stating it was poorly structured, that the maths within it were too basic, that he could complete his coursework the night before the deadline without making any effort and that he was bored. Each of the 39 categories were assigned one of 17 codes, as detailed in Appendix K Table K-1. The general category of 'academic reputation' was 'reputation'. Each of the 17 codes were organised into seven final themes. Reputation was assigned to the theme of 'The St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation' (see ref. 32, Table K-1).

Table 5-2 in Chapter 5 detailed how each of the themes were mapped to their associated value which was expanded in Tables 6-1 and 6-2. An extract of Table 6-2 is below which details the 'St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation' theme.

Theme		Overarching value	Fit Model	Environment	
<b>1) St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation</b>	Institutional values	Universalism	Self-transcendence	Person Organisation, Group, Course and Environment Fit	
		Benevolence	Self-enhancement		
		Tradition	Conservation		
		Achievement	Conservation		
	Academic reputation	Achievement	Self-enhancement	Person Course Fit	Academic Environment
		Power	Self-enhancement	Person Course Fit	

From the table above, it can be seen that academic reputation is linked with the values of achievement/power which were previously defined and described in Table 2-3 in Chapter Two. The overarching value for these individual values is self-enhancement which falls within the academic environment. The academic environment includes the intellectual climate and academic reputation.

Earlier within this chapter in section 6.5, it was stated that students with achievement values are motivated by social approval whilst those with power values are motivated by control, status and prestige. Such students are satisfied when they are in an environment which facilitates their academic success via the intellectual climate and resources and benefit from associating with the prestige of the academic reputation. The resulting fit is person/course fit which is achieved within an environment which supports team work with peers, shared goals and good communication. These elements were not evidenced within ALM6s narrative

who stated that communication was poor, feedback was not acted on and that the faculty did not share his goal, stating:

You know, like all times, they would listen to you, and they'd ask like what would you like to see done... but that was no way a reflection of what was going to happen. I felt like my entire time at St. Mary's we were just a focus group.

Using the same process as described above, ALM6's second theme was initially coded as 'value for money', then categorised as 'value' and then 'affordability' (see ref. 8, Table K-1). This was detailed in Table 6-2, extracted below:

Theme		Overarching value	Fit Model	Environment	
7) <b>Affordability</b>	Accommodation and Catering	Security	Conservation	Person Environment Fit	Physical Environment
	Tuition Fees	Power	Self-Enhancement		Academic Environment

From the table above, it can be seen that value for money relating to tuition fees is linked with the value of power. As with ALM6's first theme, this also is within the overarching value of self-enhancement within the academic environment.

*ALM6's theme 3: He found the quality of food counterintuitive with the sporting environment and felt that the quantity and quality of food within the Refectory were poor;*

This theme was coded as 'negatives of living in halls' as this included catering options and quality. This was evidenced when ALM6 discussed the lack of catering facilities in Halls and the poor quality and small portions of food available in the Refectory. As with themes one and two above, this was categorised as 'value' and then 'affordability', again within the overarching value of self-enhancement but this time within the physical environment which includes affordability and safety (see ref. 38, Table K-1). For ALM6, this theme also relates to his health and wellbeing, therefore it is also associated with the neighbouring value of Security from the value of conservation, again in the physical environment.



*ALM6's theme 4: He was critical of the drinking culture, especially during Freshers Fortnight and sports society events. He believed that the events organised by the university were too alcohol-centric;*

*ALM6's theme 5: He had established a good group of friends in Halls.*

ALM6's themes four and five were both from within the social environment. Theme four was coded as 'freshers, then 'social' which was then within the theme of 'Friendships and Social Life' (see ref. 20, Table K-1), whilst theme five was coded as 'friends made in Halls of residence', then 'friendship' which again was within the theme of 'Friendships and Social Life' (see ref. 16, Table K-1).

ALM6's themes 4 and 5 were both illustrated in Table 6-2, extracted below:

Theme		Overarching value	Fit Model	Environment
<b>4) Friendships and social life</b>	Benevolence	Self-transcendence	Person	Social
	Universalism	Openness to change	Group Fit	Environment
	Hedonism			

Adjectives associated with friendship are caring, loyal and true friendship, therefore ALM6's theme five was associated with benevolence whereas theme four was associated with hedonism. As ALM6 was critical of Freshers his personal values are likely to oppose hedonism, instead being the area of tradition and conformity, whilst his theme was in hedonism. These values are both within the social environment.

To illustrate ALM6's values and how these can be compared to those of the institution, Figure 6-6 below illustrates both the individual's and institutional values. The individual values are in grey whilst the institutions values are in blue. There are two overlapping values in both blue and grey which the student and institution share. This illustrates a mismatch of values between the student and the organisation which was evident within ALM6's interview where he was dissatisfied and critical of St Mary's of his time at St Mary's.

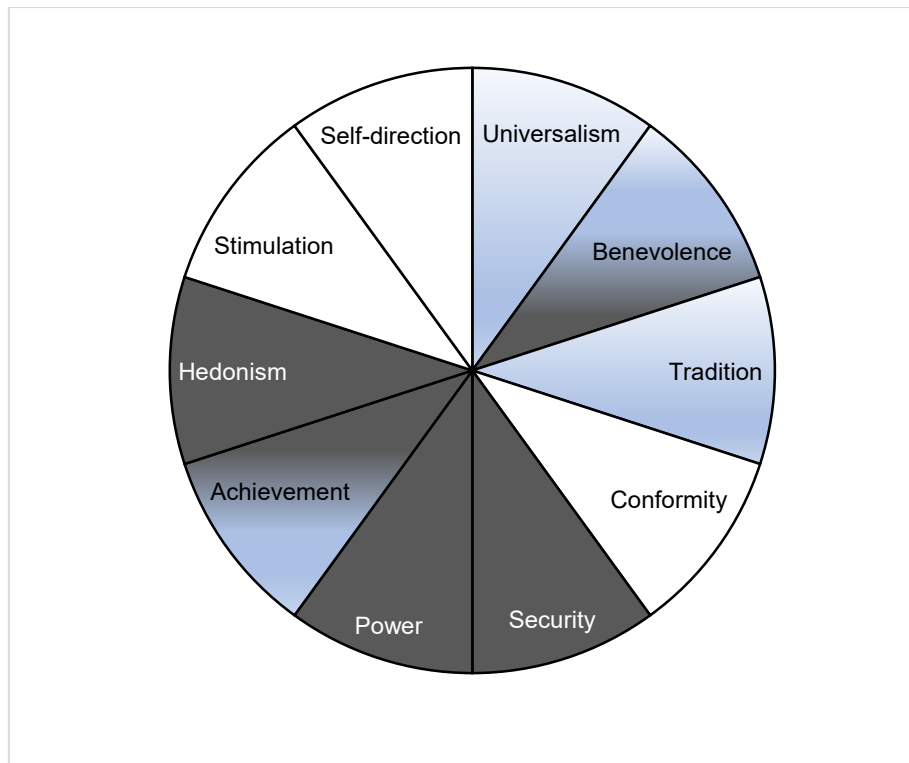


Figure 6-6 ALM6's values compared to St Mary's Institutional Values

**b) How the student could have used the HSFM**

ALM6's values were neighbouring each other: achievement, power and security along with an opposing value: benevolence. Had ALM6 considered his values and the associated environments prior to selecting a university, he might have applied to an institution which topped the league tables, such as a Russell Group university. The kudos associated with such an institution would have enhanced his CV and satisfied his desire for power and achievement.

Had ALM6 visited the campus beforehand, he may have observed the culture and behaviour within the Halls of accommodation and some research into the Students' Union social programme would have indicated the type of social activities which take place on site. Having taken these into account, ALM6 probably would have preferred off-campus, self-catered accommodation so he could cook his own meals and distance himself from a drinking culture, to satisfy his desire for security.

This case study has offered an example of a student who has a personal focus, evidenced by his desire for alternative social opportunities, other than those

organised by the Students' Union and again, examinations rather than the validated assessments in place for his programme. ALM6 is motivated by self-protection which is evidenced by his desire for healthy food options, objection to alcohol-centric events and decision to attend an institution close to his extended family. ALM6's goal was to achieve his degree, which was cost effective, and then continue onto further study; it was not to make friends for life.

**c) How the university could have used the HSFM**

The model can be used by institutions to clarify their values and academic environment therefore to clarify their institutional habitus. As previously discussed in Chapter Five, institutional habitus stems from the features, culture and ethos of an organisation which in turn influences and impacts students (Reay et al, 2010). The university could use the model to clarify or make a feature of their organisational culture in their marketing materials to attract and recruit students who identify and connect with it, therefore those who are more likely to feel a sense of fit or belonging. It is unlikely, especially in a challenging economic environment, but the marketing could be used to explicitly deter students who do not identify or connect with the culture being portrayed. These students are those who are less likely to achieve a sense of fit or belonging who may be less satisfied with their student experience. Alternatively, HEIs could use the model to identify gaps between institutional values and personal values to identify and take steps to mitigate any areas of mismatch.

The next portion of the HSFM to be examined is the academic environment.

## 6.5) Academic Environment

# Academic Environment

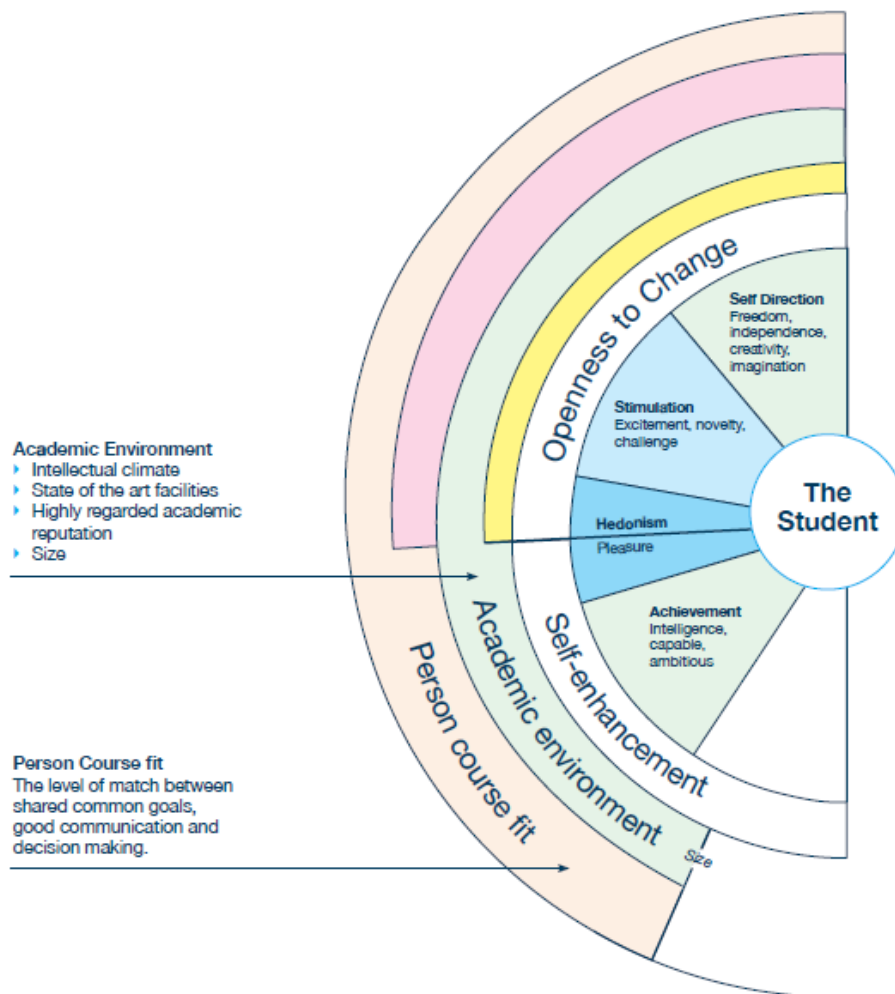


Figure 6-7 The Academic Environment section of the Holistic Student Fit Model

The academic environment, which consists of the intellectual climate, state-of-the-art academic facilities, highly regarded academic reputation and size has been deconstructed and depicted in Figure 6-7. The element of size intersects with the

physical environment when it is contextualised as relating to safety and security which was discussed within the previous section. This section of the Model is proportionally the second largest of the three environments and was the most contentious due to the values within openness to change. This portion of the Model begins with the human values of self-enhancement and openness to change. Both of these higher-order values are categorised as having a personal focus. Openness to change, which traverses both the social and academic environments, is associated with anxiety free motivations as opposed to self-enhancement which is anxiety driven, therefore there is a conflict between growth and maintaining the status quo. These elements then map into person course fit which correlates with shared common goals, good communication and decision making.

The mapping of the openness to change portion of the values Model changed several times during the development of the HSFM, due mainly to where hedonism is located on Schwartz et al's model (1992), between achievement, stimulation and self-direction. Hedonism has connotations of self-indulgence and debauchery which made it difficult to consider within a university context. Hedonism is described by Schwartz (2012) as "pleasure of sensuous gratification for oneself" (p. 5) seemingly more applicable to the social environment. The values surrounding hedonism are stimulation which is defined as excitement, novelty and challenge in life and self-direction which is defined as having independent thought and action – choosing, creating and exploring. Both stimulation and self-direction can apply to studying at university as they are relevant to academic development and growth as well as the social environment. For example, within the social environment, stimulation and self-direction can relate to having fun and trying new things.

To make the HSFM conveniently neat and straightforward, the values within the openness to change section could be rearranged. However, this gratuitous rearrangement would be contrary to a plethora of research into Schwartz et al's respected, proven and validated model. Alternatively, I considered illustrating the

three values contributing to the openness to change section of the model as a cluster. Upon reflection, stimulation, hedonism and self-direction were categorised as being within both social and academic environments. This placement was because within the context of the HE environments, the openness to change values could be applicable to academic engagement, self-development, achievement, mastery and independence. Hedonism is still an outlier and only tenuously relates to the academic environment in terms of self-indulgence within a subject or topic that a student is passionate about or the pleasure associated with top marks, performance or the sheer joy of learning.

Key personal values from within the academic environment section of the model include success, ambition, recognition, wealth, freedom, independence, curiosity, creativity and excitement. Such values were evidenced in Chapter Five which offered examples of the importance of the university's academic reputation and the excitement about graduation.

Elements of two themes partially mapped to the academic environment. These were:

- 1) The St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation (academic reputation),
- 2) The size element from theme two: Campus Size, Location and Safety when pertaining to class size.

Both of these themes demonstrate the value of achievement from within the higher-order value of self-enhancement. Students with achievement values are motivated by social approval, acquired by demonstrating competence. The HSFM illustrates that students with the value of achievement are satisfied when they sense that they are in an environment which promotes or facilitates their success with a thriving intellectual climate, the right academic resources and reputation. The resulting fit is person/course fit which is achieved within an environment which supports team work with peers, shared goals and good communication. The themes from within the academic environment will now be discussed.

### **6.5.1) From Theme One: Academic Reputation**

Chapter Five offered examples of the importance of St Mary's academic reputation for those students on teaching courses, but also referred to an absence of academic rigour which was categorised as respect, power and self-enhancement. This was addressed in case study one as ALM6 was dissatisfied with the quality of his course. An alternative example from a trainee teacher is shortly offered in case study two.

### **6.5.2) From Theme Two: Size**

Size, when within the academic environment relates to class or cohort size. Within the context of St Mary's University, it specifically relates to small classes and the associated benefits. Class size and retention were discussed within Chapter Five as St Mary's has a smaller student body and smaller classes than many institutions. Chapter Five also detailed how the social interactions between tutors and students reduces the risk of students dropping out (Scanlon et al, 2007).

Next follows a case study, case study two, from an interview with STU8 whose strongest themes were within the academic environment. STU8's themes were: achievement (33%), benevolence (22%), stimulation (12%), power (11%), tradition (11%) and universalism (11%). This case study is offered to reflect the type of environment a student who portrays the value of achievement requires to realise a sense of fit or belonging.

#### **Case Study Two:**

STU8 was a female, student of colour who was the first in her family to go to university and was studying Primary Education. She commuted via public transport to university from Tottenham in north London. STU8 chose to study at St Mary's because she felt it was the "best" for teacher training. She also stated "I am a Catholic so I went to a primary Catholic school, a Catholic secondary school and a Catholic sixth form so I thought the best thing to do would be to also go to a Catholic university".

STU8 had a total of nine themes, as follows:

- She felt that the course reputation was very important, especially in relation to employability;
- She was influenced by St Mary's athletic reputation, particularly by St Mary's alumni Sir Mo Farah, despite not participating in sport herself;
- She believed there were good resources for students, especially within the library;
- She had a positive experience with support services and had received financial support;
- The Catholic ethos was important to her and she was a practicing Catholic;
- She commented on the diversity of St Mary's student body in terms of ethnicity and highlighted the inequality of females in senior positions. She knew that St Mary's student body had more white students than students of colour and was initially concerned, but felt everyone had been respectful;
- Her commute was expensive and difficult and she had safety concerns during the winter months when travelling in the dark, both in the morning and evenings;
- She stated that she did not engage with social activities or any societies but seemed to regret this;
- She was very complimentary about her supportive lecturers.

STU8's narrative offers an example of a student who values the academic reputation, achievement and self-enhancement. STU8 spoke about the importance of hard work and achievement, stating she was at university to study and said she had specifically selected St Mary's because of its position in the league tables and its impressive employability rates for teachers. STU8 had decided not to live in university accommodation because "I would have fun, I would go to societies and stuff like that but I won't focus on the degree and my grades would probably go down". This contrasted with several other participants within the study who wanted to go to university to socialise, have fun and make new friends.



This narrative illustrates STU8s desire for personal growth and success (power and achievement).

STU8 was the first in her family to go to university, stating that going to university was a “big deal” for her family and stated her mum liked to “show off” to relatives about her studies. Her mother was influential in her university choice, having accompanied her to several open days, and offered her daughter the following advice:

You should be thinking about the end goal, graduating with a good degree. So, you know you are going to make friends you might make enemies but that is a part of life.

STU8's stated: “I didn't join any clubs or societies and it's harder to make friends so I am missing out on the university experience” which expressed the juxtaposition between her family life (cultural capital) and her student experience. When referring to her peers on her course, STU8s values of universalism and benevolence emerge:

We look out for each other. We care about each other. The teachers, the lecturers seem to like us. There've been no arguments, no enemies which is really odd considering there's so many people there.

STU8's themes captured her confusion, regret and her struggles between her family expectations and university life alongside her ambition and desire for a good career. It was unclear whether her decision to commute was her own or influenced by her family. When asked whether she felt she ‘fitted in’ at St Mary's, STU8 stated that she felt most comfortable with her seminar group:

We have people of all ages and people who are parents, so older and people my age. I'm 19 so they just came out of 6<sup>th</sup> form or college or people who are retaking so they might have had an issue in their home life and dropped out and they came back again. There are people from all different walks of life. Some people are rich and some are poor and people who come from different parts of the world so culturally it's quite interesting, there is a blend. We all just want to do well and we help each other.

STU8's themes outlined within this case study represent examples of person/course fit in terms of the academic reputation but also of person/environment fit where this overlaps with location and security as

demonstrated by the challenges of commuting. It also illustrates the career focus of non-traditional students and the cultural challenges faced by some students. STU8 gave the impression that she wanted to leave home and have fun but her family obstructed her, leaving her caught between two cultures. The next section discusses the social environment.

6.6) Social Environment

# Social Environment

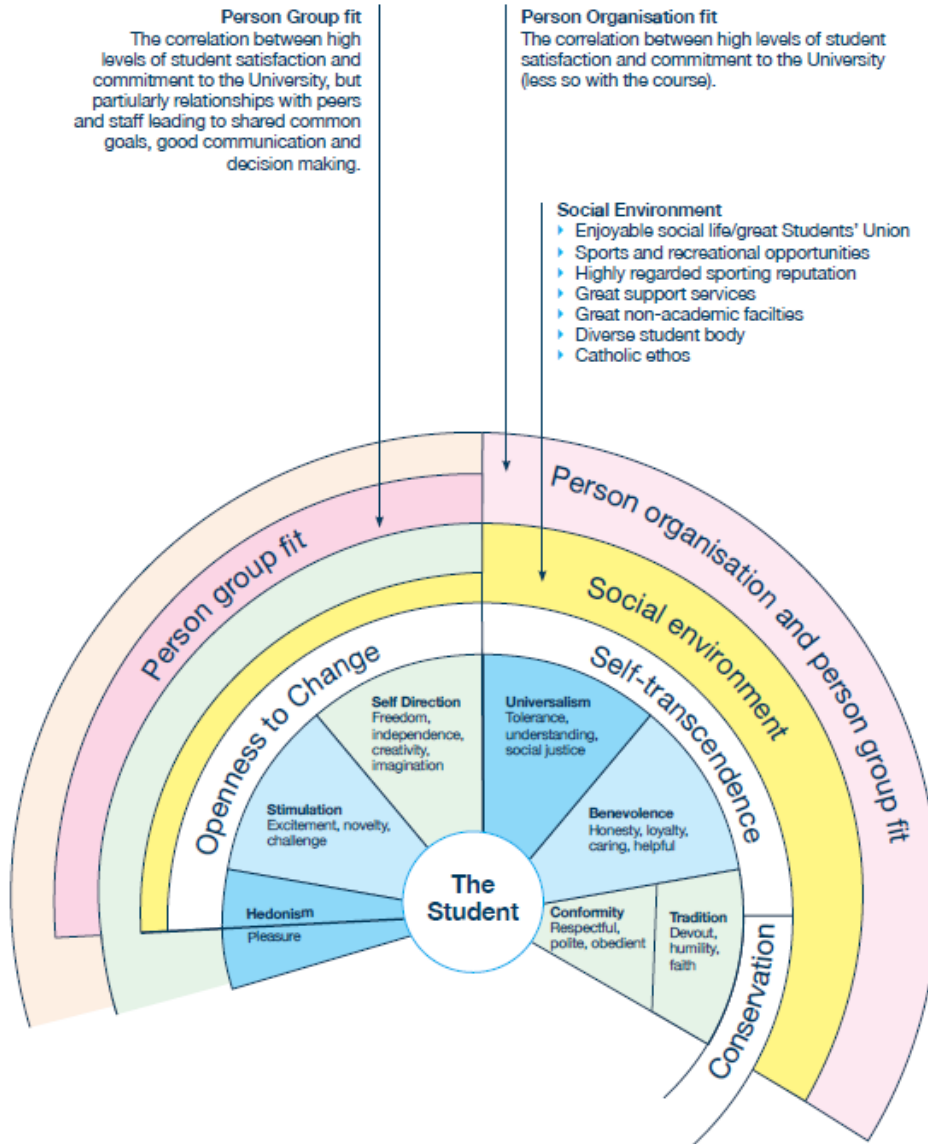


Figure 6-8 The Social Environment section of the Holistic Student Fit Model

The social environment which consists of an enjoyable social life, great Students' Union, sports and recreational opportunities, highly regarded sporting reputation, great support services, great non-academic facilities, diverse student body and Catholic ethos has been deconstructed and depicted in Figure 6-8. This section of the Model is proportionally the largest as half of the higher-order values were mapped to the social environment. The social environment section of the Model begins with the two higher-order values of self-transcendence and openness to change. Two elements of conservation, namely tradition and conformity, are situated within the social environment. These higher-order values fall into both the social and personal focuses and are both within the growth and anxiety free section of Schwartz et al's (2012) model which means students with personal values within this area are motivated by growth and development. The social environment then maps into person organisation fit and person group fit. These fit models correlate with high levels of course satisfaction and commitment to the university but particularly relationships with peers and with high levels of course satisfaction and commitment to the university.

Key values from within the social environment section of the Model include benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation and hedonism. Phase One established that, when asked why students chose to study at St Mary's University, Twickenham, two thirds of all respondents selected an element from the social category. A preference for the social environment indicated a desire for friendships, social justice, freedom, independence and excitement. Such a preference demonstrates that students require a social environment which gives them the opportunity to make friends and socialise in order for them to feel supported and experience a sense of belonging.

The themes arising from this study which fall within the social environment were:

- 1) The St Mary's Way, Values and [Reputation];
- 3) Support from Peers, Academics and Professional Staff;
- 4) Friendships and Social Life;

- 5) Sporting Reputation, Opportunities and Sports Socials;
- 6) Catholic Ethos.

The HSFM illustrates that students with the values of benevolence, universalism, tradition, self-direction and stimulation are more satisfied when they feel a level of fit within the social environment. The social environment within a university consists of organised social events on campus such as quiz nights, events in the bar, sports teams and their social events and also informal social opportunities in communal areas such as common rooms or canteens. With reference to faith-based institutions, this also includes events and support offered by the Chaplaincy. Each of the five themes from within the social environment will now be discussed.

#### **6.6.1) Theme One: The St Mary's Way, Values and [Reputation]**

The St Mary's Way theme relates to St Mary's culture and institutional values. This section was difficult to categorise as the themes span multiple areas of the values model. The first step was to map St Mary's institutional values (see table 6-6) which are discussed later in this chapter. Figure 6-10 illustrates that St Mary's does not have any institutional values within openness to change which is examined in 6.9 later within this chapter

#### **6.6.2) Theme Three: Support from Peers, Academics and Professional Staff**

Students articulated that they valued four different aspects of support: from their peers, academics, financial support and mental health/counselling services. Examples were offered during Chapter Five. This theme is also discussed within the physical environment as support can also offer a sense of security.

#### **6.6.3) Theme Four: Friendships and Social Life**

As discussed in Chapter Five, friendship was a strong theme and referenced terms such as 'friends for life' and 'surrogate family'. Friendship sits within the values of universalism and benevolence due to their virtues of tolerance, loyalty and caring, however students were also seeking fun, challenge and excitement which are related to the values within openness to change: hedonism and stimulation.

#### **6.6.4) Theme Five: Sporting Reputation, Opportunities and Sports Socials**

Sporting reputation and opportunities have a similar value profile to friendships and social life due to the social opportunities offered by the various sports teams.

However, there are elements of competitiveness which have been categorised as achievement (self-enhancement). This finding does not sit well with the Model as achievement is within the academic environment and is in opposition with universalism and benevolence. Due to absence of participants and narrative regarding competitive sport, theme five was categorised as being within the social environment and the competitive elements have been discounted. This positioning would not always be the case, so could be considered an anomaly or outlier. For example, a student on an athletic scholarship would not fit with the Model portraying sport as entirely social. However, the Model is still valid as a student with the value of achievement will still require some of the elements of the academic environment, such as state of the art facilities, in order to be satisfied.

Next follows a case study, case study three, from an interview with STU1 whose strongest themes were within the social environment. STU1's themes were from within the following values: universalism (60%), benevolence (20%) and security (20%). This case study is offered to reflect the type of environment a student who portrays the values of universalism and benevolence requires to achieve a sense of fit or belonging.

#### **Case Study Three:**

STU1 was a female, mature student in her 40s studying Psychology. She was the first in her family to attend university and commuted from her private accommodation, via public transport. One of the reasons she had selected St Mary's was the direct bus route from home, stating she her choice was based "mainly for convenience" having considered other universities in the local area including Kingston University and the University of West London. STU1 was motivated to go to university to retrain for a new career after stating that the "only way I'm going to get a job that I want is to do a degree".

STU1 had a total of six themes, as follows:

- She had received support from and had a positive relationship with lecturers;
- She expressed concerns regarding her sexuality and the Catholic ethos. She stated her initial concerns were unfounded and that she had a positive experience thus far;
- She felt that St Mary's had a unique community feel and that the small size made the campus feel welcoming and that there was a friendly atmosphere;
- She expressed concerns about value for money especially relating to the number of contact hours on her course and last-minute cancellations;
- She expressed concern about diversity, specifically the lack of other mature students.

Three of these themes pertain to universalism (sexuality, value for money, diversity), one to benevolence (support) and one to security (campus). This reflected that STU1's dominant higher-order value was self-transcendence, reflecting that STU1 values support, friendship, equality and fairness. STU1 wanted to make new friends whilst at university but was disappointed by the lack of mature students, stating:

I did hope to have a couple of mature students on the course that I would click with and make some new friends, it is hard to make friends when you get older. That would be cool. Your friends get married, move away, have kids, you realise you have a small friendship circle so I was a bit gutted. There wasn't really anyone, we are a random group of students, we don't click. There is a huge cultural and language barrier, it doesn't flow.

STU1 felt that there was a divide between herself and the younger students, stating: "I don't go out with them and I don't go drinking with them", and that they had different expectations. An example of differing expectations related to contact time in lectures. STU1 valued fairness and felt that cancelling lectures at short notice was unfair, but stated "the kids were like yay we get out early on Friday, and I'm like I don't want to get out early, I want that lecture, I need it". This led to a

discussion regarding contact hours. This could have been attributed to power; however, the discussion was within a context of fairness and was therefore universalism. STU1 stated her annoyance of classes being cancelled:

And they are very good at cancelling stuff which really bugs me to the point that I sat down last week to figure out how much each lecture costs me and how much they are cutting out.

In addition to contact time, value for money, and the lack of other mature students on her course, STU1 also discussed her sexuality and concerns about the Catholic ethos, stating:

The Catholic thing... I don't think it is relevant. Change with the times. It puts people off. When I first came here I was very concerned because of my sexuality. I asked another student what people were like and was told to keep it quiet. I thought it was run by homophobic nuns.

This again illustrated STU1's values of fairness, or a lack of it, therefore, STU1 is likely to be motivated to react when she observes unfairness or feels she or other people have been treated unfairly (universalism). This motivation is in line with a social focus, defined by Schwartz (2012) as "regulating how one relates socially to others and affects them" (p. 13).

STU1 grew up in a Catholic family, and as discussed above, she expressed some reservations about St Mary's Catholic ethos. Her narrative pertaining to the Catholic ethos has been categorised as being benevolence/universalism. This is explored further within the next theme.

#### **6.6.5) Theme Six: Catholic Ethos**

The Catholic ethos theme traversed two values of self-transcendence and conservation because the theme had two distinct strands. Those participants who identified as being Catholic held the value of tradition which includes faith and is within the higher-order value of conservation. The theme relating to the Catholic environment was categorised as benevolence and universalism due to the association with tolerance, equality, harmony and social justice. For this reason, tradition and conformity have been allocated to the social environment. This is summarised in Table 6-5.



Table 6-5 The mapping of the theme Catholic Ethos

Theme	Value	Overarching value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Catholic faith</li> </ul>	Tradition	Conversation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Catholic environment</li> </ul>	Benevolence and Universalism	Self-Transcendence

This distinction between tradition and benevolence and universalism will now be discussed using case study four from STU3. Case study four is offered as an example of a student who selected St Mary's due to its Catholic heritage. STU3 had seven themes which predominantly were within the value of universalism (67%), followed by security (17%) and tradition (17%).

### Case Study Four

STU3 was a male Theology student, living in Halls of Residence. His family home was on the outskirts of a north London borough, close to the M25. He would regularly go home at the weekend to visit his family. He chose to attend St Mary's based on the content of the course but also due to the campus. He had considered Birmingham University which offered a similar programme but felt that the campus was:

Literally a building site. There was nothing about it that felt very friendly, it was just dark, not literally that sounds morbid, but miserable almost, there was nothing vibrant about it. That put me off completely from there.

This contrasted his view of St Mary's, which he stated was "very open, relaxed and friendly atmosphere in general. It's just a really nice place to be".

STU3's themes were universalism, tradition, security and stimulation, as follows:

- He was critical of Freshers Fortnight and society events. He stated that he did not like clubbing and found other activities mundane. He would have preferred to go to the pub;
- He lived in Halls of Residence but missed his pets and cooking for himself;
- The Catholic ethos was very important and his social life gravitated around his membership of the Catholic Society and with his course peers;
- He was not interested in other societies, sports or the gym;

- He had previously visited the campus on a school trip and loved the campus, especially that it felt open and friendly;
- He spoke of diversity in terms of gender (not ethnicity) and inclusiveness in terms of religion;
- He strongly disliked the Refectory because of the atmosphere and the food. Due to this he spent a lot of money on eating out.

STU3 was quoted in Chapter Five, when discussing his membership of the Catholic Society, he referred to himself several times as being 'cathsoc', meaning he was a member of the group. His membership and strong Catholic faith were very much part of his identity, stating:

We have official events in the chapel every week and I go to two or three of them. We have mass every day and I try to go to that every other Monday evening and Sunday. Most of the time I try to go to that so I can chat to people.

When asked whether St Mary's lived its values, STU3 said it was inclusive, stating: "It's not much... there's no sort of urgh they're Catholic. It's like who you are... who you are with regards to anything".

STU3's theme relating to the Catholic ethos has been categorised as tradition within the higher-order value of conservation. This is different from the theme relating to Catholic ethos for student STU1 where her narrative relating to the Catholic ethos was mapped to equality and social justice and therefore to universalism. STU1 expressed concerns regarding the Catholic environment and her sexuality. The different categories relating to the Catholic ethos also represent the discussion from Chapter Five regarding the conflict some students articulated relating to Catholic doctrine and their own personal beliefs. Therefore, the designated value depends upon the context of the themes as those attributed to the value of universalism related to equality whilst those attributed to the value of tradition related to faith.

STU3's narrative offers an example of a student who values tradition, defined by Schwartz (2012) as valuing customs, stating: "They often take the form of religious

rites, beliefs, and norms of behavior. (respect for tradition, humble, devout, accepting my portion in life) [moderate, spiritual life]" (p. 6). STU3 felt he fitted in within the Catholic environment, stating:

For example, I'm part of Cathsoc and it's a Catholic university so that is probably where I consider fitting in because that is basically fitting in a group which is similar. The best for me personally is Cathsoc because that's what I'm involved in the most. I spend a lot of time with it.

This case study has offered an example of a student who has a social focus, evidenced by his participation in Mass and events organised by the Chaplaincy. The final, complete version of the HSFM is now presented in Figure 6-9.

## 6.7) The Holistic Student Fit Model

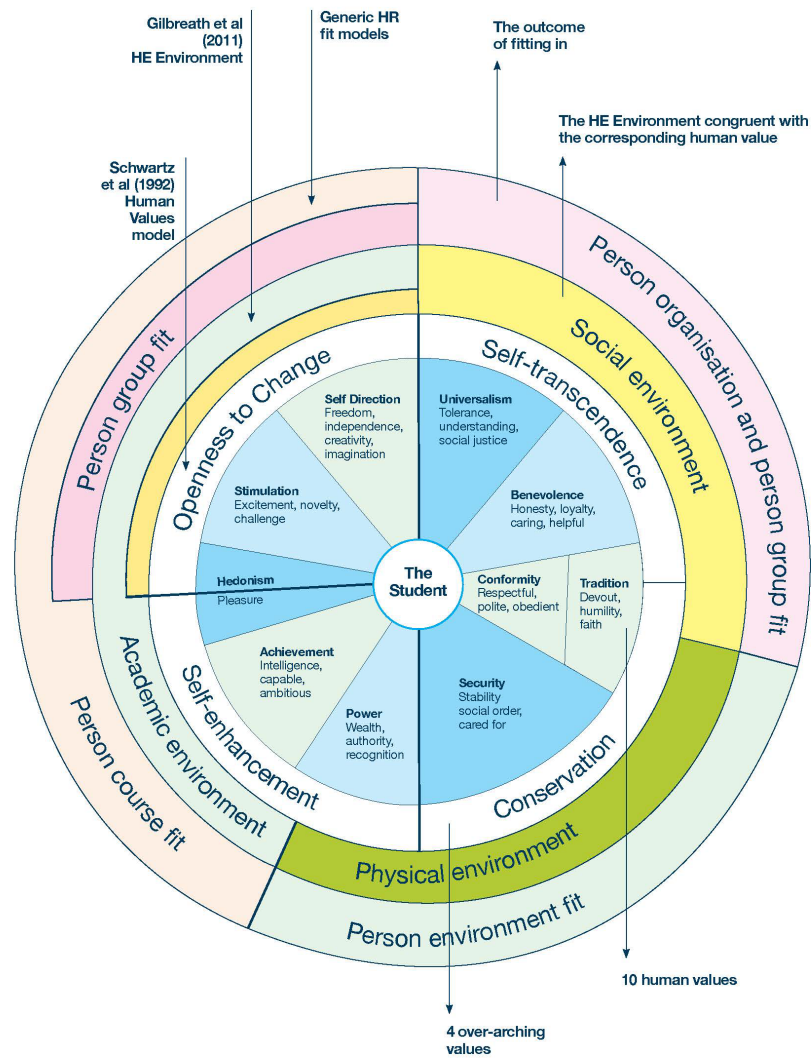


Figure 6-9, Holistic Student Fit Model

The completed Holistic Student Fit Model has now been presented in Figure 6-9. The Model is intended as a tool to encourage students to think about their own personal values and how these inform their day-to-day decisions, then to compare these to institutional values to see if they are a good fit for each other. It would be too naive and simplistic to think that students only fit in one environment as needs and expectations are fluid in the same way that personal values differ in importance to individuals and in different situations. This statement is corroborated by Seppälä, Lipponen, Bardi, and Pirtillä-Backman (2012) who state that one's personal values differ according to context, for example at home or at university. Therefore, it is likely that students require a combination of all three environments but in varying quantities, depending upon their value hierarchies. It is also likely that most students will have a dominant environment based on their personal values. Schwartz (2012) states that:

Each of us holds numerous values (e.g., achievement, security, benevolence) with varying degrees of importance. A particular value may be very important to one person but unimportant to another (Schwartz 2012, p. 3).

To illustrate the importance of fitting in, the following case study offers an example of a student who stated she did not feel she fitted in at St Mary's. ALM5's themes were from within two values: self-transcendence (71%) and conservation (29%). This case study is offered to reflect the difficulties a student experiences when they fail to achieve a sense of fit or belonging.

### **Case Study Five**

ALM5 was a female student studying Psychology. She came from Cornwall and lived in the university Halls of Residence. St Mary's was not ALM5's first choice, stating "I wanted to go to Loughborough or Exeter... the big sporty unis. I put St Mary's down because it was a London university that a lot of my PE teachers had gone to and they had like a reputation for being pretty good with sport as well". ALM5 had not visited the campus prior to starting her course, stating "I never saw the university before I stepped foot there on my first day".

ALM5's values were: universalism, benevolence, security and tradition. These values oppose both self enhancement and openness to change.

ALM5 was dissatisfied with her experience. She was quoted in Chapter Five claiming that her tutors did not support her and made her cry during her viva voce. She felt isolated academically but felt that she belonged within the hockey team and society.

- She was unhappy living in university Halls of Residence and did not make friends there;
- She felt unsupported by lecturers;
- She expressed concerns with the Catholic environment and tolerance or acceptance of her sexuality;
- She liked St Mary's campus and referred to it as being beautiful;
- She felt like an outsider on her course but made friends by participating in sport and felt that she fitted in as a member of the hockey team;
- She had experienced parental pressure to attend university;
- She felt the small size of St Mary's was negative.

Size has been discussed several times as a positive attribute for St Mary's in terms of offering a sense of security and community. However, ALM5 stated:

I think maybe if it been bigger I wouldn't have had the same feeling of kind of isolation... I wouldn't have noticed any kind of favouritism or lack of favouritism or just, you know, just couldn't be bothered with me and in a bigger group, but because I clearly stuck out in my course.

ALM5 displayed the value of conservation which was evidenced by her family's expectation of her attending university, but also in terms of the membership of the hockey team with its format, rules and structure. Therefore, ALM5 is likely to be motivated to react when she observes or experiences unfairness and also when she observes or experiences a sense of belonging or an absence of it. This is congruent with her university student experience as she felt that her lecturers did not support her, representing both unfairness and an absence of belonging.

When reflecting upon her time at St Mary's, ALM5 said she had found university a difficult experience and recognised it was not for her, stating:

I guess, a lot of people are just... I can't wait to just leave home and stuff. And, you know, some people university is the best time of their life. And then some people, it's just something that I've got to get through. Yeah, but you know, so it's all ended up ok for me. I'm doing alright. I've had some pretty good life experiences that I wouldn't have got without my degree and so yeah. Well, I just... kind of part of me wants to just go back and speak to my psychology lecturers and just say, I think you guys are arseholes really, to be honest.

When asked about 'fitting in', ALM5 stated that with hindsight, St Mary's probably was not the university for her, stating:

I'm not religious, and I'm gay as well. So, I was just kind of... when I thought about it, I was like... maybe this isn't the uni for me. But, you know, what actually drove me there was kind of... it was a really nice building and is a really nice campus, the location and you know it's in a really, really nice area.

This case study has offered an example of a student who did not fit in at university, describing university as "a bit of an inconvenience" and that "It was like, I've got to do it, just to get through it and it's kind of what's expected of me". ALM5's values were in opposition to openness to change and self-enhancement. This was evidenced by her lethargy with her studies and she was not enthusiastic about going to university or achieving a degree.

The examples given within this chapter have been applied from a student perspective utilising the narratives from STU1, STU3, STU8, ALM5 and ALM6. The HSFM can also be applied from the perspective of the university.

## **6.8) The Holistic Student Fit Model in Practice**

The HSFM is intended as a tool to be used in reality, rather than merely being an abstract concept. The model has two key stakeholders: students considering higher education and HEIs. These will both be addressed.

### **6.8.1) Potential Students**

The information and support available for prospective students was previously discussed within the literature review which highlighted that despite outreach activities, there is some disparity between advice for different cohorts and

sometimes a lack of relevant information when selecting a university. I envision the HSFM as being a tool to inform student decision making. It is acknowledged that the model requires interpretation and guidance for it to be a useful instrument and as such, is likely to be a supplement within a student/mentor scenario. Understanding personal values is discussed within Chapter Seven as recommendation eight (page 311) expands on how people can be made aware of their personal values and the impact they have on day-to-day life. It is also discussed in section 7.8 which discusses 'next steps', which includes an aim to create a website to disseminate the findings from this body of work. Video content can feature on a website to elaborate on the HSFM as a tool and explain how it can be used to support and stimulate decision making. In essence, the steps mirror those depicted in Figure 6-1 on page 230 which illustrates the student at the heart of the model. Therefore, step two is to understand one's values and an exercise can be undertaken to establish these. Step three is to consider the HE environment, what that means, for example, location, which courses are available, cost of living, social opportunities and what makes each university unique. The final step of the model reflects the outcome and so emphasises the importance of finding the right place to study to find a place where a student can feel a sense of fit or belonging.

### **6.8.2) University Environment**

Universities can use the model to gain an understanding of how their values translate into the institutional culture and environment and therefore the lived experience of students (and staff). The impact of institutional values is now discussed.

### **6.9) Institutional Values**

In order to utilise the Model to consider institutional values, St Mary's values were mapped to personal values, the three HE Environments and generic HR Fit models as evidenced and detailed in Table 6-6.



Table 6-6 St Mary's Values mapped against Schwartz's Human Values, the HE Environments and Fit Models

<b>St Mary's Value</b>	<b>St Mary's Definition</b>	<b>Examples of values</b>	<b>Schwartz's human value</b>	<b>Higher-order value</b>	<b>HE Environment</b>	<b>Fit Model</b>
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	We celebrate differences, recognising that everyone is born with a unique identity. St Mary's is a place where students and staff can reach their full potential and make a positive contribution to society.	Broadminded, social justice, harmony, unity, equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence	Social	Person organisation and person group fit
<b>Generosity of Spirit</b>	Our generosity of spirit sets us apart. It can be seen in the encouragement, collegiality, empathy, helpfulness and service to be found across the University.	Helpful, forgiving, honest, loyal, friendship	Benevolence			
<b>Respect</b>	We respect everybody. We treat everyone as we ourselves would want to be treated.	Respect for tradition, moderate, humble	Tradition	Conservation	Physical	Person environment fit
<b>Excellence</b>	We strive to be the best at everything we do. We seek professionalism through setting high standards and continuous improvement in all our practices and work.	Success, ambition, intelligence	Achievement	Self-enhancement	Academic	Person course fit

St Mary's values are depicted in Figure 6-10; the dark sections illustrate its institutional values. The image illustrates that St Mary's has no values within the higher-order value of openness to change. Openness to change was the least frequently evidenced category within the thematic analysis, appearing in 13% of themes. It includes three values of: self-direction, stimulation and hedonism. It includes three values of: self-direction, stimulation and hedonism.

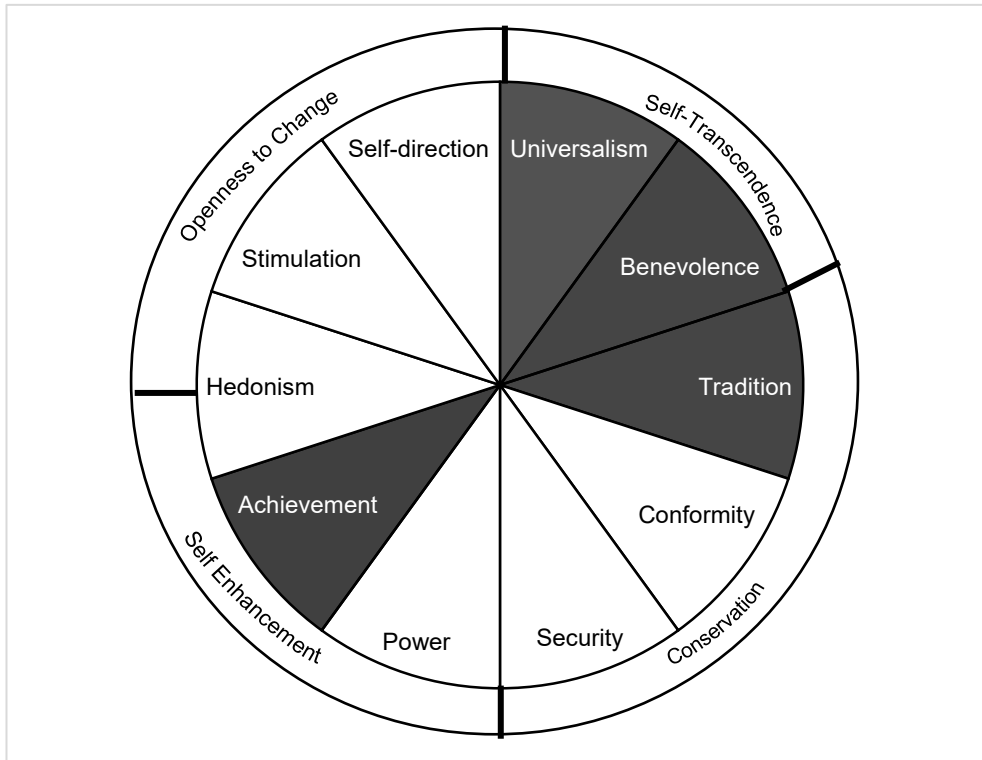


Figure 6-10 St Mary's values illustrated

The lack of a formal, articulated value does not mean that the value is absent from the environment. For example, St Mary's does not have a value relating to security, even though the campus is viewed by students as being small, safe and secure. Equally, St Mary's does not have a value relating to power, yet students who are motivated in their studies by career ambition will achieve their desired outcome if the academic environment supports this. However, the consequence of a void in values within openness to change means that students with a dominant personal value which includes enjoying life, pleasure, curiosity, creativity, self-

indulgence, freedom and independence may not fit as well as other students within the institution for whom this value is less dominant.

As previously discussed, openness to change was relevant to two of the themes: friendships and social life, and sports opportunities, reputation and societies.

These two themes include those relating to friendship and relationships as well as excitement, fun and freedom. It could be argued that 'generosity of spirit' touches upon the support element of this theme. An example could be support from peers, academic and professional staff. However, the data leading to these themes related to tutors having open door policies, wellbeing services and help with finances whereas St Mary's considers generosity of spirit to be encouragement, collegiality, empathy, helpfulness and service. This description is more closely aligned to benevolence.

Having the awareness that St Mary's does not explicitly have a value within the 'openness to change' category, the institution may opt to engineer or amend its values to include one. As an institution's values are considered something that are from the authentic core rather than being fabricated, a change of values would require a change in the university culture.

To illustrate an example of an institution with values including openness to change, below are the values of the University of the Arts, London (UAL). Their website presents their values as follows:

We uphold the values of social justice and environmental stewardship through our teaching and research, as well as in the way we live, work and conduct our operations.

We ask original questions and arrive at new insights through the creativity and rigour of our practice and research.

We draw on and develop the natural enterprise and curiosity of our students, encouraging them to be the next initiators and innovators in their respective fields.

We respect our students' and staff's individual voices and collective endeavours, celebrating the breadth of backgrounds and cultures represented at UAL.

(University of Arts London website, 2021)

From these values, one can clearly see that, amongst others elements, UAL value curiosity and creativity which one would assume are congruent with students who are interested in subjects such as art and design. There is an argument that curiosity and creativity are at the heart of all teaching and learning and encourage problem solving skills and a desire for knowledge (Hopfenbeck, Denton-Calabrese, Johnston, Scott-Barrett and McGrane, 2022). However, subjects such as art and drama require creative expression. Examples of such requirements are detailed within each course's entry requirements. St Mary's BA in Acting hold auditions whereby students are required to perform a monologue (St Mary's Acting Degree, 2022d) whilst the equivalent degree at UAL requires a portfolio of work (University Arts London, 2022). These examples are offered to illustrate the differentiators between institutions and how students with different personal values will match with institutional values. It is important to note that St Mary's portfolio includes courses in acting, media and creative arts and it is in this type of provision where there is the potential for a mismatch of core values for some students.

From the data analysis, it is unclear whether openness to change only appeared in 13% of themes because these values were of less importance to students, or whether students for whom openness to change is desirable, do not chose to attend St Mary's university and were therefore not part of the study.

#### **6.10) Traditional and Non-Traditional Students**

Finally, a comparison was made between the values allocated to the themes arising from interviews with traditional students compared with non-traditional students. For the purposes of this analysis, non-traditional students were those who were the first in their family to go to university and first year commuting students. The full details of the analysis can be found in Appendix J and is depicted in Figure 6-11.

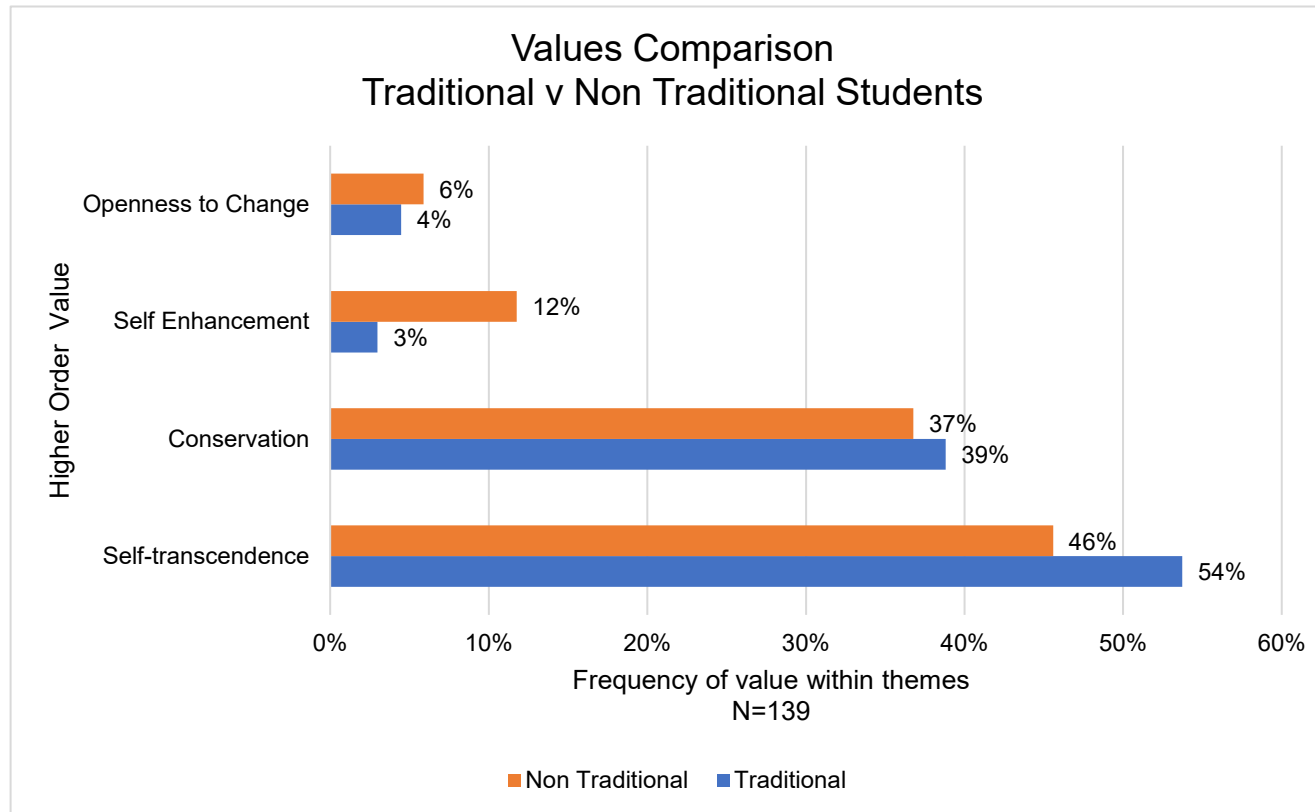


Figure 6-11 Values theme comparison, traditional v non-traditional students

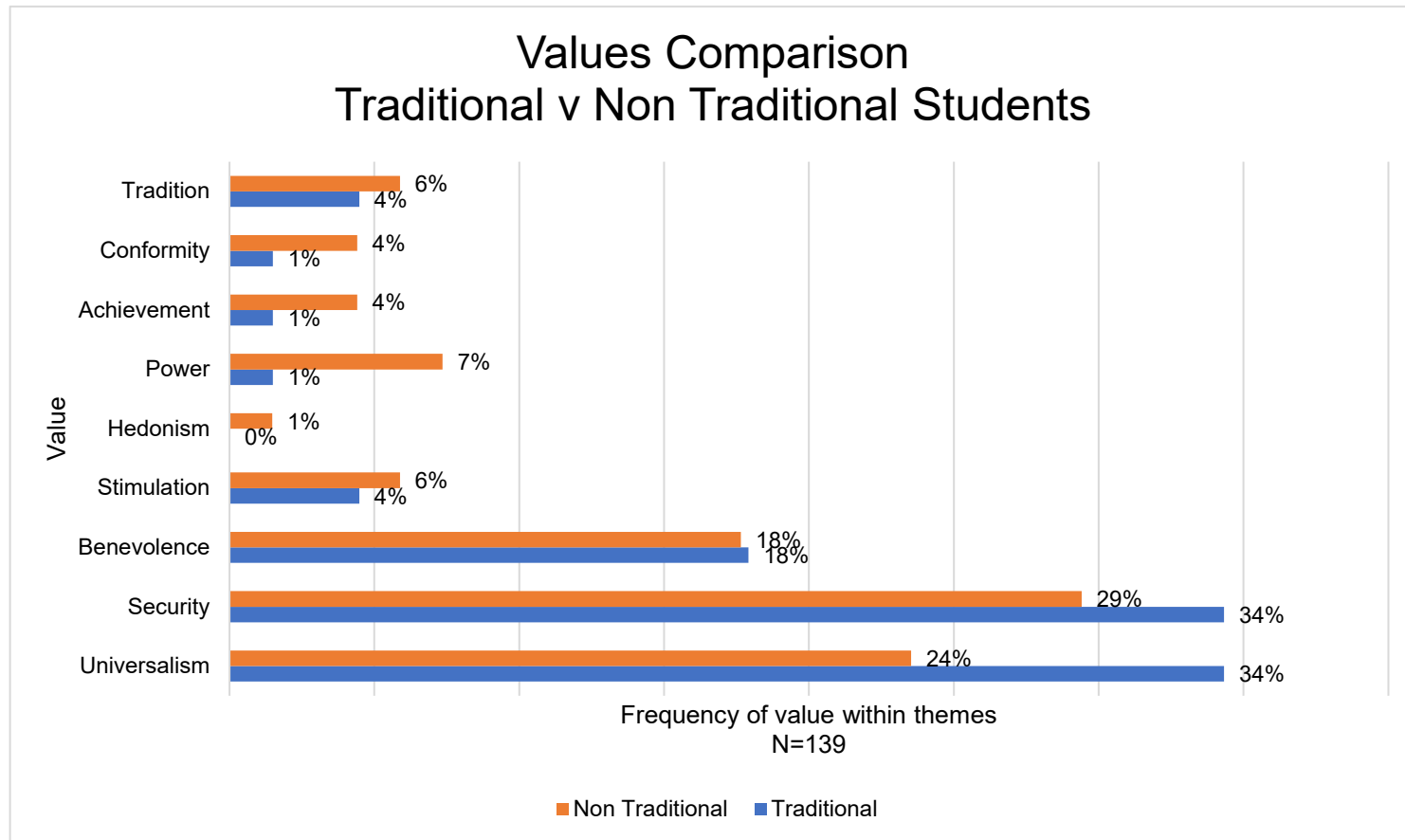


Figure 6-12 Student themes and values

When analysing the ten human values, there were few differences between the two cohorts (as illustrated in Figure 6-12). The frequency of themes relating to the value benevolence was the same for both traditional and non-traditional cohorts, appearing in 18% of themes. The following values were attributed more frequently to non-traditional students than traditional: tradition, 6% and 4%; conformity, 4% and 1%; achievement 4% and 1%; power 7% and 1%; stimulation 6% and 4%. The following values were attributed more frequently to traditional students than non-traditional: security 34% and 29% and universalism, 34% and 24%. The main variations were power and universalism; these two values oppose each other. This analysis reflects that the most dominant value for all students was self-transcendence. Traditional students were less likely to have themes relating to the opposing value of self-enhancement. These findings are congruent with research which states that post the implementation of fees, when the HE market grew, students' university selection became increasingly career-focused (Rolfe, 2002) and that students were more likely to be motivated by career aspirations. This change in motivation was described by Barnett and Di Napoli (2008), who compared students to venture capitalists, "seeking to invest his resources for maximum personal benefit" (p. 43). A career focus is in opposition to the intrinsic motivations traditionally associated with university such as intellectual development, an opportunity to learn and the university experience. This juxtaposition was discussed in Chapter Two which quoted Barnett (1997), who stated, before the introduction of tuition fees, that purpose of higher education was to develop the individual, intellectually and holistically. The statements regarding the different perspectives of traditional and non-traditional students were previously discussed as pertaining to their personal cultural capital. Cultural capital was defined in Chapter One as "the distinctions that develop between individuals and groups due to differences in access to education, family background, occupation, and wealth, giving them advantages and serving as a signifier of an individual's status within a group or society" (Open Education Sociology Dictionary, 2019). This definition was discussed in Chapter Two, with reference to non-traditional

students and their motivation for going to university. The imbalance between universalism and power reflect conflicting motivations between power which is motivated by self-protection and universalism, which are motivated by a social focus.

### **6.11) My Personal Values**

In addition to analysing the values of participants, I took an online test, consisting of forty values-based questions to examine my own values using the website Individual Research Differences (IRD). The IRD website hosts a number of online tests, some for fun such as the Pooh test to see which character matches your personality and some more scientific such as your Jung type based on Myers Briggs research. On their testing page IRD state that many “are based on peer-reviewed scientific research, and all of which are crafted by experts in psychometrics” (IRD website, 2022). The IRD human values test is “based on the Portrait Values Questionnaire developed by Shalom H. Schwartz” (IRD website, 2022) and therefore the results would be comparable to the Holistic Student Fit Model. My motivation for taking the test was to clarify my values and to establish if they were what I thought they were. This resulted in the following illustration:



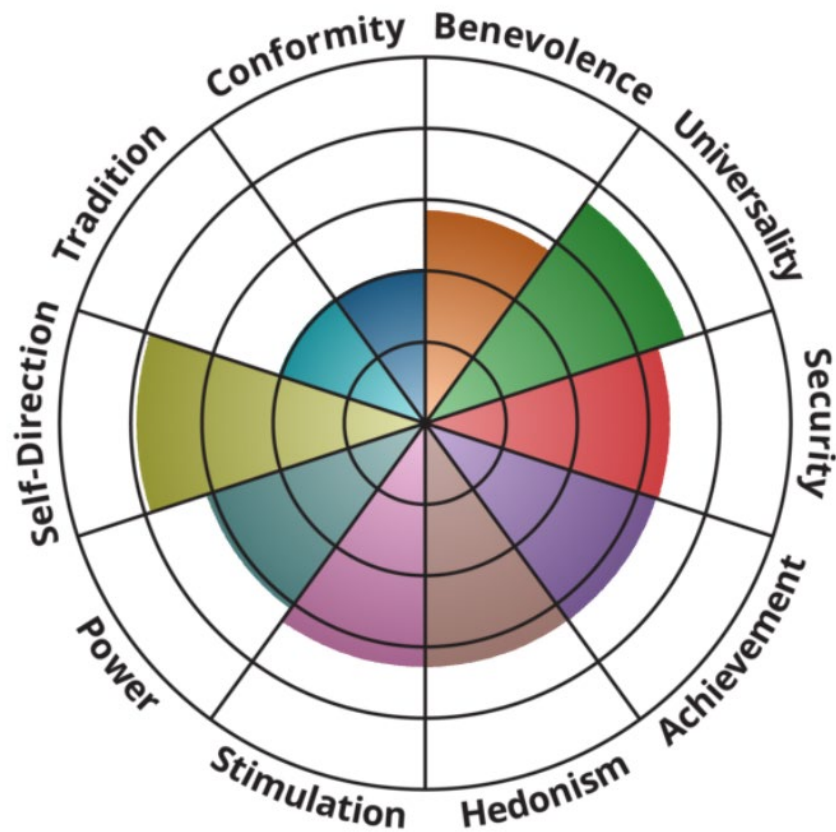


Figure 6-13 Depiction of my values

From Individual Research Differences, 2022

This illustration indicates that my two strongest values are self-direction and universalism, which the website define as follows:

Table 6-7 Definition of my strongest values

<b>Self-direction</b>	Self-direction is the need for independent thought and action in choosing, creating and exploring the individual's own life and environment. This value is derived by the innate need for mastery as well as the interpersonal demand for autonomy. Self-direction values often oppose conformity, security and tradition values.
<b>Universality</b>	Universality measures the need for understanding, appreciation, and tolerance among all the peoples of the world, as well as the need for the welfare and protection of nature. Universality may also be expressed as concern for the weak and those in the minority. Universality sometimes contrasts with the in-group focus of benevolence.

These values are within the higher-order values of openness to change and self-transcendence and are in opposition to the values of power and security. During

the introduction to this thesis, I explained my research philosophy and detailed my own social background and my motivation for completing this body of work. I stated:

'I am also driven by my values of integrity, honesty and fairness and I believe potential students should be provided with all the tools available to make an informed decision on where they choose to study. This is wider than just the course, type of assessment and employment statistics. I believe students should be given the information to be able to understand the culture of the institution in order to decide whether it is the right place for them so they can achieve their desired outcome and be satisfied'.

This statement is supported by the values chart which demonstrates my desire for independence alongside fairness, and the welfare and support for others.

My value profile also reflects the similarity between my own personal values and those of St Mary's University where I am both a student and where I have been a member of staff since 2006. The correspondence between both sets of values are likely to be why I have been employed in various roles, but at the same institution for sixteen years. The area of difference between my personal values and those of the institution are in the value of tradition, my least dominant. Upon reflection, this is an area where I have experienced conflict. I do feel uncomfortable when prayers are held at the start of a meeting, when events with a Catholic theme are afforded greater attention than others and mixed messaging relating to the LGBTQ+ community. For example, I have observed that a book launch with a Catholic theme is more likely to be attended by senior staff than a book launch relating to a sporting theme. Another example relates to public events. The university is unlikely to be associated with public events relating to the LGBTQ+ community or to fly the rainbow flag during Pride Week due to the Catholic ethos. In my opinion, this suggests a conflict between the rhetoric and the reality of St Mary's value of inclusivity. The institution is currently working towards Athena Swan accreditation to address gender inequalities and the Race Equality Charter to address racial inequalities (St Mary's, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 2022b).

## **6.12) Conclusion**

This chapter has given a detailed discussion regarding the creation of my Holistic Student Fit Model utilising the themes arising from Phases Two and Three. It then gave examples of how the Model could be applied.

The data from the three phases of enquiry making up this body of research have consistently triangulated the findings relating to core physical requirements and social opportunities. This research has concluded that when students study within an environment exhibiting values that resonate with their own, they were more likely to be satisfied. The triangulation of the data ensured that the results were academically rigorous. Therefore, the creation of the HSFM has added to the body of research regarding student/institution fit, particularly in relation to personal values and those of the institution. The Model has corroborated the differing motivators for non-traditional students when compared to traditional students and the environment required for students to achieve a sense of belonging.

The next chapter offers a conclusion to this thesis. Chapter Seven discusses limitations to this research, offers recommendations for the future students of St Mary's University, the institution and the wider sector for using the newly formed model.

# Chapter 7

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1) Introduction

The objective of this thesis was to examine and understand student fit within the context of a faith-based institution; the reasons why students of all faiths and none selected St Mary's, a Catholic institution, as their university of choice and whether students applying to a faith-based university considered 'fitting in' during the application process. This final chapter will consolidate the findings from Chapters Four to Six which relate to the three complementary phases of enquiry completed for this research. Together, the three phases have answered the research question, the findings of which will be summarised within this chapter. In addition to detailing the contribution this study has made to research in the field of student/institution fit, this chapter offers recommendations for St Mary's University, potential students and the wider sector.

In summary, the three phases of enquiry were as follows: Phase One was a longitudinal quantitative study which collected data to establish why students chose to attend St Mary's University. Phase One aimed to ascertain whether students' reasons for attending St Mary's ranged according to their personal characteristics. The data were collected over a period of two years utilising the UK Engagement Survey in February 2018, and again in February 2019. A phased approach was adopted which allowed for the quantitative data collected from Phase One, in part to inform the subsequent, qualitative phase addressing any initial findings or suppositions from the preliminary data. This approach allowed for the elaboration of findings, clarification of areas of interest, and added narrative, context and life to the data. Phase Two consisted of twenty-two semi-structured interviews with current first year students, as well as alumni and staff who had studied at St Mary's to explore in greater depth why they chose to study there. Phases Two and Three looked at whether the university's values influenced students' decision making and whether students felt like they fitted in at university. From the data collected in Phases Two and Three, a Holistic Student Fit Model advanced by taking account

of personal values and how these intersected with the three higher education environments and human resource fit models to reflect the outcome of fitting in. Together, these depicted how students' expectations differed according to their personal values. Phase Three utilised the St Mary's 2019/2020 undergraduate prospectus to establish why students chose to study at St Mary's using the photographs as tools to initiate discussion. The photographs were analysed, quantifying the volume and type of images used within the prospectus. The pictures were used to invite discussion during semi-structured interviews. The use of the photographs was adopted to encourage dialogue, particularly around feelings elicited by the scenes, creating an opportunity for the expression of feelings which are often difficult to articulate. Students selected the photographs that resonated with them, explaining why and whether they believed the prospectus was an accurate representation of their student experience, through their own personal lens. Phase Three also asked whether St Mary's imagery depicted a realistic portrayal of the institution to potential students via the prospectus.

Four objectives were established to achieve the research aim. The four contributing objectives were as follows:

#### **7.1.1) Objective One**

***To discover whether students set out to select an institution that had similar values to their own***

Objective one was to discover whether students set out to select a university that had similar institutional values to their own personal values. This objective was achieved during Phases Two and Three which asked students to name St Mary's values, to explain how the values were communicated to them, to offer examples of how the university lived them and how they, as students, had experienced the institution's values personally. The importance of personal and institutional values was discussed in Chapter Two, the literature review, which highlighted that personal values can influence decision making and that institutional values are the core of an organisation's brand and contribute towards staff attitude and behaviour

(Westerman et al, 2013; Schwartz et al, 2012, 1992). Students offered a rich narrative relating to their experiences of St Mary's values.

The data arising from interviews was subject to a thematic analysis and the themes were then utilised in the creation of the Holistic Student Fit Model which was illustrated in Chapter Six.

### **7.1.2) Objective Two**

#### ***To ascertain why students selected St Mary's and whether there was commonality based on student characteristics***

Objective two sought to ascertain why students selected St Mary's and whether there was commonality based on student characteristics. Phase One articulated what students wanted from the university in terms of their needs, requirements and expectations. The data were ranked based upon how frequently a reason was chosen. Phase One established that the pleasant and safe campus environment, geographic location, highly regarded academic reputation and size accounted for 53% of the total responses. The data showed that primarily, students considered physical needs when selecting a university as they are vital to survival which was illustrated when students selected the physical environment most frequently. This conclusion was analogous with Gilbreath et al's (2011) research and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as both established that physiological and safety needs were the most prevalent. The academic environment was the second most frequently chosen category with an average of 28% of respondents selected a reason from within it. Phase One also established the importance of the social environment, noting that 66% of all respondents selected at least one element from within it, which included opportunities to interact with peers, such as team sports and the Students' Union. The social environment was the category with the most elements, a total of seven. It was also the environment with the most areas of statistical significance; these areas were discussed in-depth throughout Chapter Four.

When considering commonality of choice factors based on students' characteristics, the data were evaluated considering gender, faculty, religion, ethnicity, year of study, age, parental education, whether the student had considered leaving university and time spent commuting to university. The data indicated the following:

- Those respondents with a parent educated to degree level rated pleasant/safe campus environment more frequently than students who did not have a parent educated to degree level;
- The pleasant/safe campus environment was of more importance to younger students, becoming less important with age. This claim was confirmed by participants in Phase Two who offered examples of why the campus environment was important to them and offered safety and security whilst being located in a cosmopolitan area;
- More students in the School of Education said they considered "highly regarded academic reputation" than any other school. Participants in Phase Two who were studying Primary Education confirmed this desire by offering examples of why the course reputation and Ofsted ranking was important to them;
- Students aged 19-21 and those within the School of Sport, Health and Applied Sciences considered sports and recreational opportunities more frequently than any other age-group or any other school. Phase Two established the impact the sporting reputation and environment had amongst the wider St Mary's community, not just those on sports related programmes. These findings correspond with research undertaken by British Universities and Colleges Sport, the national governing body for Higher Education Sport in the UK who established that student sport fostered friendships, belonging, wellbeing and inclusion (2020);
- In 2018, no students categorised as having a faith or religion that was not Christian or Catholic considered "enjoyable social life/great Students' Union" compared to an average of 6.5% for the other groups;

- Students who had a parent educated to degree level were more likely to select diversity as a choice factor than those without (22% compared to 8%);
- Students who had thought about leaving were less likely to have selected reasons from three social and lifestyle factors:
  - Great non-academic facilities;
  - Sports and recreational opportunities;
  - Enjoyable social life and great Students' Union.

or to have considered the academic reputation of the institution;

- St Mary's commuting students selected elements from within the social environment more frequently than those who resided in Halls of Residence. Phase Two contradicted this finding as it found that commuting students participated less in organised social events due to caring commitments and the distance travelling home.

In addition to the quantitative data, the data arising from Phase Two captured the students' narratives which confirmed that after their basic physical needs such as security, catering and accommodation were in place, the social environment was their priority as they wanted to feel a sense of belonging and ease in their surroundings for the duration of their degree. Phase Two also concluded that sport was important to students across the institution and not just to those students on a subject related to sports. The reason for this was the opportunity to join a team and be part of the group which in many cases was described as being friends for life or as a family. This connection to others offered students a support network and opportunities to socialise which was highly valued. Phase Two also established that students gave multiple positive examples of their experience at university when their personal values were congruent with the university environment.



### **7.1.3) Objective Three**

**The research questioned why students chose to attend a faith-based institution, irrespective of their own faith stance or worldview.**

Objective three questioned why students chose to attend a faith-based institution, irrespective of their own faith stance or worldview. Phase One established that 10% of students selected the Catholic ethos as a choice factor. Of this, half of the of students identified as being Christian/Catholic; 30% as having another faith including Muslim, Hindu and Sikh students; and 20% of students did not identify with a religion. Participants in Phase Two offered reasons for selecting a Catholic institution. These included those who were of the Catholic faith who valued the ability to attend mass daily alongside opportunities to socialise with likeminded students. This was consistent with research on religious institutions which states that students felt a sense of community and support and that the institution was compassionate and accepting of others (Swezey and Ross, 2012). Some participants were uneasy with elements of the Catholic ethos, citing concerns regarding the lack of sexual health advice and concerns regarding sexuality. Some participants expressed a conflict between St Mary's Catholic values of respect and inclusiveness, and the reconciliation between traditional beliefs, student expectations and attitudes relating to sex and sexuality.

### **7.1.4) Objective Four**

**As the research evolved, an additional aim developed, which was to create a model illustrating personal values and institutional fit.**

Objective four, was to create a model illustrating personal values and institutional fit. This objective was met and the Holistic Student Fit Model was discussed in depth in Chapter Six. The Model starts with the student at its core and their personal values, utilising Schwartz's human values model (1992). The next layer of the Model depicts three HE environments, namely social, academic and physical. These environments were created by Gilbreath et al (2011) who stated that students who fit with their chosen university showed higher levels of wellbeing and satisfaction. The final layer of the Model reflects the outcome of fitting in using terminology from HR including person environment fit, person organisation fit,

person/group fit and person/course fit. The outcome refers to the correlation between the environment and how satisfied the student is.

The Holistic Student Fit Model highlights the importance of corresponding personal and institutional values and student satisfaction, and gives an example of how a gap between these can lead to dissatisfaction. Examples of this were offered in Chapter Six.

The next section offers an overview of the findings relating to each of the seven themes which have arisen as part of this body of research. Recommendations relating to the themes are offered for future students including both St Mary's University and the wider HE sector. Towards the end of the chapter the limitations of the study and thoughts on potential future research are offered.

## **7.2) Summary of the Themes**

Each of the seven themes are now summarised, offering recommendations where relevant.

### **7.2.1) The St Mary's Way, Values and Reputation**

The theme '*The St Mary's Way*', which also includes values and reputation, was difficult to define, articulate and place within the Holistic Student Fit Model as it contains elements relating to the physical, academic and social environments. Participants referred to the '*St Mary's Way*' when they were presenting examples of the institutional culture alongside feelings of nostalgia and their identity as 'Simmies'. The term 'Simmie' was often used in conjunction with the word 'community', suggesting a strong connection between students, the Students' Union, sports teams and societies who refer to themselves collectively as 'Simmies'. Previous chapters have discussed the concept of Habitus as being unconscious and like a community code, shaped by the people you socialise with and made of deeply ingrained characteristics, habits and skills (Reay, 2004). Habitus is relevant to this theme as institutional habitus stems from the features, culture and ethos of an organisation which in turn influences and impacts students

(Reay *et al*, 2010). The term '*The St Mary's Way*' seems to be indicative of St Mary's institutional habitus, distinctive to the institution and its unique selling point.

The ethos and values of an organisation is traditionally the centre of their identity, in other words, their brand (Rutter *et al*, 2017). The '*St Mary's Way*' could equally refer to St Mary's brand. Organisations use their core values as the centre from which to build their brand and a strong brand evokes brand loyalty (Rutter *et al*, 2017). St Mary's has four core values: inclusiveness, generosity of spirit, respect, and excellence (St Mary's, Mission and Purpose, 2019a). Of these values, inclusiveness was the one most frequently highlighted by students. Multiple examples were given, although diversity and inclusiveness had multiple definitions and meanings to different people, for example and not exclusively, mature students viewed diversity through the lens of age, Catholic students through the lens of their religion and BAME students through the lens of their ethnicity.

Students gave positive examples of inclusivity but also negative examples, highlighting the lack of diversity of staff, particularly in senior roles, the lack of female professors and the volume of mature students. Diversity within academia has been studied by Tzovara *et al* (2021) who highlight several areas of discrimination within academia including gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. These researchers state that the lack of diversity in HE has resulted in underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities and pay inequalities. Gender inequality was evidenced within St Mary's 2019 and 2022 Gender Pay Gap Reports which established that more female staff occupy support roles and roles within the lower half of the pay scales than men. When comparing the median hourly pay, St Mary's women earn 86p for every £1 earned by their male colleagues (St Mary's Joint Gender Pay Gap and Ethnicity Pay Gap High Level Report, 2022c). The 2022 report also highlights inequalities between white staff and those from other ethnicities. BAME staff make up 36% of staff in lower paid roles (quartile 1) and only 13% of staff in the highest band (quartile 4) (St Mary's University Joint Gender Pay Gap and Ethnicity Pay Gap High Level Report,

2022c). The pay gap reports confirm the first-hand accounts from students regarding a lack diversity and role models within St Mary's workforce, especially senior staff. During the period of this piece of research, St Mary's has begun addressing inequalities within the workplace, including recruiting a Head of Equality and Inclusion. St Mary's are currently working towards Athena Swan accreditation to address gender inequalities and the Race Equality Charter to address racial inequalities (St Mary's, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 2022b). Had these steps not been taken, a recommendation would have been made to commit to addressing inequalities and to clearly articulate how such disparities will be tackled. In addition to ethnicity and diversity, participants from the LGBTQ+ community expressed their concerns about hiding their sexuality due to the Catholic ethos. Tzovara et al (2021) state that the lack of diversity in HE deters some students from within the LGBTQ+ community from pursuing higher education altogether, something which will be discussed later in 7.2.6.

The marketing team had made efforts to portray the institutional values using imagery but whilst it is easy to depict inclusivity, it was not obvious how to depict respect, excellence or generosity of spirit. It was also a challenge to ensure internal stakeholders were represented fairly and to ensure balance and equity across programmes and faculties. This leads to my first recommendation for the marketing team at St Mary's:

**Recommendation One:**

As the prospectus is one of the principal sources of information for prospective students, this recommendation relates to a strategic approach to photography. Equal weighting should be given to imagery relating to the physical and social environments in marketing materials and branding to evidence the information students want to know and setting their expectations. The pictures should be representative of the student population as a whole, which could include varied cultural events. Such opportunities could be capitalised to promote the institution, reflecting the social opportunities available to students. A balance of photographs

will result in the prospectus and website imagery being culturally familiar to a wide range of students, allowing prospective students to identify themselves within the social environment where they can achieve a sense of belonging. This includes imagery which will be culturally relevant for mature students, ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. It will also set realistic student expectations.

### **7.2.2) Campus Size, Location and Safety**

Phase Two offered many examples of why the size of St Mary's and the campus-based footprint was of importance to students. According to Gilbreath et al (2011), size is an element of the academic environment. However, there was some debate in Chapter Six regarding the context of 'size'. For the purposes of the Holistic Student Fit Model it was finally placed between the academic and physical environments depending on the context, when relating to the size of the campus or class size. The narratives within Phase Two offered examples of why the size of St Mary's was a prominent attraction for some students. When discussing the size of the campus, students referred to feeling safe and secure and these elements combined to offer an environment where students could feel a sense of familiarity which, according to Strayhorn (2019), are the conditions required for students to feel a sense of belonging. An absence of these elements heightens feelings of exclusion and loneliness resulting in students feeling left-out and unwelcome (Strayhorn, 2019). Students liked being located in the green, leafy suburbs which added to the sense of safety and security and that London was only thirty minutes away by train. In addition to easy access into London and good transport links, students felt that the area was cosmopolitan.

Several students from areas such as Dorset, Norfolk and Southampton spoke about their concerns of moving to London and the perceived dangers such as crime but considered Twickenham to be London without the risks. Proximity to London was subject to discussion in Phase Three as pages two and three of the undergraduate prospectus was titled 'the best of both' and highlighted the benefits of St Mary's location. These pages were controversial with some students who felt

that the imagery was misleading and portrayed Twickenham as being closer to London and more cosmopolitan than it actually is. However, others found the London images attractive. The participants from the marketing team spoke of the pressure to depict the proximity to London as this was particularly attractive to an international audience, but also highlighted that the pages and infographic were factually correct in terms of travel times into London.

The students who were from London felt that Strawberry Hill was definitely not London and was less ethnically diverse than their home towns. They spoke about travelling 'out' to Twickenham or Strawberry Hill, meaning out to the suburbs. Some commuting students, those who relied upon public transport to get to university, complained about the transport links, the time spent commuting, the lack of trains to Strawberry Hill, their timetabled classes, whether that be early starts or late finishes, and the cost of travel.

Some of the commuting students spoke of their regret of not living in Halls feeling that they had missed out on social activities and participation in campus life. It was perceived that students living in Halls had more fun. The size and quality of the Students' Union bar were also discussed. The students appreciated the ambiance and collegiality of the bar but felt it lacked in quality and variety of offer. A negative of the compact size of St Mary's was overfamiliarity. Students spoke of gossip and rumour and that everyone knew everyone's business and the speed news would travel.

### **Recommendation Two:**

The theme of size has led to a recommendation for St Mary's senior leaders. They should be aware that St Mary's compact size and single campus offers reassurance to nervous students as they felt it was easy to familiarise themselves with the campus and offered ease of movement between classes and facilities. It also facilitated the thing people struggled to name, the 'je ne sais quoi' some participants described as '*The St Mary's Way*' as it created an environment for students to flourish socially. Utmost consideration should be given to any plans to

grow the size of the university, particularly off site, as it may be counterproductive by destroying one of the main reasons students decided to attend. Should a practical or financial need arise which mandates expansion, consideration should be given to how this can be done whilst retaining '*The St Mary's Way*'. Students should be consulted on how this could be managed to ensure that the attraction and benefits of the current footprint are not lost and expansion is not counterproductive to student recruitment.

### **7.2.3) Support from Peers, Academics and Professional Staff**

Students gave many examples of the support they had received from lecturers and support services including financial, emotional and academic support. In several examples, students stated that if it had not been for the support of their tutor, they would have dropped out of their course. These examples are supported by Robbins (2012) who found that personal and academic support systems increased levels of progression and retention. According to the participants within this study, it was the pastoral support offered for challenges outside of their studies that enabled them to continue. St Mary's have a degree completion rate of 72% (Complete University Guide, 2022) which is the national average (HEPI, 2021). This type and level of support was cited as an example of respect, excellence and generosity of spirit. Several students spoke of the financial support they were offered and selected photographs from the prospectus which depicted students receiving support, instigating further discussion and examples of how the support they had received had exceeded their expectations. Participants spoke of 'open door policies' and others referred to their favourite lecturers by name and cited examples of care and support they had given.

Research into student expectations, previously discussed in the literature review, highlighted students' expectations in terms of contact time and support from academics, particularly in relation to value for money (Bates and Kaye, 2014). There is less research available regarding student expectations of support from professional services who offer financial and emotional support. There is a

growing body of research relating to mental health and wellbeing of university students, promoted by the OfS, championing students' rights and encouraging wide-ranging support for students (OfS website, 2019b). The narrative from students regarding their need for support was clear and congruent with claims from the OfS that students who are living away from home, learning how to balance, studying and working require pastoral support as they mature and develop coping strategies.

Students' desire for support is recognised and student services teams are in place to assist them. More contentious is the support students require from their tutors. This extra workload is not always recognised in workload models. Increased student expectations of contact time and student support was discussed in Chapter Five within the context of value for money following the introduction of tuition fees (Bates and Kaye, 2014).

### **Recommendation Three:**

Recommendation three has arisen from the discord between the provision of support for students from academic staff and the recognition of such support within their workload. To ensure that support is consistently available for students and that its provision is recognised and valued by the institution, it is recommended that support for students is quantified and recognised within academic staff's workload.

#### **7.2.4) Friendships and Social Life**

An enjoyable social life and the Students' Union was the seventh most popular reason for selecting St Mary's. Participation at university-led social events was of relevance to this study due to the body of research detailed in Chapter Two, the literature review, undertaken by Rolfe (2002) which found that commuting students were less likely to participate in social clubs as they retained their existing social scene. A body of research exists regarding the lack of engagement of commuter students and terminology such as 'live at home', 'learn and go' and statements such as 'superficial engagement' (Thomas and Jones, 2017). This research is at odds with the narrative from students who expressed the desire to engage but that



there was a lack of opportunity. The data reflected that approximately a third of St Mary's students commuted to university, 37% lived locally and 30% lived in Halls of Residence. Phase One reflected that there was little variation between the cohorts when selecting an enjoyable social life and the Students' Union as a reason for attending St Mary's. These findings contrast with Rolfe's (2002) research as all students were equally engaged in the social environment regardless of where they lived. The reason for this was unclear but it may be due to changes in behaviour and the range of social activities available within the intervening two decades. However, during Phase Two, commuting students spoke of the difficulties getting back home late at night after social events which was a barrier for their attendance. In some cases, this was a source of disappointment and students believed that they would have had a better experience had they lived in Halls as they perceived it to have been a lost opportunity for fun and friendship. Mature students were critical of Fresher's Fortnight which was highlighted as predominately consisting of evening and late-night events for younger students with a focus on alcohol. Some students were critical of the range of social activities available. Some felt that there was bias towards sporting societies and their social calendars. There was a consensus that the non-alcohol related events were dull, citing opportunities such as playing board games in the Chaplaincy.

From the data, it can be inferred that the students who were thinking of leaving the university had not considered, or were not looking for a social environment or to 'join in' with the community. The lack of participation in social activities could be driven by a variety of reasons such as caring or work commitments and commuting restrictions (Maguire and Morris 2018; Thomas and Jones, 2017; Rolfe, 2002). These scenarios are similar to the conclusions of Rolfe (2002) who found that some students chose to retain their social scene, established prior to university and were not looking to engage with university life in the same way as those residing in the Halls of Residence. This lack of engagement had a negative impact on overall satisfaction and consequently upon student experience.

The narrative from students regarding friendships and their social engagements are congruent with Strayhorn (2019) who states that social support on campus offers students the opportunity to feel connected, valued and cared-for, indicating why friendships are so important to students and why it was such a strong theme.

#### **Recommendation Four:**

The theme relating to friendships and the social environment leads to a fourth recommendation for St Mary's regarding the social environment. It is recommended that St Mary's, in conjunction with the Students' Union and the Chaplaincy, review the social opportunities available for students to ensure that the offer is inclusive for the entire student body. Examples have been offered from students who were engaged with social events, and those who were not, and the barriers they had experienced. The recommendation for an inclusive social calendar champions those students who were not engaged and who believed the social opportunities did not cater for them. Whilst across the sector the student body has evolved significantly since the massification of higher education, university culture and the university environment has not kept pace with the change. In general, university culture, policies and processes, including social events, are designed for typical, traditional university students, 18-21-year-old students who leave home to study and live in a communal environment. Examples of such a culture include a lack of adaptations or flexibility for carers or parents who may require variations to their timetable and alternative social opportunities in order to cope with competing family demands and alcohol-centric events. Currently it is the expectation that non-traditional students should adapt to fit into the existing deep-rooted culture. An example specific to St Mary's social offer is 'bus to club night', a regular event. For a small fee, students are collected from campus, bused to a nightclub and back to campus again at the end of the evening. This arrangement gives an advantage to students living in Halls who are more likely to be traditional students and disadvantages commuting students who are not able to access similar subsidised travel arrangements or convenience meaning they are less likely to participate.

The process of students adapting to the culture of the university is termed 'cultural suicide' by some researchers meaning the student is required to move away from or reject their culture and adapt to a new one in order to belong (Strayhorn, 2019; Lehmann, 2007). Therefore, students could benefit if their social needs were considered which would encourage a greater sense of belonging, which in turn leads to increased student satisfaction and retention. If universities genuinely wish to attract, welcome and retain non-traditional students, their timetable and events schedule should be welcoming to all.

My study suggests that were institutions to offer more inclusive social opportunities, more non-traditional students would participate. Such an offer would include events held during the working day allowing students with caring responsibilities to participate whilst their dependents are catered for and allow commuting students to participate and travel home safely. Students are increasingly health conscious and expect events that are not alcohol-centric as do students from some cultures and religions. Previous events within this category were viewed by some as afterthoughts and as boring, including playing board games, watching films (which is not sociable) and sunrise yoga (which was not accessible for commuters or carers). The Freshers Events in September 2022 included a wider range of events than in previous years including a colour run, bowling, cycling, paddle boarding, a petting zoo and a fun fair, all during the day (St Mary's Students Union, 2022). Increased participation will reduce feelings of isolation or alienation and should reduce attrition by fostering a greater sense of community. There is a void in research into social activities at university either relating to traditional or non-traditional students; this would be an area for future enquiry. Karimi and Matous (2018) found that it is human nature for people to socialise with people similar to themselves. Due to this tendency, these researchers state that "inclusion does not occur naturally unless a supportive environment and opportunities for interaction and integration of diverse groups are provided" (Karimi and Matous, 2018, p. 186), thus reiterating the impetus for St Mary's to foster such events.

The recommendation for an inclusive social calendar could be achieved by a consultation event which asks students for their feedback and input into their needs and expectations whilst at university, and how this would create the scaffolding required to support them during their student journey. Students should be offered the opportunity to participate in wider university working groups and committees which focus upon diversity and the needs of students. Participation such as this could be encouraged by the Students' Union and not be seen as tokenistic, but as an opportunity to drive change.

The theme relating to friendship also elicited examples of the friendship's students had made when participating in sports teams and societies. These friendships were meaningful and were often described as 'friends for life'. This is now discussed further.

#### **7.2.5) Sporting Reputation, Opportunities and Sports Societies**

Sports and recreational opportunities and sporting reputation were the fifth and sixth reasons selected for attending St Mary's University. Unsurprisingly, due to the content of the courses and personal interests, sports and recreational opportunities were selected more frequently by SHAS students but also by males and students aged 19-21. The sporting environment was a key area of discussion due to St Mary's sporting reputation and the use of sporting imagery and successful athletic alumni for marketing purposes.

Students spoke at length about their friendships and antics as members of sports teams and societies. For students who were homesick or struggling with being away from home, the sports teams offered support and a sense of belonging and acted as a surrogate family. The positive benefits of sport, particularly regarding mental health were discussed in Chapter Two, the literature review.

Grasdalsmoen et al (2020) found that students with lower levels of physical activity experienced mental health issues including poor sleep, were at risk of alcohol related disorders, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Certainly, many of the participants within this study spoke verbosely about their positive experiences

with sport in its many guises: elite level, recreational sport and the associated social activities.

When considering St Mary's sporting reputation and the opportunity to feature sporting imagery, it was surprising that sporting images made up only 20% of the total pictures within the prospectus, despite half of photographs depicting social activities. The marketing team were aware of the attraction of St Mary's sporting reputation and sporting opportunities to potential students and the benefit of using it as a marketing tool. However, they were cautious due to historic feedback from other departments who felt sport was being over represented and they believed that it was not relevant to their students who could find a competitive sporting environment off-putting. Although only a third of students from EHSS selected sports and recreational opportunities compared to two thirds of SHAS students, during Phase Two, participants from EHSS articulated the social benefits of the social sporting environment contrary to some departmental beliefs.

#### **Recommendation Five:**

The findings relating to sport raise a fifth recommendation for St Mary's, specifically the marketing team who should take greater advantage of St Mary's sporting reputation. Sport is applicable for everyone and helps to differentiate St Mary's from other HEIs, and it also encourages participation, teamwork and a sense of belonging and benefits physical and mental health. Such an opportunity was created in July 2022 when St Mary's presented celebrity alumni Joe Wickes with an Honorary Doctorate in recognition for his contribution to wellbeing (St Mary's Joe Wickes MBE to be Awarded Honorary Doctorate by St Mary's University, 2022e). Commensurate with the wider, national UKES findings, the St Mary's data from Phase One also reflected that students who participated in sports and societies were less likely to think about leaving university (Neves, 2018). The data indicated that 30% of students who had not considered leaving had selected 'sports and recreational opportunities' as a reason for selecting St Mary's, compared to 16% of those who had considered leaving. One student who was

dissatisfied with her course stated that her membership of a sports team was fundamental to her being resilient enough to complete her degree.

Together, these points demonstrate the 'pull factor' sports has for students and the importance sport plays in a positive environment that offers students the opportunity to support each other and achieve a sense of belonging. The benefit of sports participation is echoed by Strayhorn (2012) who found that students derived a greater sense of belonging by socialising with their peers outside of classes, establishing that the more time students were involved in a club or organisation, the greater their sense of belonging.

#### **7.2.6) Catholic Ethos**

The Catholic ethos, culture and values were a strong, sometimes controversial theme. Some of the students who were interviewed were staunchly Catholic and attended daily mass in the chapel on campus and felt a sense of belonging within their faith. This sense of belonging is corroborated by Strayhorn (2019) who stated that students who are members of religious clubs exhibited a greater sense of belonging than non-members (p. 22). One participant implied he had experienced discrimination in the past for being Catholic so relished what he saw as being a safe and open environment. Other students had concerns regarding their sexuality and felt they needed to hide this to be accepted, or questioned whether St Mary's was the university for them. For these students, it transpired that their concerns were unfounded but it is feasible that other potential students could share their concerns and did not consider applying to St Mary's due to its Catholic ethos. Students also spoke of their disappointment regarding the lack of advice relating to sexual health and that condoms were not available on campus, particularly as students were living away from home for the first time and the volume of social events which included excessive amounts of alcohol. This, they said, provided a perfect storm for unsafe sex and should be addressed. Some were expecting to see an abundance of nuns and priests dressed in robes present on campus and one student was concerned that he would be forced to study theology or religion

despite being on a sports science course. He was very relieved to discover that this was not the case and that there was not a Catholic core curriculum or a requirement to observe any Catholic rituals. Several participants did not know that St Mary's was a Catholic university prior to application or even when they were students. This might surprise some, especially as there is a large chapel is at the centre of the campus, but reasons included associations with their primary school name, street names and in one case a football stadium; Southampton's ground is called 'St Mary's Stadium'. For other students, the lack of association with religion was due to a lack of thought regarding the name.

The marketing team addressed the challenge of how to visually portray St Mary's Catholic ethos and values without deterring those ascribing to other religions or none. At the time of the research, the majority of students attending St Mary's stated they did not have a religion, with 45% identifying as having a belief. This is lower than the national average HE population where 50.2% of students report having a faith (Advance HE, 2020). The proportion of Catholic or Christian students attending St Mary's (35%) was slightly higher than the UK average of 32.9% (HESA, 2021). A representative number of students participated in the research which reflected that there were no statistically significant variances between responses when analysed by religion. Anecdotally, staff believed that students of other religions chose to study at St Mary's due to the Catholic ethos, however this was not reflected in the data as in 2018 no students categorised as 'other religions' selected the Catholic ethos. Evidence reflects that faith-based primary and secondary schools have a high proportion of students who are religious due to their selective admissions criteria. However, this is not replicated at St Mary's. The data is not publicly available to see if this is consistent with other faith-based HEIs in the UK.

#### **Recommendation Six:**

The sixth recommendation relates to St Mary's Catholic history and ethos. It is recommended that St Mary's articulate what a Catholic University is and how this

will influence or impact upon students' experiences. St Mary's mission is a key message within its Vision 2030, stating:

We are an inclusive Catholic university seeking to develop the whole person and empower our community to have a positive impact on the world.

(St Mary's Vision 2030, p. 6)

The literature review gave a definition of faith-based university, offered by Swezey and Ross (2012) which explained the influence religion has on an institution including its: "identity, mission, governance, administration, criteria for faculty hiring, curricula, student life, campus ministries, policies, operations and procedure and so forth" (p. 63). It is recommended that St Mary's articulate their Catholic ethos to reassure students that they offer an environment which welcomes all faiths and none, as well as a non-judgemental environment pertaining to students' sexuality. Students offered examples of how they had perceived a Catholic environment compared to how they experienced it and discussed how this mismatch may deter future students from considering St Mary's as an option. A Google search of 'what is a Catholic university' generates sites which are mainly based in America who are generally less moderate than those in the UK. An example is offered from Ave Maria University which is based in Florida in the USA. This example was listed in second place within the Google search of 'what is a Catholic university?', whilst Wikipedia was first and St Mary's was seventh place:

It is built on rigor and critique, research and teaching, dignity and culture, autonomy and academic freedom, individual rights and the common good. However, if there is something good a secular university does, a Catholic university does it better. Because while both search for truth, the Catholic university already knows the fount of truth – Jesus Christ and His Church. CATHOLIC AS AN INSTITUTION.

This translates to how it sets its priorities, goals, and strategies, in its choice of leaders, officers, staff, and faculty, in its admissions, athletics, and student life. It is Catholic in what it celebrates and commemorates, in what it criticizes and condemns. It is Catholic in its choices of academic programs, student activities, policies, rules, and regulations. It is Catholic publicly and unabashedly, without embarrassment or apology.

(Ave Maria University, 2020)



The excerpt above from Ave Maria University's website highlights the influence their beliefs have in their policies, rules and regulations. It is within these areas that students expressed their concerns regarding tolerance and respect for students' well-being, especially when the students' personal beliefs opposed that of Catholic doctrine. The Ave Maria University website uses capital letters to reinforce its message and uses words such as 'criticise' and 'condemn'. It is rhetoric such as this that generated the narrative from students which was offered in Chapter Five regarding their conflict relating to sexuality and sexual health and their fears of criticism and condemnation. It is for this reason that St Mary's should convey what its Catholic ethos is and how this is experienced to reassure and encourage students of other faiths, or none, to apply.

#### **7.2.7) Affordability**

Mature students spoke about value for money, particularly relating to the amount of contact time they received. Students had expectations of more lecture time than they had received both in terms of the number of hours each week and the number of weeks during the term. They felt reading weeks were worthwhile but should have been in addition to the scheduled teaching and not in replacement of lectures. This is similar to research by Bates and Kaye (2014) who found that participants in their study linked financial investment to contact time in a similar fashion to the mature students within this study. Commuting students spoke of the expenses they incurred including peak-time train fares and parking. This ran alongside the logistics of commuting, particularly students' teaching timetables, including early starts, late finishes and large gaps during the day.

Some students spoke of the quality of food included within their accommodation contract. Whilst some were satisfied, others spoke of the lack of options, navigating the points-based system and timings of meals. Breakfast is not available at the weekend and instead, students are offered brunch. Some students found this to be inflexible and incompatible with their lifestyles and part time jobs. Students complained that they had paid for their meals within their accommodation

contract but the limited opening hours meant that were paying for meals they could not eat.

The increase of student expectations after the introduction of student fees was discussed in the literature review, in addition to literature highlighting an increase in student complaints (Weale, 2020; Jones, 2006). The student narratives above demonstrate the attention students give to costs associated with being a student and the importance of value for money in relation to their degree.

There is no a recommendation relating to the theme of affordability. This is for three reasons. One: tuition fees are set by the Government alongside the regulations relating to repayment via student loans. Therefore, these costs are outside of the university's purview. Second, St Mary's are already mindful of the financial burden students face and offer financial support including a hardship fund. Thirdly, recommendation three has already addressed the support that students expect, the impact this has on academic workloads and ultimately staff budgets.

#### **7.2.8) Academic Achievement, Resources and Opportunities**

When reviewing the prospectus, several students paused at the photographs depicting graduation. For the first-year students the image represented their aspirations whilst for alumni the pictures represented a memorable day celebrating their achievements with family and friends. Alumni spoke of their graduation at Westminster Cathedral in London as it was depicted on page 92 of the undergraduate prospectus and the splendour of the occasion.

Across the two-year data collection period, the academic environment was the second most frequently chosen category with an average of 28% of respondents selecting a reason from within it. Academic reputation was the third most selected reason for selecting St Mary's. Despite this, some students joked about St Mary's not being on the same level as Oxford or Cambridge, stating that St Mary's students were not as smart. Half of EHSS students chose the academic reputation compared to students in SHAS (14%). The reason for this was not clear although St Mary's reputation was important to students on teaching courses. Trainee

teachers also selected images of the library and were complementary about the resources. Students who had not considered leaving were slightly more likely to select the academic reputation of the institution (42%) compared to those who had considered leaving (37%).

Phase One established that 22% of students had considered leaving university with the top three reasons being difficulty balancing commitments, health or family problems and the course not being as expected. The students who had considered leaving were less satisfied with the quality of their course (16%) when compared to those who had not thought about leaving (69%).

#### **Recommendation Seven:**

A seventh recommendation for St Mary's senior leaders and leaders within the Institute of Education relates to the institution's teacher training heritage and reputation. St Mary's should be aware and recognise the influence St Mary's trainee and graduate teachers have on students applying to university. Eighteen percent of participants within this study stated they applied to St Mary's at the suggestion of a teacher who had themselves graduated from St Mary's. This should be acknowledged, encouraged and incentivised to organically promote St Mary's via its advocates: alumni.

### **7.3) Recommendations for St Mary's and Future Students**

Seven recommendations have already been made during this chapter. The following two additional recommendations are offered to prospective students, their parents, guardians and those who offer advice to students regarding transition to higher education and to the institution regarding the culture of St Mary's:

#### **7.3.1) Personal and Institutional Values**

Prospective students need to be aware of their own personal values, what is important to them and why, prior to considering their choice of university. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, researchers such as Schwartz et al (2012) believe that values drive decision-making whilst others such as Verplanken and Holland (2002) state that values unconsciously guide behaviour. A consensus of

opinion is offered by Khoshtaria (2018) as “values define whether people accept or reject, like or dislike, approve or disapprove of particular opinions, beliefs, facts and phenomena” (p. 281). Whilst there is agreement amongst researchers that values impact behaviour, there is a lack of academic research relating to how individuals identify their values. Searches relating to the identification of values result in a raft of self-help books from coaches and gurus. This has led to recommendation number eight:

**Recommendation Eight:**

In order to create a way of allowing students to compare their own values to those of the institution, the eighth recommendation is that students are made aware of their personal values and the impact of them. Values could be established via the use of online quizzes, attending talks, leaflets and via the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum. This understanding will provide students with an additional tool to compare universities to their concept of their ideal university. It will also benefit students as understanding personal values is a transferable skill for the future. An example of a benefit of knowing your values pertains to employment. When seeking employment, knowing and understanding your personal values and the benefits of fit within the workplace are similar to those of within higher education: job satisfaction and motivation.

In addition to one’s values, it would benefit students to consider their culture, acknowledging and challenging it in a positive way. Ways of considering and questioning one’s culture could include questioning whether to commute to university or stay in Halls of Residence; what are the benefits of both options, and would the financial burden outweigh opportunities such as meeting new people, becoming more independent, learning how to cook and budgeting skills.

The data throughout this thesis have indicated the importance of diversity and inclusion to students. Strayhorn (2019) established the importance of diversity within the classroom, highlighting that students have a greater sense of belonging if they socialise with a diverse range of students. In order for social mobility to be

successful and for non-traditional students to attend university and graduate into successful professionals, students need to find a way of retaining their culture and yet achieving a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar environment. Belonging can be achieved through careful consideration of university. Whilst it is true that one size cannot fit all, universities come in all shapes and sizes and students should seek one with which they can identify.

#### **Recommendation Nine:**

The ninth and final recommendation relates to St Mary's institutional values. As discussed in Chapter Two, St Mary's values are indistinct, described by James and Benton (2018) as "abstract and nebulous" (p. 62). It is unclear from my research whether there is ownership of St Mary's values and whether St Mary's consistently lives all four of them equally. It remains unclear whether the values are simply rhetoric, printed in corporate literature and on the wall or reality, tangible and lived by staff and students. Chapter Six also highlighted that St Mary's does not have any values within the category of openness to change, resulting in students who prioritise enjoying life, pleasure, curiosity, creativity, self-indulgence, freedom and independence not fitting as well as students for whom this value is less dominant. Based on the data, I would suggest that a review of St Mary's values would enhance brand clarity. This speculation is driven by the data which reflected that students did not know St Mary's values and the majority of participants could not name them. Therefore, a review exercise will clarify St Mary's brand which in turn will enable the marketing team to portray the culture and environment to prospective students. Questions to be asked during a review include: Does St Mary's live their values? How are they evidenced? Are they authentic? To resolve these questions, it is recommended that the institutional values and culture are made more explicit in order to create a way of allowing students to compare their own values to those of the institution.

One way of creating an opportunity for students, parents and the university to support non-traditional students in their university application process is to have an

event on campus. The event would focus on young people from non-traditional backgrounds in key stages four and five. The university could target and invite alumni who are from a non-traditional background themselves, asking them to deliver short talks focusing on their student journey and their career using the theme of 'People Like Me'. The goal is for the alumni to resonate with the students and inspire them to apply to university. Examples of alumni who could be approached are an Irish Traveller who completed a degree in Physical and Sport Education, a celebrity who completed a degree in sport science who frequently discusses growing up on a council estate in Croydon, and a student with a disability who discusses the challenges they faced with both their mental and physical health whilst studying.

Each talk could address questions such as:

- What did your family think about you going to university?
- How did you afford it?
- Did you commute or stay in Halls?
- Do you think that made a difference to your experience?
- Were there other people like you at university?
- How has having a degree benefited you?

There could be a question and answer session at the end of the talk or an electronic version (eg. Mentimeter) as some students may be too embarrassed to ask questions in a group. The talks could be filmed so they can be used for future school visits, open days and edited for use on social media. As part of the event, talks on student finance including bursaries and the application process could be included.

The next section addresses the contribution this study has made to the field of student/institution fit.

#### **7.4) Importance of the Study and Contribution**

The claim to new knowledge arising from this body of research is the evolution of the Holistic Student Fit Model. Chapter Six discussed the creation of the Model and also the potential application of the Model from the perspective of both the student and the institution. The Model highlighted the importance of compatible personal and institutional values and student fit or misfit. Using the data from Phase Two, the Model was tested by using the transcripts from students alongside the thematic analysis data. In addition, Chapter Six has an example of fit pertaining to students with Catholic values and non-traditional students.

Together, these examples concluded that the most prevalent part of the Model was the social environment which encompassed self-transcendence, openness to change and an element from conservation. For St Mary's students, this portion of the Model represented the important of social interaction. It is also within the social environment where all universities can differentiate themselves and where students' cultural capital is most relevant.

The Model was also examined from the perspective of the university, mapping the university values against the themes and the reasons students chose to study at St Mary's. The data and the Model reflected a gap in values between some students and the values of the institution. This gap highlights the importance of communicating the institutional values to potential students allowing them to decide whether they are similar to their own before they select an institution. When a misfit between institution and student occurs, students are more likely to experience higher levels of stress and feel conflicted. In this situation, dissatisfied students are more likely to formally complain, drop-out and issue lower student satisfaction scores on surveys (Bates and Kaye, 2014; Lehmann, 2007; Alves and Raposo, 2007; Jones, 2006).

The Model highlighted the differing expectations of non-traditional students when compared to traditional students. This analysis reflected that traditional students were slightly more dominant within the higher-order value of self-transcendence

(27%) when compared to non-traditional students (23%). This variance suggests the themes for traditional students were more likely to be categorised under the value of universalism which relate to values such as diversity, harmony and tolerance. This finding was evidenced in Phase One and was detailed in objective two above, which found that students who had a parent educated to degree level were more likely to select diversity as a choice factor than those without. Non-traditional students were more likely to have themes relating to the opposing value of self-enhancement. This value includes achievement and power. The values of self-transcendence and self-enhancement are opposing values, one with a social focus and the other with a personal focus.

### **7.5) Limitations**

A limitation of this research was that it was based at one single institution, using St Mary's University, Twickenham as a case study. Initial enquiries into widening the research to more than one institution were unsuccessful due to the confidential nature of students' personal data. The adoption of a case study format was for practical and ethical reasons, due to the nature and accessibility of student data. Whilst the recommendations are specifically applicable to St Mary's, they are transferrable to other institutions, particularly regarding inclusive social events, communication of their brand, how their values are embedded and how institutions differentiate themselves. Another limitation was the quantitative data set. As previously stated, St Mary's withdrew from the UKES survey so only two years data were available instead of the preferred data set of three years which was in-line with the student life cycle.

A further limitation of this research related to the lack of a definition of 'size' during Phase One. Size could be contextualised as the size of the campus, class size, size of the bar, classroom size, or the Refectory. Within this study, size was allocated to two environments, academic and physical. This is at odds with Gilbreath et al's (2011) research when size referred to school size. Although the data is valid and contextualised within the findings and discussions in Chapters



Four to Six, the research would have been strengthened if in Phase One size was split into two categories: campus size and class size.

### **7.6) Further research**

Based on the data collected for this study, potential for future research in student/environment fit includes replicating the study for postgraduate and international students to see whether the findings would be similar. This would suit a multiple case study design, either holistic or embedded. Additionally, the findings for non-traditional students could be researched in greater depth as the group are not homogenous and differences in requirements could be identified and recommendations gleaned. The findings from such studies allow the potential for further research into the Holistic Student Fit Model, or sections of it, on a wider scale to further understand the impact of personal values upon the environment one finds themselves in and satisfaction. This type of research would help students and institutions further appreciate the impact of personal values and the place they play in university environments.

Further research into the impact of the social environment could address participation levels at social events for non-traditional students. This research could start during Fresher's events and continue throughout the academic year. Events during the daytime could appeal to both traditional students and a diverse student body, allowing for a more cohesive student body. Suggestions could be team building events like escape rooms, laughter or drumming workshops, cook and eat sessions alongside more physical events such as 5-a-side or walking football, lunchtime walks or perhaps lunchtime quizzes, stand-up comedy or computer gaming. Cultural events could be organised to celebrate all types of cultures including different ethnicities, religions, social heritage and sexuality. Were attendance and feedback monitored alongside retention, the institution could see whether a consistent inclusive social calendar impacts student satisfaction. Attendance monitoring should be analysed by factors such as age, ethnicity,

residential or commuting status to see if particular events are more popular, appealing and inclusive than others.

Finally, the difference between fit and belonging could be researched in greater depth due to the overlapping definitions detailed within Chapter One which highlighted that “fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn’t require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are” (Brown, 2010, p. 35). This definition is particularly relevant within HE, as students are challenged to become independent learners, to grow and develop into professionals which requires change.

### **7.7) Implications for this Research**

As highlighted in the introduction, the consequences of students not fitting in are considerable. For universities, the consequences are mainly financial caused by students dropping out and increased complaints or students not even applying. Research undertaken by Bowman and Denson (2014) established that student/institution fit was the second most influential factor leading to students dropping out of their studies, second only to financial difficulties. For students the consequences of not fitting in are wide ranging and can be damaging emotionally and financially, including mental health issues such as stress, depression and anxiety, dropping out and in rare circumstances, suicide. These consequences should be forefront in the minds of universities when promoting their institution to potential students.

Students whose personal values match those of the institution are more likely to engage with the academic and social community, and they are more likely to be satisfied students and engaged alumni. More importantly, for HEIs, they are less likely to drop out, meaning the full payment of three years of tuition fees and are likely to be advocates for the institution which will have a positive impact upon recruitment.

In the current HE environment, supply exceeds demand therefore universities are working hard to recruit students and there is volatility during clearing. Should there come a time in the future, as predicted, where demand for places exceeds supply, it is conceivable that there will be increased competition for places making it harder for students to find a university place that is the best fit and making do with the place they are offered. Such a scramble for places may impact retention longer-term as students accept their second-choice university or gain a place in clearing which was not thoroughly researched, similar to the proverb 'marry in haste, repent at leisure' leading to regret, drop out and other negative experiences such as mental health problems, stress and dissatisfaction.

An additional, positive implication for the institution is a deeper understanding of their values and the power institutional values have on daily interactions. This understanding should contribute to future policy making and institutional decision making regarding everything the university stands for.

#### **7.8) Next steps**

For my professional development, I would like to apply the knowledge I have acquired from this body of work by creating a website to aid potential students in their university deliberations. The website will include lifestyle and cultural considerations alongside information about funding, accommodation and types of university. The website will include a quiz to identify personal values and then the Holistic Student Fit Model to help students think about and shortlist institutions where they are most likely to fit in.

#### **7.9) Conclusion**

As stated in the introduction, undergraduate university students in the UK invest a great deal of time, money and effort in the pursuit of a degree. Their experience at university would be more positive if they were in an environment where they felt a sense of belonging, acceptance and community whilst they were there. This sense of belonging, acceptance and community could be described as fitting in. Pervin and Rubin (1967) stated the elements of fitting in are comparable institution and

student values, social opportunities and quality of staff. These three elements were clearly evidenced throughout this thesis and are key to student satisfaction. Therefore, for students to achieve a sense of fitting in at university, they should aim to attend a university with compatible values to their own. It was evident that most of the participants within this research found St Mary's to be a positive environment where they felt a sense of belonging, whether that was within a team, their Halls of Residence, their programme, their faith or a combination of all of these things. The Holistic Student Fit Model could be championed as a tool for matching personal values to those of the institution to predict student fit and belonging leading to satisfaction and a positive experience. Greater clarity of institutional values will also benefit staff, leaders and the wider St Mary's community by creating and fostering an environment with shared values, leading to a more satisfied, motivated and loyal workforce and academic community.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A, Declaration of Originality

### DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Students are reminded that the work that they submit for assessment must be their own. Please read the following statements and sign and date at the bottom of this form to show that you have complied:

1. This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of your own efforts. Any ideas, data or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to the originator in the text, bibliography or footnotes.
2. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification at this or any other institution.
3. Any chapters that describe the outcomes of joint research should be clearly identified as such with a statement inserted as a footnote on the first page and contributors named. Significant data, images or text resulting from the input of other researchers should be identified as such and attributed to the persons concerned by means of a footnote within the chapter.
4. It is usual to acknowledge the help and guidance of others who have assisted you during your research and preparation of your thesis. Such acknowledgements do not replace or obviate the need for individual attribution as discussed in points 1 and 3.
5. The University reserves the right to submit electronic versions of your draft documents for assessment of plagiarism using electronic detection software such as 'turnitin'. In addition, whether or not drafts have been so assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment.



SIGNED:

.....

Cindy Croucher-Wright

PRINT NAME:.....

DATE:.....18/11/2022.....



# Appendix B, Research Approval

Monika Nangia

Fri 27/10/2017 11:26

To:Cindy Croucher-Wright <cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk>;

Dear Cindy

Yes, I'm happy with that. However, to ensure data protection, I might need you to complete formal procedures, complete a form etc.

I'll get these to you.

Best wishes

Monika

Dr Monika Nangia  
Academic Registrar  
St Mary's University  
Waldegrave Road, Twickenham, London TW1 4SX  
Tel: [+44 \(0\)20 8240 4014](tel:+44(0)2082404014)  
Mob: [+44 \(0\)7525 617927](tel:+44(0)7525617927)  
[www.stmarys.ac.uk](http://www.stmarys.ac.uk)

Permission from the Registrar to request ethical approval to access the student records system.

## **Cindy Croucher-Wright**

---

**From:** Ruth Kelly  
**Sent:** 19 November 2019 11:58  
**To:** Cindy Croucher-Wright  
**Subject:** Permission to undertake research

Dear Cindy,

Following your request, I grant you permission to undertake research into student fit within a faith-based institution using St Mary's as a case study.

Best,

Ruth

Ruth Kelly, Line Manager and Pro-Vice Chancellor

# Appendix C, Application for Ethical Approval 1 – UKESS Survey and Student Interviews



ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Ethics Sub-Committee

Application for Ethical Approval (Research)

This form must be completed by any undergraduate or postgraduate student, or member of staff at St Mary's University, who is undertaking research involving contact with, or observation of, human participants.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students should have the form signed by their supervisor, and forwarded to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. Staff applications should be forwarded directly to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. All supporting documents should be merged into one PDF (in order of the checklist) and clearly entitled with your **Full Name, School, Supervisor**.

Please note that for all undergraduate research projects the supervisor is considered to be the Principal Investigator for the study.

If the proposal has been submitted for approval to an external, properly constituted ethics committee (e.g. NHS Ethics), then please submit a copy of the application and approval letter to the Secretary of the Ethics Sub-Committee. Please note that you will also be required to complete the St Mary's Application for Ethical Approval.

Before completing this form:

- Please refer to the **University's Ethical Guidelines**. As the researcher/supervisor, you are responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in this review.
- Please refer to the Ethical Application System (Three Tiers) information sheet.
- Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions and Commonly Made Mistakes sheet.
- If you are conducting research with children or young people, please ensure that you read the **Guidelines for Conducting Research with Children or Young People**, and answer the below questions with reference to the guidelines.

**Please note:**

**In line with University Academic Regulations the signed completed Ethics Form must be included as an appendix to the final research project.**

If you have any queries when completing this document, please consult your supervisor (for students) or School Ethics Sub-Committee representative (for staff).



**St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London**

### St Mary's Ethics Application Checklist

The checklist below will help you to ensure that all the supporting documents are submitted with your ethics application form. The supporting documents are necessary for the Ethics Sub-Committee to be able to review and approve your application.

Please note, if the appropriate documents are not submitted with the application form then the application will be returned directly to the applicant and may need to be re-submitted at a later date.

Document	Enclosed? (delete as appropriate)		Version
	Yes	Not applicable	No
1. Application Form	Mandatory		
2. Risk Assessment Form		X	
3. Participant Invitation Letter		X	
4. Participant Information Sheet	Mandatory		
5. Participant Consent Form	Mandatory		
6. Parental Consent Form		X	
7. Participant Recruitment Material - e.g. copies of Posters, newspaper adverts, website, emails		X	

8. Letter from host organisation (granting permission to conduct the study on the premises)		X	
9. Research instrument, e.g. validated questionnaire, survey, interview schedule	X		
10. DBS (to be sent separately)		X	
11. Other Research Ethics Committee application (e.g. NHS REC form)		X	
12. Certificates of training (required if storing human tissue)		X	

I can confirm that all relevant documents are included in order of the list and in one PDF document (any DBS check to be sent separately) named in the following format: **Full Name, School, Supervisor.**

Signature of Applicant:



Signature of Supervisor:

*Maria James*

Maria James



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

Ethics Application Form

1) Name of proposer(s)	Cindy Croucher-Wright
2) St Mary's email address	cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk
3) Name of supervisor	Dr Maria James

4) Title of project  Student fit in a faith-based institution – student interviews
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5) School or service	School of Education, Theology and Leadership
----------------------	--

6) Programme (whether undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research)	PhD
7) Type of activity/research (staff/undergraduate student/postgraduate student)	Postgraduate student

8) Confidentiality	
Will all information remain confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 1998?	YES/NO

9) Consent	
Will written informed consent be obtained from all participants/participants' representatives?	YES/NO

10) Pre-approved protocol	No
Has the protocol been approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee under a generic application?	YES/NO/Not applicable Date of approval:

11) Approval from another Ethics Committee	
a) Will the research require approval by an ethics committee external to St Mary's University?	YES/NO/Not applicable
b) Are you working with persons under 18 years of age or vulnerable adults?	YES/ NO

12) Identifiable risks	
a) Is there significant potential for physical or psychological discomfort, harm, stress or burden to participants?	YES/NO
b) Are participants over 65 years of age?	YES/NO
c) Do participants have limited ability to give voluntary consent? This could include cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, persons with a chronic physical or mental condition, or those who live in or are connected to an institutional environment.	YES/NO
d) Are any invasive techniques involved? And/or the collection of body fluids or tissue?	YES/NO
e) Is an extensive degree of exercise or physical exertion involved?	YES/NO
f) Is there manipulation of cognitive or affective human responses which could cause stress or anxiety?	YES/NO
g) Are drugs or other substances (including liquid and food additives) to be administered?	YES/NO
h) Will deception of participants be used in a way which might cause distress, or might reasonably affect their willingness to participate in the research? For example, misleading participants on the purpose of the research, by giving them false information.	YES/NO
i) Will highly personal, intimate or other private and confidential information be sought? For example, sexual preferences.	YES/NO
j) Will payment be made to participants? This can include costs for expenses or time.	YES/NO If yes, please provide details
k) Could the relationship between the researcher/ supervisor and the participant be such that a participant might feel pressurised to take part?	YES/ NO
l) Are you working under the remit of the Human Tissue Act 2004?	YES/ NO

13) Proposed start and completion date
<p>Please indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the study is due to commence.</li> <li>• Timetable for data collection.</li> <li>• The expected date of completion.</li> </ul> <p>Please ensure that your start date is at least 3 weeks after the submission deadline for the Ethics Sub-Committee meeting.</p>
<p>Interviews will commence on an ad-hoc basis once approval has been received and will continue until the completion of the research project (2023).</p>
14) Sponsors/Collaborators
<p>Please give names and details of sponsors or collaborators on the project. This does not include your supervisor(s) or St Mary's University.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsor: An individual or organisation who provides financial resources or some other support for a project.</li> <li>• Collaborator: An individual or organisation who works on the project as a recognised contributor by providing advice, data or another form of support.</li> </ul>
None

15. Other Research Ethics Committee Approval
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please indicate whether additional approval is required or has already been obtained (e.g. the NHS Research Ethics Committee).</li> <li>• Please also note which code of practice / professional body you have consulted for your project.</li> <li>• Whether approval has previously been given for any element of this research by the University Ethics Sub-Committee.</li> </ul>
N/A



## 16. Purpose of the study

In lay language, please provide a brief introduction to the background and rationale for your study. *[100 word limit]*

- Be clear about the concepts / factors / performances you will measure / assess/ observe and (if applicable), the context within which this will be done.
- Please state if there are likely to be any direct benefits, e.g. to participants, other groups or organisations.

The overarching research relates to student fit within a faith-based institution. It considers how a faith-based institution communicates its values to prospective students and whether these values contribute towards students feeling they will fit with the institution. It will try to ascertain why students chose a faith-based institution and the factors they consider when applying.

This application specifically relates to the collection of qualitative data which will add depth to the quantitative data collected. The data will be analysed by a variety of variables including age, gender, school.

## 17. Study Design/Methodology

In lay language, please provide details of:

- a) The design of the study (qualitative/quantitative questionnaires etc.)
- b) The proposed methods of data collection (what you will do, how you will do this and the nature of tests).
- c) You should also include details regarding the requirement of the participant i.e. the extent of their commitment and the length of time they will be required to attend testing.
- d) Please include details of where the testing will take place.
- e) Please state whether the materials/procedures you are using are original, or the intellectual property of a third party. If the materials/procedures are original, please describe any pre-testing you have done or will do to ensure that they are effective.

The university regularly collects data from its students about their student experience. The quantitative data used for this research project will be data that is drawn from a variety of St Mary's surveys. This request is for approval to interview a cross section of students to compliment the statistical data. Interviews will be semi structured and will delve into why students chose to attend St Mary's and whether they considered fitting in. Students who leave St

Mary's prematurely will also be approached to ascertain their reasons and whether it is related to student fit.

The data will be close referenced with student records of achievement.

All data will be de-identified with all names removed. Linking between records will be done using student registration numbers, using the R package. The aim is to analyse the data for trends using the R packages ggplot2 and dplyr.

Interviews will last approx. 60 mins and will take place in a St Mary's venue, either on campus, at the Naylor Library or The Exchange in a quiet, private area.

## 18. Participants

Please mention:

- a) The number of participants you are recruiting and why. For example, because of their specific age or sex.
- b) How they will be recruited and chosen.
- c) The inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- d) For internet studies please clarify how you will verify the age of the participants.
- e) If the research is taking place in a school or organisation then please include their written agreement for the research to be undertaken.

The participants for this research will be all entrants to St Mary's University during the 2017-2023 academic years. Any student below the age of 18 will be omitted from the research.

## 19. Consent

If you have any exclusion criteria, please ensure that your Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet clearly makes participants aware that their data may or may not be used.

- a) Are there any incentives/pressures which may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part? If so, explain and clarify why this needs to be done
- b) Will any of the participants be from any of the following groups?
  - Children under 18
  - Participants with learning disabilities
  - Participants suffering from dementia
  - Other vulnerable groups.

c) If any of the above apply, does the researcher/investigator hold a current DBS certificate? A copy of the DBS must be supplied **separately from** the application.

d) How will consent be obtained? This includes consent from all necessary persons i.e. participants and parents.

a) There is no incentive offered for students to participate.

b) All participants will be over 18 and will be representative of the student body. The sample will not include participants with learning disabilities, dementia or vulnerable groups.

c) The researcher does hold a DBS certificate, however this should not be required for this research.

All data is de-identified and individuals cannot be from the data held.

## 20. Risks and benefits of research/ activity

a) Are there any potential risks or adverse effects (e.g. injury, pain, discomfort, distress, changes to lifestyle) associated with this study? If so please provide details, including information on how these will be minimised.

b) Please explain where the risks / effects may arise from (and why), so that it is clear why the risks / effects will be difficult to completely eliminate or minimise.

c) Does the study involve any invasive procedures? If so, please confirm that the researchers or collaborators have appropriate training and are competent to deliver these procedures. Please note that invasive procedures also include the use of deceptive procedures in order to obtain information.

d) Will individual/group interviews/questionnaires include anything that may be sensitive or upsetting? If so, please clarify why this information is necessary (and if applicable, any prior use of the questionnaire/interview).

e) Please describe how you would deal with any adverse reactions participants might experience. Discuss any adverse reaction that might occur and the actions that will be taken in response by you, your supervisor or some third party (explain why a third party is being used for this purpose).

f) Are there any benefits to the participant or for the organisation taking part in the research (e.g. gain knowledge of their fitness)?

There is no risk to participants and it should be noted that participation in the interview is voluntary. The questions relate to the student's personal experience during their time at university.

Should the student disclose sensitive information during the interview, the researcher will signpost them to support available for students. The researcher will treat all information confidentially.

F - St Mary's will benefit from this research as it will provide a greater understanding of why students choose to enrol at St Mary's. Their responses will be linked to their regnum allowing for analysis by age, religion, course type and over time (in later research with a separate approval request) retention rate, degree classification and overall satisfaction. Crucially, this type of understanding is invaluable for the university, providing the institution with the evidence necessary to help shape future marketing campaigns and brand identity particularly with reference to St Mary's as a "Catholic" University.

It is possible that the research will find that students simply select their chosen university on location, specific course reputation, entry tariff or price. Were this to be the case, there would still be a benefit to the research as it would be possible to analyse these motivators against retention and attainment to see whether there is a correlation or common threads.

Were St Mary's to adopt marketing strategies which clearly communicated its values and what that means to students, then potential students could make an informed decision around student fit, which in turn should lead to increased retention, increased student satisfaction and fewer complaints.

#### 21. Confidentiality, privacy and data protection

a) What steps will be taken to ensure participants' confidentiality?


- Please describe how data, particularly personal information, will be stored (all electronic data must be stored on St Mary's University servers).
- Consider how you will identify participants who request their data be withdrawn, such that you can still maintain the confidentiality of theirs and others' data.

b) *Describe how you will manage data using a data a management plan.*

- *You should show how you plan to store the data securely and select the data that will be made publicly available once the project has ended.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>You should also show how you will take account of the relevant legislation including that relating data protection, freedom of information and intellectual property.</i></li> </ul> <p>c) Who will have access to the data? Please identify all persons who will have access to the data (normally yourself and your supervisor).</p> <p>d) Will the data results include information which may identify people or places?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what information will be identifiable.</li> <li>• Whether the persons or places (e.g. organisations) are aware of this.</li> <li>• Consent forms should state what information will be identifiable and any likely outputs which will use the information e.g. dissertations, theses and any future publications/presentations.</li> </ul>
<p>All data will be anonymised at source and no individual will be identified.</p> <p>Data will be stored and identified by using regnum numbers. Should a student wish to be withdrawn, their data would be identified via their regnum and removed.</p> <p>Data will be password protected and stored securely on the university network for a minimum of 10 years.</p> <p>Participants will be asked to sign a consent form, in order to meet data protection requirements.</p> <p>Access to the data is limited to the researcher and her supervisory team.</p>
<p>22. Feedback to participants</p>
<p>Please give details of how feedback will be given to participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a minimum, it would normally be expected for feedback to be offered to participants in an acceptable format, e.g. a summary of findings appropriately written.</li> <li>• Please state whether you intend to provide feedback to any other individual(s) or organisation(s) and what form this would take.</li> </ul>
<p>The information will be used to directly enhance the student experience. Feedback will be given to the student body through the Students' Union.</p>

The proposer recognises their responsibility in carrying out the project in accordance with the University's Ethical Guidelines and will ensure that any person(s) assisting in the research/ teaching are also bound by these. The Ethics Sub-Committee must be notified of, and approve, any deviation from the information provided on this form.

Signature of Proposer(s) 	Date:  15/1/18
Signature of Supervisor (for student research projects)  <i>Maria James</i>  Maria James	Date:  15/1/18



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

Approval Sheet

Name of applicant:	Cindy Croucher-Wright
Name of supervisor:	Dr Maria James
Programme of study:	PhD
Title of project:	Student Fit in a Faith Based Institution

Supervisors, please complete section 1 or 2. If approved at level 1, please forward a copy of this Approval Sheet to the School Ethics Representative for their records.

SECTION 1
Approved at Level 1
Signature of supervisor (for student applications)..... <i>Maria James</i> .....
Date.....15/1/18.....
SECTION 2
Refer to School Ethics Representative for consideration at Level 2 or Level 3
Signature of supervisor.....
..
Date.....

**SECTION 3**

To be completed by School Ethics Representative

Approved at Level 2

Signature of School Ethics Representative.....

Date.....

**SECTION 4**

To be completed by School Ethics Representative. Level 3 consideration required by the Ethics Sub-Committee (including all staff research involving human participants)

Signature of School Ethics Representative.....

Date.....

Level 3 approval – confirmation will be via correspondence from the Ethics Sub-Committee





St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

## Appendix D, Ethical Approval – Application 1

26 January 2018  
SMEC\_2017/18\_079

**Cindy Croucher-Wright (ETL):** 'Student fit in a faith-based institution – Data collection via UKES questionnaire'

Dear Cindy

**University Ethics Sub-Committee**

Thank you for submitting your ethics application for consideration.

I can confirm that ethical approval to undertake your research is granted by Chair's action.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Conor Gissane'.

Prof Conor Gissane  
Chair, Ethics Sub-Committee

# Appendix E, Application for Ethical Approval 2 – Staff Alumni



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Ethics Sub-Committee

Application for Ethical Approval (Research)

This form must be completed by any undergraduate or postgraduate student, or member of staff at St Mary's University, who is undertaking research involving contact with, or observation of, human participants.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students should have the form signed by their supervisor, and forwarded to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. Staff applications should be forwarded directly to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. All supporting documents should be merged into one PDF (in order of the checklist) and clearly entitled with your **Full Name, School, Supervisor**.

Please note that for all undergraduate research projects the supervisor is considered to be the Principal Investigator for the study.

If the proposal has been submitted for approval to an external, properly constituted ethics committee (e.g. NHS Ethics), then please submit a copy of the application and approval letter to the Secretary of the Ethics Sub-Committee. Please note that you will also be required to complete the St Mary's Application for Ethical Approval.

Before completing this form:

- Please refer to the **University's Ethical Guidelines**. As the researcher/supervisor, you are responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in this review.
- Please refer to the Ethical Application System (Three Tiers) information sheet.
- Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions and Commonly Made Mistakes sheet.
- If you are conducting research with children or young people, please ensure that you read the **Guidelines for Conducting Research with Children or Young People**, and answer the below questions with reference to the guidelines.

**Please note:**

**In line with University Academic Regulations the signed completed Ethics Form must be included as an appendix to the final research project.**

If you have any queries when completing this document, please consult your supervisor (for students) or School Ethics Sub-Committee representative (for staff).



**St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London**

### St Mary's Ethics Application Checklist

The checklist below will help you to ensure that all the supporting documents are submitted with your ethics application form. The supporting documents are necessary for the Ethics Sub-Committee to be able to review and approve your application.

Please note, if the appropriate documents are not submitted with the application form then the application will be returned directly to the applicant and may need to be re-submitted at a later date.

Document	Enclosed? (delete as appropriate)		Version
	Yes	Not applicable	No
1. Application Form	Mandatory		
2. Risk Assessment Form		X	
3. Participant Invitation Letter		X	
4. Participant Information Sheet	Mandatory		
5. Participant Consent Form	Mandatory		
6. Parental Consent Form		X	
7. Participant Recruitment Material - e.g. copies of Posters, newspaper adverts, website, emails		X	
8. Letter from host organisation (granting permission to conduct the study on the premises)		X	

9. Research instrument, e.g. validated questionnaire, survey, interview schedule		X	
10. DBS (to be sent separately)		X	
11. Other Research Ethics Committee application (e.g. NHS REC form)		X	
12. Certificates of training (required if storing human tissue)		X	

I can confirm that all relevant documents are included in order of the list and in one PDF document (any DBS check to be sent separately) named in the following format: **Full Name, School, Supervisor.**

Signature of Applicant:



Cindy Croucher-Wright



Signature of Supervisor:



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

Ethics Application Form

1) Name of proposer(s)	Cindy Croucher-Wright
2) St Mary's email address	cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk
3) Name of supervisor	Dr Carla Meijen
4) Title of project Student fit in a faith-based institution – student interviews	
5) School or service	Institution of Education
6) Programme (whether undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research)	PhD
7) Type of activity/research (staff/undergraduate student/postgraduate student)	Postgraduate student
8) Confidentiality	
Will all information remain confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 1998?	YES/NO

9) Consent	
Will written informed consent be obtained from all participants/participants' representatives?	YES/NO

10) Pre-approved protocol	No
Has the protocol been approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee under a generic application?	YES/NO/Not applicable Date of approval:

11) Approval from another Ethics Committee	
a) Will the research require approval by an ethics committee external to St Mary's University?	NO
b) Are you working with persons under 18 years of age or vulnerable adults?	YES/ NO

12) Identifiable risks	
a) Is there significant potential for physical or psychological discomfort, harm, stress or burden to participants?	YES/NO
b) Are participants over 65 years of age?	YES/NO
c) Do participants have limited ability to give voluntary consent? This could include cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, persons with a chronic physical or mental condition, or those who live in or are connected to an institutional environment.	YES/NO
d) Are any invasive techniques involved? And/or the collection of body fluids or tissue?	YES/NO
a) Is an extensive degree of exercise or physical exertion involved?	YES/NO

b) Is there manipulation of cognitive or affective human responses which could cause stress or anxiety?	YES/NO
c) Are drugs or other substances (including liquid and food additives) to be administered?	YES/NO
d) Will deception of participants be used in a way which might cause distress, or might reasonably affect their willingness to participate in the research? For example, misleading participants on the purpose of the research, by giving them false information.	YES/NO
e) Will highly personal, intimate or other private and confidential information be sought? For example, sexual preferences.	YES/NO
m) Will payment be made to participants? This can include costs for expenses or time.	YES/NO If yes, please provide details
n) Could the relationship between the researcher/ supervisor and the participant be such that a participant might feel pressurised to take part?	YES/ NO
o) Are you working under the remit of the Human Tissue Act 2004?	YES/ NO
13) Proposed start and completion date	
<p>Please indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the study is due to commence.</li> <li>• Timetable for data collection.</li> <li>• The expected date of completion.</li> </ul> <p>Please ensure that your start date is at least 3 weeks after the submission deadline for the Ethics Sub-Committee meeting.</p>	
<p>Staff interviews are planned between October 2019 and August 2020. Data analysis will take place following the interviews. I would like to reserve the</p>	

option to re-interview or continue to interview staff until end of the PhD research project (2023).
14)Sponsors/Collaborators
<p>Please give names and details of sponsors or collaborators on the project. This does not include your supervisor(s) or St Mary's University.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsor: An individual or organisation who provides financial resources or some other support for a project.</li> <li>• Collaborator: An individual or organisation who works on the project as a recognised contributor by providing advice, data or another form of support.</li> </ul>
None
15. Other Research Ethics Committee Approval
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please indicate whether additional approval is required or has already been obtained (e.g. the NHS Research Ethics Committee).</li> <li>• Please also note which code of practice / professional body you have consulted for your project.</li> <li>• Whether approval has previously been given for any element of this research by the University Ethics Sub-Committee.</li> </ul>
N/A
16. Purpose of the study
<p>In lay language, please provide a brief introduction to the background and rationale for your study. <i>[100 word limit]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be clear about the concepts / factors / performances you will measure / assess/ observe and (if applicable), the context within which this will be done.</li> </ul>



- Please state if there are likely to be any direct benefits, e.g. to participants, other groups or organisations.

This study is part of a PhD project exploring student fit within a faith-based institution. It considers how a faith-based institution communicates its values to prospective students and whether these values contribute towards students feeling they will fit with the institution. To gain a different perspective I will interview staff who are St Mary's alumni. This study will adopt models from business/HR theory relating to person-organisation/person-environment fit, based on how a person matches their workplace, role and environment. Compatibility includes knowledge, skills and ability but also values and culture. The overlapping student and staff models will be compared.

#### 17. Study Design/Methodology

In lay language, please provide details of:

- The design of the study (qualitative/quantitative questionnaires etc.)
- The proposed methods of data collection (what you will do, how you will do this and the nature of tests).
- You should also include details regarding the requirement of the participant i.e. the extent of their commitment and the length of time they will be required to attend testing.
- Please include details of where the testing will take place.
- Please state whether the materials/procedures you are using are original, or the intellectual property of a third party. If the materials/procedures are original, please describe any pre-testing you have done or will do to ensure that they are effective.

- This study is a qualitative design
- Interviews will be semi-structured using an interview guide that is constructed for the purpose of this study, questions in the interview will cover areas related to pre-university choice and selection, university experience and continue to experiences as an alumni and member of staff.
- Interviews will last approx. 60 mins
- The interviews will take place in a St Mary's venue, either on campus, at the Naylor Library or The Exchange in a quiet, private area.
- An interview guide is developed for the purpose of this study, and the material is original. The interview guide can be found on page 20, [appendix C](#).

#### 18. Participants

Please mention:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f) The number of participants you are recruiting and why. For example, because of their specific age or sex.</li> <li>g) How they will be recruited and chosen.</li> <li>h) The inclusion/exclusion criteria.</li> <li>i) For internet studies please clarify how you will verify the age of the participants.</li> <li>j) If the research is taking place in a school or organisation then please include their written agreement for the research to be undertaken.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) There is no set number of participants, it will depend on how many staff/alumni are willing to participate and when data saturation is reached. Ideally this will be approx. 10 participants.</li> <li>b) A number of staff I have spoken to about my research have already indicated an interest in the PhD research. The main method of recruitment would be word of mouth.</li> <li>c) Any member of staff who have studied and graduated at undergraduate or postgraduate level at St Mary's will meet the criteria of 'alumni'. I will recruit participants who have been employed for a minimum of 6 months.</li> <li>d) Not applicable</li> <li>e) The overall research project (PhD) has been approved by St Mary's. An email/letter stating this has been included in the appendix.</li> </ul>
<p>19. Consent</p>
<p>If you have any exclusion criteria, please ensure that your Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet clearly makes participants aware that their data may or may not be used.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Are there any incentives/pressures which may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part? If so, explain and clarify why this needs to be done</li> <li>b) Will any of the participants be from any of the following groups? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Children under 18</li> <li>➤ Participants with learning disabilities</li> <li>➤ Participants suffering from dementia</li> <li>➤ Other vulnerable groups.</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) If any of the above apply, does the researcher/investigator hold a current DBS certificate? A copy of the DBS must be supplied <b>separately from</b> the application.</li> <li>d) How will consent be obtained? This includes consent from all necessary persons i.e. participants and parents.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) There is no incentive offered for staff to participate. There isn't any pressure to take part either and the participant information sheet explains how to withdraw at any time.</li> <li>b) All participants will be over 18. The sample will not include participants with learning disabilities, dementia or vulnerable groups.</li> <li>c) Not applicable, a DBS is not required.</li> <li>d) Consent is given via the participation form – see <a href="#">appendix A</a></li> </ul>

20. Risks and benefits of research/ activity

- a) Are there any potential risks or adverse effects (e.g. injury, pain, discomfort, distress, changes to lifestyle) associated with this study? If so please provide details, including information on how these will be minimised.
- b) Please explain where the risks / effects may arise from (and why), so that it is clear why the risks / effects will be difficult to completely eliminate or minimise.
- c) Does the study involve any invasive procedures? If so, please confirm that the researchers or collaborators have appropriate training and are competent to deliver these procedures. Please note that invasive procedures also include the use of deceptive procedures in order to obtain information.
- d) Will individual/group interviews/questionnaires include anything that may be sensitive or upsetting? If so, please clarify why this information is necessary (and if applicable, any prior use of the questionnaire/interview).
- e) Please describe how you would deal with any adverse reactions participants might experience. Discuss any adverse reaction that might occur and the actions that will be taken in response by you, your supervisor or some third party (explain why a third party is being used for this purpose).
- f) Are there any benefits to the participant or for the organisation taking part in the research (e.g. gain knowledge of their fitness)?

- a) There is no risk to participants and it should be noted that participation in the interview is voluntary. The questions relate to their experiences and feelings towards the university as a student and as an employee. Any potential discomfort will be avoided by ensuring that interviews take place in a private area and assurance that the research is completely anonymised. Participants do not have to answer questions if they do not want to.
- b) There are no risks to the participants.
- c) N/A
- d) The interview should not be upsetting for the participants. It is semi structured and will be led by the interviewee. Please see the interview schedule on page 20 ([appendix C](#)) for more detail.
- e) It is unlikely that there would be any adverse reaction to the interview questions however were this to occur, I would stop the interview and only continue if the participant were willing to.
- f) St Mary's will benefit from this research as it will provide a greater understanding of why students choose to enrol at St Mary's. Crucially, this type of understanding is invaluable for the university, providing the institution with the evidence necessary to help shape future marketing campaigns and brand identity particularly with reference to St Mary's as a "Catholic" University.  
Were St Mary's to adopt marketing strategies which clearly communicated its values and what that means to students, then potential students could make an informed decision around student fit,

which in turn should lead to increased retention, increased student satisfaction and fewer complaints.

## 21. Confidentiality, privacy and data protection

a) What steps will be taken to ensure participants' confidentiality?

- Please describe how data, particularly personal information, will be stored (all electronic data must be stored on St Mary's University servers).
- Consider how you will identify participants who request their data be withdrawn, such that you can still maintain the confidentiality of theirs and others' data.

b) *Describe how you will manage data using a data management plan.*

- *You should show how you plan to store the data securely and select the data that will be made publically available once the project has ended.*
- *You should also show how you will take account of the relevant legislation including that relating data protection, freedom of information and intellectual property.*

c) Who will have access to the data? Please identify all persons who will have access to the data (normally yourself and your supervisor).

d) Will the data results include information which may identify people or places?

- Explain what information will be identifiable.
- Whether the persons or places (e.g. organisations) are aware of this.
- Consent forms should state what information will be identifiable and any likely outputs which will use the information e.g. dissertations, theses and any future publications/presentations.

a) All data will be anonymised at source by allocating pseudonyms and no individual will be identified by their name or role.

Data will be stored and identified by using pseudonyms. A document which details the person and their pseudonym will be stored securely and password protected. Should a member of staff wish to be withdrawn, their data will be removed. Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form. See [Appendix A](#) for details.



b) As detailed above, data is anonymised and securely stored. The raw data will not be shared and GDPR regulations are adhered to. The summary data will be available at the end of the project (which does not include any identifying data).

c) Access to the data is limited to the researcher and her supervisory team.

d) As stated in a) above, all data will be anonymised and participants will be allocated pseudonyms.

22. Feedback to participants
<p>Please give details of how feedback will be given to participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a minimum, it would normally be expected for feedback to be offered to participants in an acceptable to format, e.g. a summary of findings appropriately written.</li> <li>• Please state whether you intend to provide feedback to any other individual(s) or organisation(s) and what form this would take.</li> </ul>
<p>The information will be used to directly enhance the student experience. Feedback will be given to the student body through the Students' Union and will be provided to other participants (staff/alumni) electronically at the end of the study.</p>

The proposer recognises their responsibility in carrying out the project in accordance with the University's Ethical Guidelines and will ensure that any person(s) assisting in the research/ teaching are also bound by these. The Ethics Sub-Committee must be notified of, and approve, any deviation from the information provided on this form.

<p>Signature of Proposer(s)</p> 	<p>Date:</p> <p>20/9/19</p>
<p>Signature of Supervisor (for student research projects)</p>  <p>Dr Carla Meijen</p>	<p>Date:</p> <p>20/9/19</p>

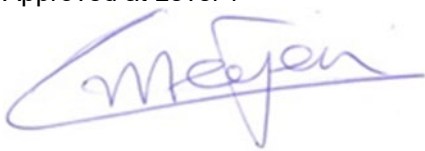


St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

Approval Sheet

Name of applicant:	Cindy Croucher-Wright
Name of supervisor:	Dr Carla Meijen
Programme of study:	PhD
Title of project:	Student Fit in a Faith Based Institution

Supervisors, please complete section 1 or 2. If approved at level 1, please forward a copy of this Approval Sheet to the School Ethics Representative for their records.

<b>SECTION 1</b>
Approved at Level 1

Signature of supervisor (for student applications).....
Date.....29/9/19.....
<b>SECTION 2</b>
Refer to School Ethics Representative for consideration at Level 2 or Level 3

Signature of supervisor.....  
Date.....

**SECTION 3**  
To be completed by School Ethics Representative  
Approved at Level 2  
Signature of School Ethics Representative.....  
Date.....

**SECTION 4**  
To be completed by School Ethics Representative. Level 3 consideration required by the Ethics Sub-Committee (including all staff research involving human participants)  
Signature of School Ethics Representative.....  
Date.....  
Level 3 approval – confirmation will be via correspondence from the Ethics Sub-Committee



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Student fit in a faith-based institution

Main investigator and contact details: Cindy Croucher-Wright; [cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk);

Tel. 020 8320 4284

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I agree to having the interview recorded (audio).
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
4. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
5. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
6. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed.....

Date.....

-----  
If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_





St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study	Student Fit in a Faith Based Institution
Who is undertaking the research?	The research will be conducted by Cindy Croucher-Wright, a PhD student at St Mary's University.

### Purpose of Study

This research focuses upon student fit within the context of a faith-based university. 54% of prospective undergraduate students felt it was important to consider whether they would "fit in" when applying to university. This interview will focus on your unique experience of St Mary's as an alumni and member of staff.

### Invitation to participate

- You are being asked to be in a research study into student fit in a faith-based institution
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of staff at St Mary's University
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study

### What is required of me?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed for approx.. an hour. The interview will take place in a quiet area of the university and will be recorded and transcribed. You will be asked questions about your experience of St Mary's as a student, member of staff, and alumni. It is a semi structured interview and will be led by you, the participant. If you do not want to answer particular questions, you do not have to.

## Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participation are for future generations of students. It will help the university to understand the reasons why students chose St Mary's and how St Mary's can communicate with students and attract students who will fit in and thrive.

## Confidentiality

- This study is anonymous and participants will not be identified.
- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records, including audio, will be kept securely using a password protected file. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.
- The data is only accessible to the researcher and her supervisory team.

## Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, up to the point of data analysis, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material. You can do this by contacting the researcher (see the details on page 2).

## Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher (details on page 2). If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

## Consent

Your signature on the informed consent form indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Contact details:

Cindy Croucher-Wright

E: [cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk)

T: 020 8240 4284

A: St Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Twickenham, TW1 4SX

# Interview Schedule – Staff Alumni

*Appendix C*

Greeting and welcome, explain note taking and recording.

Confirm understanding of the participant information sheet and signed consent form.

Introduction to the study “I’m looking at why students chose to study at St Mary’s”

Job related questions

- What is your role at St Mary’s?
- How long have you been in post?
- How long after graduating did you start your jobs?
- How would you describe St Mary’s as a workplace/employer?

Student related questions

- When did you study at St Mary’s?
- What course did you take?
- Why did you choose to study St Mary’s?
- Do you remember what your expectations were when you started studying?
  - Did your experience match up to your expectations?
- Where did you live when you were studying?
- Did you join any clubs or societies?

General questions

- How would you describe St Mary’s to other people?
  - The culture?
  - The values?
- Would you recommend St Mary’s to others?
- Do you feel like you fit in at St Mary’s? Why?
- What made you want to stay at St Mary’s after you graduated?

Alumni related questions

- Have you attended any alumni events? Why not or what did you think of the event?
- What does being an alumni mean to you?

Final questions

- Is there anything else you would like to share?

*Appendix D*

Research Authorization

**Cindy Croucher-Wright**

---

**From:** Ruth Kelly  
**Sent:** 19 November 2019 11:58  
**To:** Cindy Croucher-Wright  
**Subject:** Permission to undertake research

Dear Cindy,

Following your request, I grant you permission to undertake research into student fit within a faith-based institution using St Mary's as a case study.

Best,

Ruth

# Appendix F, Ethical Approval – Application Two

① You replied on Wed 06/11/2019 15:26



Mary Mihovilovic  
Sun 03/11/2019 17:59



To: Cindy Croucher-Wright

Dear Cindy,

My apologies for not responding sooner but I have been away across both half term weeks.

I have replied to your email regarding permission to conduct the research at St Mary's. As the Level 1 approval has been given by your tutor do not redo that one. Just this one.

I'm happy to go through this with you if that would be helpful and speed things up. Just let me know what would be most helpful.

Best wishes,

Mary

Dr Mary Mihovilovic, SFHEA  
Programme Director MA in Education

Tel: 020 8240 4332  
St Mary's University  
Waldegrave Road  
Twickenham  
London

## Appendix G, Application for Ethical Approval 3 – Marketing Staff



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY  
Ethics Sub-Committee

Application for Ethical Approval (Research)

This form must be completed by any undergraduate or postgraduate student, or member of staff at St Mary's University, who is undertaking research involving contact with, or observation of, human participants.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students should have the form signed by their supervisor, and forwarded to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. Staff applications should be forwarded directly to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. All supporting documents should be merged into one PDF (in order of the checklist) and clearly entitled with your **Full Name, School, Supervisor**.

Please note that for all undergraduate research projects the supervisor is considered to be the Principal Investigator for the study.

If the proposal has been submitted for approval to an external, properly constituted ethics committee (e.g. NHS Ethics), then please submit a copy of the application and approval letter to the Secretary of the Ethics Sub-Committee. Please note that you will also be required to complete the St Mary's Application for Ethical Approval.

Before completing this form:

- Please refer to the **University's Ethical Guidelines**. As the researcher/supervisor, you are responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in this review.
- Please refer to the Ethical Application System (Three Tiers) information sheet.
- Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions and Commonly Made Mistakes sheet.
- If you are conducting research with children or young people, please ensure that you read the **Guidelines for Conducting Research with Children or Young People**, and answer the below questions with reference to the guidelines.

**Please note:**

**In line with University Academic Regulations the signed completed Ethics Form must be included as an appendix to the final research project.**

**If you have any queries when completing this document, please consult your supervisor (for students) or School Ethics Sub-**

Committee representative (for staff).



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St Mary's Ethics Application Checklist

The checklist below will help you to ensure that all the supporting documents are submitted with your ethics application form. The supporting documents are necessary for the Ethics Sub-Committee to be able to review and approve your application.

Please note, if the appropriate documents are not submitted with the application form then the application will be returned directly to the applicant and may need to be re-submitted at a later date.

Document	Enclosed? (delete as appropriate)		Version
	Yes	Not applicable	No
1. Application Form	Mandatory		
2. Risk Assessment Form		X	
3. Participant Invitation Letter		X	
4. Participant Information Sheet	Mandatory		
5. Participant Consent Form	Mandatory		
6. Parental Consent Form		X	
7. Participant Recruitment Material - e.g. copies of Posters, newspaper adverts, website, emails		X	
8. Letter from host organisation (granting permission to conduct the study on the premises)		X	
9. Research instrument, e.g. validated questionnaire, survey, interview schedule		X	
10. DBS (to be sent separately)		X	

11. Other Research Ethics Committee application (e.g. NHS REC form)		X	
12. Certificates of training (required if storing human tissue)		X	

I can confirm that all relevant documents are included in order of the list and in one PDF document (any DBS check to be sent separately) named in the following format: **Full Name, School, Supervisor.**

Signature of Applicant:



Cindy Croucher-Wright

Signature of Supervisor:







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Ethics Application Form

1) Name of proposer(s)	Cindy Croucher-Wright
2) St Mary's email address	cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk
3) Name of supervisor	Dr Carla Meijen
4) Title of project  Student fit in a faith-based institution – student interviews	
5) School or service	Institute of Education
6) Programme (whether undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research)	PhD
7) Type of activity/research (staff/undergraduate student/postgraduate student)	Postgraduate student
8) Confidentiality	

Will all information remain confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 1998?	YES/ <del>NO</del>
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9) Consent	
Will written informed consent be obtained from all participants/participants' representatives?	YES/ <del>NO</del>

10) Pre-approved protocol	No
Has the protocol been approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee under a generic application?	<del>YES/NO</del> /Not applicable Date of approval:

11) Approval from another Ethics Committee	
a) Will the research require approval by an ethics committee external to St Mary's University?	NO
b) Are you working with persons under 18 years of age or vulnerable adults?	<del>YES</del> / NO

12) Identifiable risks	
a) Is there significant potential for physical or psychological discomfort, harm, stress or burden to participants?	<del>YES</del> /NO
b) Are participants over 65 years of age?	<del>YES</del> /NO
c) Do participants have limited ability to give voluntary consent? This could include cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, persons with a chronic physical or mental condition, or those who live in or are connected to an institutional environment.	<del>YES</del> /NO
d) Are any invasive techniques involved? And/or the collection of body fluids or tissue?	<del>YES</del> /NO

e) Is an extensive degree of exercise or physical exertion involved?	YES/NO
f) Is there manipulation of cognitive or affective human responses which could cause stress or anxiety?	YES/NO
g) Are drugs or other substances (including liquid and food additives) to be administered?	YES/NO
h) Will deception of participants be used in a way which might cause distress, or might reasonably affect their willingness to participate in the research? For example, misleading participants on the purpose of the research, by giving them false information.	YES/NO
i) Will highly personal, intimate or other private and confidential information be sought? For example, sexual preferences.	YES/NO
j) Will payment be made to participants? This can include costs for expenses or time.	YES/NO If yes, please provide details
k) Could the relationship between the researcher/ supervisor and the participant be such that a participant might feel pressurised to take part?	YES/ NO
l) Are you working under the remit of the Human Tissue Act 2004?	YES/ NO
m) Proposed start and completion date	
Please indicate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the study is due to commence.</li> <li>• Timetable for data collection.</li> <li>• The expected date of completion.</li> </ul> Please ensure that your start date is at least 3 weeks after the submission deadline for the Ethics Sub-Committee meeting.	
Staff interviews are planned between October 2019 and August 2020. Data analysis will take place following the interviews. I would like to reserve the	

option to re-interview or continue to interview staff until end of the PhD research project (2023).
14) Sponsors/Collaborators
<p>Please give names and details of sponsors or collaborators on the project. This does not include your supervisor(s) or St Mary's University.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsor: An individual or organisation who provides financial resources or some other support for a project.</li> <li>• Collaborator: An individual or organisation who works on the project as a recognised contributor by providing advice, data or another form of support.</li> </ul>
None
15. Other Research Ethics Committee Approval
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please indicate whether additional approval is required or has already been obtained (e.g. the NHS Research Ethics Committee).</li> <li>• Please also note which code of practice / professional body you have consulted for your project.</li> <li>• Whether approval has previously been given for any element of this research by the University Ethics Sub-Committee.</li> </ul>
N/A
16. Purpose of the study
<p>In lay language, please provide a brief introduction to the background and rationale for your study. <i>[100 word limit]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be clear about the concepts / factors / performances you will measure / assess/ observe and (if applicable), the context within which this will be done.</li> <li>• Please state if there are likely to be any direct benefits, e.g. to participants, other groups or organisations.</li> </ul>
<p>The overarching research relates to student fit within a faith-based institution. It considers how a faith-based institution communicates its values to prospective students and whether these values contribute towards students feeling they will</p>

fit with the institution. It will try to ascertain why students chose a faith-based institution and the factors they consider when applying.

I am requesting ethical approval to interview staff regarding the marketing practices adopted by the university. I am using the imagery within the prospectus during interviews with students and would like to obtain some insight into how the images are selected and why.

#### 17. Study Design/Methodology

In lay language, please provide details of:

- a) The design of the study (qualitative/quantitative questionnaires etc.)
- b) The proposed methods of data collection (what you will do, how you will do this and the nature of tests).
- c) You should also include details regarding the requirement of the participant i.e. the extent of their commitment and the length of time they will be required to attend testing.
- d) Please include details of where the testing will take place.
- e) Please state whether the materials/procedures you are using are original, or the intellectual property of a third party. If the materials/procedures are original, please describe any pre-testing you have done or will do to ensure that they are effective.

- a) This study is a qualitative design
- b) Interviews will be semi-structured using an interview guide ([appendix C](#)) that is constructed for the purpose of this study, questions in the interview will cover areas related to the design of the prospectus, marketing materials and the imagery used by the institution.
- c) Interviews will last approx. 60 mins
- d) The interviews will take place in a St Mary's venue, either on campus, at the Naylor Library or The Exchange in a quiet, private area.
- e) An interview guide is developed for the purpose of this study, and the material is original. The interview guide can be found on page 19 ([appendix C](#)).

#### 18. Participants

Please mention:

- a) The number of participants you are recruiting and why. For example, because of their specific age or sex.
- b) How they will be recruited and chosen.
- c) The inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- d) For internet studies please clarify how you will verify the age of the participants.
- e) If the research is taking place in a school or organisation then please include their written agreement for the research to be undertaken.

- a) There is no set number of participants, it will depend on how many staff are willing to participate. The team is quite small and so there is likely to be 1-3 individuals.
- b) I will approach relevant members of the marketing team and ask them if they are willing to participate.
- c) Relevant job role.
- d) Not applicable
- e) This research has been approved by St Mary's.

19. Consent

If you have any exclusion criteria, please ensure that your Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet clearly makes participants aware that their data may or may not be used.

- a) Are there any incentives/pressures which may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part? If so, explain and clarify why this needs to be done
- b) Will any of the participants be from any of the following groups?
  - Children under 18
  - Participants with learning disabilities
  - Participants suffering from dementia
  - Other vulnerable groups.
- c) If any of the above apply, does the researcher/investigator hold a current DBS certificate? A copy of the DBS must be supplied **separately from** the application.
- d) How will consent be obtained? This includes consent from all necessary persons i.e. participants and parents.

- a) There is no incentive offered for staff to participate. There isn't any pressure to take part either and the participant information sheet explains how to withdraw at any time.
- b) All participants will be over 18. The sample will not include participants with learning disabilities, dementia or vulnerable groups.
- c) N/A
- d) All data is de-identified and individuals cannot be identified from the data held.

20. Risks and benefits of research/ activity

- a) Are there any potential risks or adverse effects (e.g. injury, pain, discomfort, distress, changes to lifestyle) associated with this study? If so please provide details, including information on how these will be minimised.
- b) Please explain where the risks / effects may arise from (and why), so that it is clear why the risks / effects will be difficult to completely eliminate or minimise.
- c) Does the study involve any invasive procedures? If so, please confirm that the researchers or collaborators have appropriate training and are competent to deliver these procedures. Please note that invasive


<p>procedures also include the use of deceptive procedures in order to obtain information.</p> <p>d) Will individual/group interviews/questionnaires include anything that may be sensitive or upsetting? If so, please clarify why this information is necessary (and if applicable, any prior use of the questionnaire/interview).</p> <p>e) Please describe how you would deal with any adverse reactions participants might experience. Discuss any adverse reaction that might occur and the actions that will be taken in response by you, your supervisor or some third party (explain why a third party is being used for this purpose).</p> <p>f) Are there any benefits to the participant or for the organisation taking part in the research (e.g. gain knowledge of their fitness)?</p>
<p>a) There is no risk to participants and it should be noted that participation in the interview is voluntary. The questions relate to why images were chosen. Any discomfort will be avoided by ensuring that interviews take place in a private area. Permission will be requested from the participant to refer to them by their job role, not by name.</p> <p>b) There are no risks to the participants.</p> <p>c) N/A</p> <p>d) The interview should not be upsetting for the participants. It is semi structured and will be led by the interviewee. Please see the interview schedule on page 19 (<a href="#">appendix C</a>) for more detail.</p> <p>e) It is unlikely that there would be any adverse reaction to the interview questions however were this to occur, I would stop the interview and only continue if the participant were willing to.</p> <p>f) St Mary's will benefit from this research as it will provide a greater understanding of why students choose to enrol at St Mary's. Crucially, this type of understanding is invaluable for the university, providing the institution with the evidence necessary to help shape future marketing campaigns and brand identity particularly with reference to St Mary's as a "Catholic" University.</p> <p>Were St Mary's to adopt marketing strategies which clearly communicated its values and what that means to students, then potential students could make an informed decision around student fit, which in turn should lead to increased retention, increased student satisfaction and fewer complaints.</p>
<p>21. Confidentiality, privacy and data protection</p>
<p>a) What steps will be taken to ensure participants' confidentiality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please describe how data, particularly personal information, will be stored (all electronic data must be stored on St Mary's University servers).</li> <li>• Consider how you will identify participants who request their data be withdrawn, such that you can still maintain the confidentiality of theirs and others' data.</li> </ul> <p>b) <i>Describe how you will manage data using a data a management plan.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>You should show how you plan to store the data securely and select the data that will be made publicly available once the project has ended.</i></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>You should also show how you will take account of the relevant legislation including that relating data protection, freedom of information and intellectual property.</i></li> </ul> <p>c) Who will have access to the data? Please identify all persons who will have access to the data (normally yourself and your supervisor).</p> <p>d) Will the data results include information which may identify people or places?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what information will be identifiable.</li> <li>• Whether the persons or places (e.g. organisations) are aware of this.</li> <li>• Consent forms should state what information will be identifiable and any likely outputs which will use the information e.g. dissertations, theses and any future publications/presentations.</li> </ul>
<p>a) All data will be anonymised at source by allocating pseudonyms and no individual will be identified by their name or role.</p> <p>b) Data will be stored and identified by using pseudonyms. A document which details the person and their pseudonym will be stored securely and password protected. Should a member of staff wish to be withdrawn, their data will be removed. Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form.</p> <p>c) Access to the data is limited to the researcher and her supervisory team.</p> <p>d) As stated in a) above, all data will be anonymised and participants will be allocated pseudonyms.</p>
<p>22. Feedback to participants</p>
<p>Please give details of how feedback will be given to participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a minimum, it would normally be expected for feedback to be offered to participants in an acceptable to format, e.g. a summary of findings appropriately written.</li> <li>• Please state whether you intend to provide feedback to any other individual(s) or organisation(s) and what form this would take.</li> </ul>
<p>The information will be used to directly enhance the student experience. Feedback will be given to the student body through the Students' Union and will be provided to other participants (staff/alumni) electronically at the end of the study</p>

The proposer recognises their responsibility in carrying out the project in accordance with the University's Ethical Guidelines and will ensure that any person(s) assisting in the research/ teaching are also bound by these. The Ethics Sub-Committee must be notified of, and approve, any deviation from the information provided on this form.

<p>Signature of Proposer(s)</p> 	<p>Date:</p> <p>12/8/19</p>
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Signature of Supervisor (for student research projects)  Dr Carla Meijen	Date:  20/8/19
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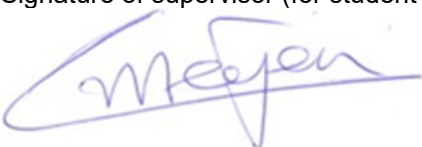


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Approval Sheet

Name of applicant:	Cindy Croucher-Wright
Name of supervisor:	Dr Carla Meijen
Programme of study:	PhD
Title of project:	Student Fit in a Faith Based Institution

Supervisors, please complete section 1 or 2. If approved at level 1, please forward a copy of this Approval Sheet to the School Ethics Representative for their records.

SECTION 1
Approved at Level 1
Signature of supervisor (for student applications).....

Date.....24/09/2019.....

SECTION 2

Refer to School Ethics Representative for consideration at Level 2 or Level 3

Signature of supervisor.....

Date.....

SECTION 3

To be completed by School Ethics Representative

Approved at Level 2

Signature of School Ethics Representative.....

Date.....

SECTION 4

To be completed by School Ethics Representative. Level 3 consideration required by the Ethics Sub-Committee (including all staff research involving human participants)

Signature of School Ethics Representative.....

Date.....

Level 3 approval – confirmation will be via correspondence from the Ethics Sub-Committee



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Student fit in a faith-based institution

Main investigator and contact details: Cindy Croucher-Wright; [cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk);

Tel. 020 8320 4284

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I agree to having the interview recorded (audio).
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
4. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
5. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
6. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed..... Date.....

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study                      Student Fit in a Faith Based Institution

Who is undertaking the research?      The research will be conducted by Cindy Croucher-Wright, a PhD student at St Mary's University.

### Purpose of Study

This research focuses upon student fit within the context of a faith-based university. 54% of prospective undergraduate students felt it was important to consider whether they would "fit in" when applying to university. This interview will focus on the imagery selected to market St Mary's University.

### Invitation to participate

- You are being asked to be in a research study into student fit in a faith-based institution
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of staff at St Mary's University
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study

### What is required of me?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed for approx.. an hour. The interview will take place in a quiet area of the university and will be recorded and transcribed. You will be asked questions about your experience of St Mary's as a student, member of staff and alumni. It is a semi structured interview and will be led by you, the participant. If you do not want to answer particular questions, you do not have to.

### Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participation are for future generations of students. It will help the university to understand the reasons why students chose St Mary's and how St Mary's can communicate with students and attract students who will fit in and thrive.

### Confidentiality

- This study is anonymous and participants will not be identified.

- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records, including audio, will be kept securely using a password protected file. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.
- The data is only accessible to the researcher and her supervisory team.

#### Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, up to the point of data analysis, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material. You can do this by contacting the researcher (see the details on page 2).

#### Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher (details on page 2). If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

#### Consent

Your signature on the consent form indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

#### Contact details:

Cindy Croucher-Wright

E: [cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:cindy.croucher-wright@stmarys.ac.uk)

T: 020 8240 4284

A: St Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Twickenham, TW1 4SX



## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – MARKETING STAFF

Greeting and welcome, explain note taking and recording.

Confirm understanding of the participant information sheet and signed consent form.

Introduction to the study “I’m looking at why students chose to study at St Mary’s”

### Job related questions

- What is your role at St Mary’s?
- Do you select imagery to use for marketing purposes?
- Can you talk me through the process for creating the prospectus?
- How do you decide on which images to use?
- How often do you fresh the image bank?
- What is the process of getting feedback on the images?
  - How do you involve students in this?
- How do you go about representing the student body?
- Do you have anything you would like to add?

### Appendix D

### Research Authorization

#### **Cindy Croucher-Wright**

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**From:** Ruth Kelly  
**Sent:** 19 November 2019 11:58  
**To:** Cindy Croucher-Wright  
**Subject:** Permission to undertake research

Dear Cindy,

Following your request, I grant you permission to undertake research into student fit within a faith-based institution using St Mary’s as a case study.

Best,

Ruth

## Appendix H, Ethical Approval – Application Three



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|

30<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Dear Cindy

I am writing to confirm that your application for ethical approval of your research enquiry has been approved at Level 2.

**Researcher's name:**  
Cindy Croucher-Wright

**Regnum:**  
157577

**Title of project:**  
Student fit in a faith based institution

**Supervisor**  
Dr Carla Meijen

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "M Mihovilović".

**Dr Mary Mihovilović**  
Institute of Education Ethics Representative



# Appendix I, Data from Phase One

## a) Gender

The breakdown of St Mary's university population for the two-year period by gender was as follows:

Table I-1 Gender of St Mary's Undergraduate and Foundation Student Population by year

Year	Total Undergraduate and Foundation Student Population	Breakdown	
		Male	Female
2017/18	3678	44.4%	55.6%
2018/19	3293	45.4%	54.5%

HESA data (2021) shows that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 44% of undergraduate students in HE in the UK were male and 56% were female. Details by university are not available however the results show that St Mary's University is similar to the national average.

The breakdown of respondents to St Mary's UKES Survey by gender is as follows:

Table I-2 St Mary's survey response rate by gender of respondents

Year	No of respondents	Breakdown			
		Male		Female	
2017/18	199	44	22%	155	78%
2018/19	259	75	29%	184	71%

Whilst, by a small margin, more females attend St Marys than males, disproportionally more females responded to the survey than males. This discrepancy and bias are noted when discussing the results, due to the discrete influence it has.

Table I-3 Responses by Gender

GENDER	Total responses	Male	Female	Male	Female	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)	
Affordability	58	14	44	24%	76%	.732	
Catholic Ethos	62	10	52	16%	84%	.057	
Diverse student body	55	13	42	24%	76%	.672	
Enjoyable social life/great student union	108	36	72	33%	67%	.046	a
Geographic Location	240	66	174	28%	73%	.437	
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	73	22	51	30%	70%	.377	
Great support services (eg. careers service)	104	30	74	29%	71%	.449	
Highly regarded academic reputation	202	47	155	23%	77%	.239	
Highly regarded sporting reputation	108	40	68	37%	63%	.003	b
Intellectual climate	52	12	40	23%	77%	.612	
Other (please state)	63	9	54	14%	86%		
Pleasant/safe campus environment	248	62	186	25%	75%	.602	
Size	177	50	127	28%	72%	.380	
Sports and recreational opportunities	115	38	77	33%	67%	.046	c
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	47	15	32	32%	68%	.328	
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>1248</b>				

a)  $p < .005$

b)  $p < .005$

c)  $p < .005$

## b) Ethnicity

The breakdown of the university population for the two-year period by ethnicity was as follows:

Table I-4 St Mary's Student Population by Ethnicity

<b>Year</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>BAME</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	69% (2553)	29% (1063)	2% (62)
<b>2018/19</b>	69% (2260)	29% (965)	2% (68)

HESA data (2021) shows that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 75% of undergraduate students in HE in the UK were white, 7% were black, 11% Asian, 4% were of mixed heritage and 3% were of other or unknown ethnicity.

In comparison, within our UCAS competitor group, the average student population by ethnicity were 51% white, 17% black, 20% Asian, 6% mixed heritage and 6% other or unknown. Within the Cathedrals group 86% of students are white, 4% black, 6% Asian, 3% were of mixed heritage and 2% were of other or unknown ethnicity.

From these data, St Mary's has a higher than average proportion of BAME students nationally and in comparison, to the Cathedrals Group but a lower proportion than the institutions in our UCAS competitor group.

Table I-5 St Mary's UKES Responses by Ethnicity

<b>Year</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>BAME</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	5% (139)	5% (55)	8% (5)
<b>2018/19</b>	7% (168)	8% (80)	16% (11)

Table I-6 Responses by Ethnicity

ETHNICITY	Total responses	White	BAME	DNS	White	BAME	DNS	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)
Affordability	58	35	23	0	60%	40%	0%	.100
Catholic Ethos	62	39	21	2	63%	34%	3%	.712
Diverse student body	55	37	17	1	67%	31%	2%	.878
Enjoyable social life/great student union	108	76	27	5	70%	25%	5%	.244
Geographic Location	240	162	73	5	68%	30%	2%	.577
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	73	52	18	3	71%	25%	4%	.492
Great support services (eg. careers service)	104	67	33	4	64%	32%	4%	.652
Highly regarded academic reputation	202	139	56	7	69%	28%	3%	.586
Highly regarded sporting reputation	108	76	31	1	70%	29%	1%	.360
Intellectual climate	52	33	17	2	63%	33%	4%	.768
Other (please state)	63	41	19	3	65%	30%	5%	
Pleasant/safe campus environment	248	176	63	9	71%	25%	4%	.063
Size	177	120	49	8	68%	28%	5%	.195
Sports and recreational opportunities	115	80	33	2	70%	29%	2%	.668
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	47	34	12	1	72%	26%	2%	.747
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>1167</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>53</b>				

## c) Faculty

The breakdown of the university population for the two-year period by faculty was as follows:

Table I-7 St Mary's Student Population by Faculty

Year	Student Population by Faculty			
	EHSS		SHAS	
2017/18	2464	67%	1214	33%
2018/19	2066	63%	1227	37%

Table I-8 St Mary's UKES Responses by Faculty

Year	Responses by Faculty			
	EHSS		SHAS	
2017/18	152	76%	47	24%
2018/19	146	56%	113	44%

In 2018 the university consisted of four schools, distributed as follows:

Table I-9 St Mary's Four School Structure in 2018

<b>Sport Health and Applied Science (SHAS)</b>	30.9%
<b>School of Education, Training and Leadership (SETL)</b>	23.5%
<b>Management and Social Science (MSS)</b>	23.4%
<b>Arts &amp; Humanities (A&amp;H)</b>	17.6%

Table I-10 Responses by Faculty

FACULTY	Total responses	EHSS	SHAS	EHSS	SHAS	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)	
Affordability	58	36	22	62%	38%	.506	
Catholic Ethos	62	47	15	76%	24%	.078	
Diverse student body	55	43	12	78%	22%	.019	a
Enjoyable social life/great student union	108	71	37	66%	34%	.960	
Geographic Location	240	166	74	69%	31%	.126	
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	73	36	37	49%	51%	.001	b
Great support services (eg. careers service)	104	73	31	70%	30%	.298	
Highly regarded academic reputation	202	150	52	74%	26%	.000	c
Highly regarded sporting reputation	108	33	75	31%	69%	.000	d
Intellectual climate	52	31	21	60%	40%	.307	
Other (please state)	63	44	19	70%	30%		
Pleasant/safe campus environment	248	173	75	70%	30%	.061	
Size	177	115	61	65%	34%	.885	
Sports and recreational opportunities	115	41	74	36%	64%	.000	e
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	47	19	28	40%	60%	.000	f
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>1078</b>	<b>633</b>				

a)  $p < .005$

b)  $p < .001$

c)  $p < .001$

d)  $p < .001$

e)  $p < .001$

f)  $p < .001$

## d) Religion

The breakdown of St Mary's university population for the two-year period by religion was as follows:

Table I-11 St Mary's Student Population by Religion

<b>Year</b>	<b>No Religion/Unknown</b>	<b>Christian/ Catholic</b>	<b>Any other</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	55%	35%	10%
<b>2018/19</b>	54%	36%	10%

Table I-12 St Mary's UKES Responses by Religion

<b>Year</b>	<b>No Religion/Unknown</b>	<b>Christian/ Catholic</b>	<b>Any other</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	54%	40%	12%
<b>2018/19</b>	61%	31%	8%

Table I-13 Responses by Religion

Religion	Total responses	Not Known / None	Christian/ Catholic	Other	Not Known / None	Christian/ Catholic	Other	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)	
Affordability	58	26	27	5	45%	47%	9%	.489	
Catholic Ethos	62	30	30	2	48%	48%	3%	.001	*
Diverse student body	55	25	26	4	45%	47%	7%	.217	
Enjoyable social life/great student union	108	69	36	3	64%	33%	3%	.148	
Geographic Location	240	134	85	21	56%	35%	9%	.252	
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	73	41	27	5	56%	37%	7%	.806	
Great support services (eg. careers service)	104	54	42	8	52%	40%	8%	.723	
Highly regarded academic reputation	202	113	76	13	56%	38%	6%	.865	
Highly regarded sporting reputation	108	57	45	6	53%	42%	6%	.705	
Intellectual climate	52	34	15	3	65%	29%	6%	.832	
Other (please state)	63	38	13	12	60%	21%	19%		
Pleasant/safe campus environment	248	141	92	15	57%	37%	6%	.391	
Size	177	103	61	13	58%	34%	7%	.991	
Sports and recreational opportunities	115	68	38	9	59%	33%	8%	.853	
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	47	29	15	3	62%	32%	6%	.675	
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>122</b>					

\*Disregarded due to small sample size <5



## e) Age

The breakdown of the university population for the two-year period by age was as follows. A mature student is defined by UCAS (2019) as students over the age of 21.

Table I-14 Student Population by Age (February)

<b>Year</b>	<b>18 or Under</b>	<b>19-21</b>	<b>Over 21</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	28% (105)	52% (413)	20% (218)
<b>2018/19</b>	5% (118)	61% (607)	34% (249)

HESA data (2021) shows that during the academic year 2017/18, nationally 46% of undergraduate students in HE in the UK were mature students and 54% were aged 20 and under.

Table I-15 Responses by Age (February)

<b>Year</b>	<b>18 or Under</b>	<b>19-21</b>	<b>Over 21</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	12% (24)	52% (104)	36% (71)
<b>2018/19</b>	12% (32)	60% (156)	27% (71)

Table I-16 Responses by Age

AGE	Total responses	<=18	19-21	Over 25	<=18	19-21	Over 25	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)
Affordability	58	5	30	23	9%	52%	40%	.272
Catholic Ethos	62	8	33	21	13%	53%	34%	.829
Diverse student body	55	7	31	17	13%	56%	31%	.993
Enjoyable social life/great student union	108	13	68	27	12%	63%	25%	.272
Geographic Location	240	29	135	76	12%	56%	32%	.949
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	73	7	46	20	10%	63%	27%	.483
Great support services (eg. careers service)	104	8	63	33	8%	61%	32%	.269
Highly regarded academic reputation	202	30	111	61	15%	55%	30%	.313
Highly regarded sporting reputation	108	12	71	25	11%	66%	23%	.084
Intellectual climate	52	2	35	15	4%	67%	29%	.100
Other (please state)	63	8	31	24	13%	49%	38%	
Pleasant/safe campus environment	248	35	140	73	14%	56%	29%	.366
Size	177	21	103	53	12%	58%	30%	.887
Sports and recreational opportunities	115	11	76	28	10%	66%	24%	.066
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	47	6	25	16	13%	53%	34%	.867
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>512</b>				

## f) Year of Study

The breakdown of St Mary's university population for the two-year period by year of study was as follows:

Table I-17 St Mary's Student Population by Year of Study

<b>Year</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> year</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Year</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Year</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	1% (34)	33% (1224)	34% (1235)	42% (1166)
<b>2018/19</b>	3% (94)	31% (1018)	32% (1058)	33% (1097)

Table I-18 St Mary's UKES Responses by Year of Student

<b>Year</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> year</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Year</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Year</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	0% (0)	44% (87)	49% (98)	7% (14)
<b>2018/19</b>	5% (5)	54% (141)	34% (88)	5% (13)

Table I-19 Responses by Year of Study

YEAR OF STUDY	Total responses	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y1	Y2	Y3	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)	
Affordability	57	34	18	5	60%	32%	9%	.723	
Catholic Ethos	62	28	30	4	45%	48%	6%	.488	
Diverse student body	54	32	21	1	59%	39%	2%	.364	
Enjoyable social life/great student union	106	63	38	5	59%	36%	5%	.403	
Geographic Location	239	130	92	17	54%	38%	7%	.335	
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	72	38	26	8	53%	36%	11%	.709	
Great support services (eg. careers service)	101	49	48	4	49%	48%	4%	.036	*
Highly regarded academic reputation	200	116	72	12	58%	36%	6%	.354	
Highly regarded sporting reputation	107	50	49	8	47%	46%	7%	.305	
Intellectual climate	51	28	21	2	55%	41%	4%	.709	
Other (please state)	62	32	22	8	52%	35%	13%		
Pleasant/safe campus environment	245	141	89	15	58%	36%	6%	.302	
Size	177	95	71	11	54%	40%	6%	.174	
Sports and recreational opportunities	114	52	54	8	46%	47%	7%	.132	
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	47	24	20	3	51%	43%	6%	.763	
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>1694</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>671</b>	<b>111</b>					

\*Disregarded due to small sample size <5

## g) Parental Education

Table I-20 Responses by Parental Education 2018

PARENTAL EDUCATION 2018	Total responses	Yes	No	Don't Know / Refused	Yes	No	Don't Know / Refused	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)	
Affordability	23	10	12	1	43%	52%	4%	.431	
Catholic Ethos	36	8	28	0	22%	78%	0%	.127	
Diverse student body	24	14	10	0	58%	42%	0%	.011	a
Enjoyable social life/great student union	46	19	27	0	41%	59%	0%	.138	
Geographic Location	95	37	57	1	39%	60%	1%	.043	b
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	35	15	18	2	43%	51%	6%	.203	
Great support services (eg. careers service)	47	11	34	1	23%	72%	2%	.297	
Highly regarded academic reputation	91	27	61	3	30%	67%	3%	.764	
Highly regarded sporting reputation	44	14	29	1	32%	66%	2%	.872	
Intellectual climate	20	9	11	0	45%	55%	0%	.329	
Other (please state)	25	7	17	1	28%	68%	4%		
Pleasant/safe campus environment	112	43	68	1	38%	61%	1%	.013	c
Size	72	27	45	0	38%	63%	0%	.081	
Sports and recreational opportunities	46	18	27	2	39%	59%	4%	.530	
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	20	8	12	0	40%	60%	0%	.530	
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>736</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>13</b>					

- a) Disregarded due to small sample size <5
- b) Disregarded due to small sample size <5
- c) Disregarded due to small sample size <5

## h) Considered Leaving

Table I-21 Responses by considering leaving 2019

CONSIDERED LEAVING UNIVERSITY 2019	Total responses	Yes	No	No Response	Yes	No	No Response	Asymp Sig. 2 sided (p value)	
Affordability	35	7	23	5	20%	66%	14%	.395	
Catholic Ethos	26	2	22	2	8%	85%	8%	.030	a
Diverse student body	31	3	25	3	10%	81%	10%	.371	
Enjoyable social life/great student union	62	6	49	7	10%	79%	11%	.046	b
Geographic Location	145	28	105	12	19%	72%	8%	.214	
Great non-academic facilities (eg. track, theatre)	38	2	32	4	5%	84%	11%	.055	
Great support services (eg. careers service)	58	8	42	8	14%	72%	14%	.117	
Highly regarded academic reputation	111	21	76	14	19%	68%	13%	.064	
Highly regarded sporting reputation	64	11	47	6	17%	73%	9%	.618	
Intellectual climate	31	4	24	3	13%	77%	10%	.442	
Other (please state)	38	12	23	3	32%	61%	8%		
Pleasant/safe campus environment	136	25	100	11	18%	74%	8%	.416	
Size	104	22	74	8	21%	71%	8%	.794	
Sports and recreational opportunities	68	9	54	5	13%	79%	7%	.181	
State-of-the-art academic facilities (eg. laboratories)	27	4	21	2	15%	78%	7%	.805	
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>974</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>717</b>	<b>93</b>					

a) Disregarded due to small sample size <5

b)  $p < .005$

## Appendix J, Summary of themes from all interviews with St Mary’s Twickenham students and alumni

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
STU1	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has received support and has a positive relationship with lecturers</li> <li>2. Catholic Ethos – concerns re sexuality. Initial concerns unfounded and has had a positive experience</li> <li>3. Feel there is a unique community, small size makes the campus welcoming and friendly atmosphere on campus</li> <li>4. Concerns re value for money especially contact hours</li> <li>5. Diversity – lack of other mature students</li> </ol>
STU2		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Support services – mental health support was important</li> <li>7. International student paying a higher fee and accommodation but quicker to complete in the UK making it more cost effective</li> <li>8. Catholic Ethos – specially chose a Catholic university. Takes part in daily mass and socialises with Catholic society and support from the Chaplaincy</li> <li>9. Friendships – difficult to make friends at first and friendship group is mainly in the Catholic Society</li> </ol>
STU3		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Critical of Freshers and societies. Does not like clubbing and other activities mundane. Would prefer to go to the pub.</li> <li>11. Lives in Halls of residence but misses pets and cooking</li> <li>12. Catholic Ethos – social life gravitates around Catholic Society and course peers. Not interested in other societies or sports or the gym</li> <li>13. Visited the campus on a school trip and loved the campus. Feels open and friendly.</li> <li>14. Location – easy reach of home and commutes home regularly</li> <li>15. Diversity – in terms of gender (not ethnicity)</li> <li>16. Inclusiveness – in terms of religion.</li> <li>17. Dislikes the Refectory atmosphere and food. Spends money on eating out.</li> </ol>

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
STU4	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	<p>18. Visited the campus for sports events and liked it. Small and everyone knows each other's names.</p> <p>19. Sports reputation and opportunities. In receipt of a sports scholarship. Member of athletics team. Shy and sports helped integration.</p> <p>20. Student support important – well-being and finance. Enquired before attending. Has a mentor.</p> <p>21. Friends in Halls – open door policy</p> <p>22. Small campus preferable – chose SM over Brunel because of size</p>
STU5		<p>23. Had limited life experience and so being campus based felt like a safe option. The size was also a benefit as it felt less intimidating.</p> <p>24. Scared of travelling out of area and not confident travelling into London or catching trains or tubes.</p> <p>25. Member of the football team and described the team as his 'family'.</p> <p>26. Friendships made in Halls and in the football society.</p> <p>27. Struggled to live independently – cleaning, washing, budgeting etc.</p> <p>28. Diversity – thought mix of ages 'strange'</p> <p>29. Course reputation important and one of the main reasons for selecting St Mary's</p> <p>30. Had received support from lecturers and financial support</p> <p>31. Campus based a positive as everything is conveniently located.</p>



Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
STU6	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. Not first choice but did not meet the criteria.</li> <li>33. Support from Lecturers and support services (library)</li> <li>34. SM recommended by PE teacher</li> <li>35. Works to fund study and this impacts on social activities.</li> <li>36. Friendship group mainly Halls – leave doors open, trust each other. Friends for life.</li> <li>37. Diversity – said there is an ACS society</li> <li>38. Sports reputation and opportunities really important. Member of the Cheer Leading Society.</li> <li>39. Keen to study year abroad</li> <li>40. Positives of small campus but negative is gossip</li> </ul>
STU7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>41. Small and friendly campus, feels really welcome. Had friends and relatives who are Simmies. Considered the Ref a social space and provides a good opportunity to meet people</li> <li>42. Made friends for life in Halls and met her boyfriend</li> <li>43. Confident and enjoys social life. Enjoyed Freshers. Is a student ambassador.</li> <li>44. Sports opportunities - member of netball and dance.</li> <li>45. Inclusive – backgrounds</li> <li>46. Support – pastoral care (counselling) and support from tutor.</li> <li>47. Safe environment, feels nurtured.</li> </ul>
STU8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>48. Importance of course reputation in relation to employability</li> <li>49. Influenced by athletic reputation (Mo Farah) although not sporty</li> <li>50. Support Services – financial</li> <li>51. Good resources – library</li> <li>52. Catholic ethos important</li> <li>53. Diversity – knew that SM has more white students and was concerned but feels everyone has been respectful</li> <li>54. Commute expensive and difficult</li> <li>55. Does not engage with social activates or societies</li> <li>56. Supportive lecturers</li> </ul>

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
<b>STU9</b>	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	57. Sporting reputation, facilities and opportunities of importance. Had used the facilities before becoming a student. 58. Location, commutes as has 3 children 59. Diversity – age, gender and ethnicity. Few men on course and mainly younger students. Lack of ethnic diversity
<b>STU10</b>		60. Sporting reputation and position in academic rankings 61. Proximity to London – other international students and transport links 62. Support services – careers 63. Friendly and safe

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
<b>ALM1</b>	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>64. Small social circle in Halls/course. Did not have time to engage in any societies.</li> <li>65. Campus location – close to London but in safe suburbs</li> <li>66. Critical of societies – lack of non-sports options</li> <li>67. Diversity – more ethnic diversity than home location</li> <li>68. Critical of lack of sexual health advice and Catholic ethos</li> <li>69. Supportive staff</li> </ul>
<b>ALM2</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70. Inclusive– varied backgrounds</li> <li>71. Campus location as was commuting and had a family to look after. Like the general atmosphere</li> <li>72. Catholic ethos – founding values and caring</li> <li>73. Sporting reputation and opportunities of importance. Although not actively participating, her children had attended athletics on campus.</li> <li>74. Course reputation important in terms of employability</li> <li>75. Recommended by a teaching colleague</li> <li>76. Regrets not living in Halls and participating in social activities and societies</li> </ul>
<b>ALM3</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>77. Sports reputation and facilities, especially the PEC</li> <li>78. Regrets not living in Halls and was commuting from South London and felt this impacted his experience.</li> <li>79. Worked alongside studying</li> <li>80. Supportive and friendly lecturers</li> <li>81. Size made it more inclusive and fostered community</li> <li>82. Generosity of spirit – library staff helping</li> <li>83. Catholic ethos – similar values and chapel there if needed</li> </ul>

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
<b>ALM4</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>84. Immediate attraction to the campus. Ideal location – Central too overwhelming</li> <li>85. Friendships – Made friends in Halls and college friend joined at the same time. Joined Gaelic football team and was welcomed despite not having played before.</li> <li>86. Support and quality of lecturers. First name basis with lecturers</li> <li>87. Sports opportunities and reputation. Likeminded people.</li> <li>88. Campus, size, safety and atmosphere. Easy to settle in. Couldn't name the je ne sais quoi.</li> <li>89. Catholic ethos, multicultural and tolerant</li> </ul>
<b>ALM5</b>	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>90. Course recommended by PE teacher (originally on JH with sport science)</li> <li>91. Unhappy in Halls</li> <li>92. Felt unsupported by lecturers</li> <li>93. Concerns re Catholic ethos due to sexuality</li> <li>94. Liked the campus - beautiful</li> <li>95. Outsider on course, fitted with hockey team</li> <li>96. Parental pressure to attend university</li> <li>97. Small size a negative</li> </ul>
<b>ALM6</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>98. Felt course lacked academic rigour</li> <li>99. Friendship group in Halls</li> <li>100. Poor value for money including amount of contact time and quality of food</li> <li>101. Found quality of food counterintuitive with sporting environment.</li> <li>102. Critical of drinking culture, especially Freshers fortnight and sports societies</li> </ul>

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
<b>SAL1</b>	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	103. Recommended by a PE teacher 104. Sporting reputation and societies and friendships 105. Lack of ethnic diversity and concerns re student sexuality and the Catholic faith 106. Positive experience of support services and availability of staff 107. Disappointed at recent changes and impact on staff – lack of values 108. Small size both a positive and negative as can be a rumour mill 109. Referred to the ‘St Mary’s Way’ as the culture.
<b>SAL2</b>		110. Lack of diversity, although improved over time 111. Experienced racism 112. Nostalgic vision of SM in the past as a family and unhappy with recent changes particularly senior staff who are less caring and less accessible to staff 113. Critical of SM values 114. Supportive lecturers 115. Positive of support for students’ well-being 116. Change in students over time, more consumeristic
<b>SAL3</b>		117. Sporting reputation and opportunities, especially rugby 118. Sceptical that senior managers live SM’s values 119. Nostalgic vision of SM in the past and unhappy with recent changes 120. Positive experience of the campus, size, atmosphere and community spirit 121. Mixed relationships with colleagues and students 122. Change in students over time, more consumeristic

Table J-1 Summary of themes from all interviews (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Basic Themes
<b>SAL4</b>	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	123. Recommended by a teacher 124. Beautiful campus and campus based 125. Some staff live SM values but others don't 126. Welcoming environment, community feel 127. Small size important 128. Supportive and people know your name 129. Lack of diversity but that is slowly changing
<b>SAL 5</b>		130. Supportive and friendly lecturers – open door policy 131. Small friendly campus, everyone knows each other 132. Critical of inclusive value due to lack of ethnic diversity at senior level 133. Friendships in Halls and sports societies
<b>SAL6</b>		134. Location – close to London but safe in the suburbs 135. Affordability – worked to self-fund 136. Availability and support from lecturers although some elements of favouritism and bullying. Could be cliquey. 137. Friendships made in Halls and stuck within the same friendship group. Did not attend any clubs or societies because of course demands. 138. Positive in terms of diverse in terms of ethnicity and cultures. This was a new experience, having grown up in a predominantly white area. 139. Critical of Catholic ethos regarding sexual health and availability of condoms

## Appendix K, Theme Analysis

Table K-1 Theme analysis

Ref	General Category	Code	Global theme
11	Support from the chaplaincy/Catholic ethos	Catholic	Catholic ethos
12	Membership of the Catholic society	Catholic	
13	Accessibility to the chapel, daily mass	Catholic	
15	Concerns re lack of sexual health education	Sexual Health	
14	Concerns regarding sexuality	Sexuality	
1	Positives of size: everyone knows each, people know each other's names (community, open, friendly, small)	Size	Campus, size, location and safety
2	Negatives of size: propensity of gossip and conflict in small groups	Size	
3	Proximity to London: close enough for social benefits yet in the leafy suburbs	Size/Location	
4	Safe environment / single campus	Facilities	

Table K-1 Theme analysis (cont)

Ref	General Category	Code	Global theme
20	Freshers fortnight, the propensity of events revolving around alcohol	Social	Friendships and Social Life
5	Regret of not living in Halls, missing out on social life and participation in campus life	Commute	
16	Friends made in Halls of residence	Friendship	
17	Friends for life	Friendship	
18	Friends made in sports teams and societies	Friendship	
21	Social opportunities of sports teams and societies	Social/Sport	Sporting reputation, opportunities and sports societies
23	Sports reputation / association with elite sporting alumni and the associated kudos	Sports	
22	Sporting facilities are state-of-the art	Facilities/Sport	
6	Academic Support	Support	Support
7	Pastoral Support	Support	



Table K-1 Theme analysis (cont)

Ref	General Category	Code	Global theme
19	Lack of diversity in societies, mainly sports focused	Values/Diversity	The St Mary's Way, values and reputation
25	Not all staff felt their colleagues lived the St Mary's values	Values/Diversity	
27	Lack of diversity in senior staff (gender and ethnicity)	Values/Diversity	
28	Low numbers of mature students	Values/Diversity	
29	Some students felt the university was diverse whilst others disagreed, mismatch between programmes and the general student population	Values/Diversity	
30	Diversity and inclusivity meant different things to different people including gender, age, religion and ethnicity	Values/Diversity	
31	Recognition of inclusivity with various examples including gender, age, religion, people with a disability and ethnicity. Also referred to in terms of 'joining in', for example societies and residents in Halls	Values/Diversity	
26	A nostalgic view of St Mary's. Changes over time in structure, organisation, student demographics	Change	
24	'St Mary's Way' / culture referred to by members of staff	Culture	
32	Academic Reputation / Recommended by a teacher	Reputation	

Table K-1 Theme analysis (cont)

<b>Ref</b>	<b>General Category</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Global theme</b>
10	Working part time whilst studying	Work	Affordability
33	Employability	Work	
8	Value for money, particularly amount of contact time	Value	
9	Affordability / Cost of commute	Commute	
38	Negatives of living in Halls (incl Ref and food quality)	Value	
34	Study abroad	Other	Not categorised
35	Parental Pressure	Other	
36	Lack of engagement	Other	
37	Resources	Other	
39	2nd choice	Other	

## Appendix L, Thematic Analysis of Photographs

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU2	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	5	Piazza	It's the main area and throughout all my time here I've spent a lot of time in that room there, in the chaplaincy and we people watch through the window so also a lot of time in the chapel where this picture would have been taken from so for me that is what I associate most.
STU3		5	Piazza	That looks edited quite a bit but it still has that feeling of St Mary's. That not been staged or it doesn't look like it.
		5	Ref and outside of the Ref	This evidences daily life on campus and is truly representative.
		27	Picnic benches	Unrealistic, the one outside of Cronin, that one that's never as busy as that.
STU4		4	Hanging out	It's just everyone is enjoying themselves in that picture and getting on. That's something that stands out to me.
		21	All sports	Sport, just any of the sport
		25	Chat on the stairs	That looks like a lecturer and a student just having a conversation, talking about things, making sure everything is ok that stands out to me.

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU4	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	Inside back cover	Graduation hats	Just happiness and the feeling of success.
STU5		2	Aerial shot of campus	The birds eye view of the university, seeing the open space of it going across, seeing that you think that's it, that is the campus and the sports facilities and Halls and everything. That really appeals to me because everything is there at the reach of a hand. Rather than living here and my lectures are all the way over here and you have to leave like an hour.
		5	Ref	I am quite a fussy, not badly fussy but there are other options that are there there's not one food there are a couple of options. People can comment on the standard of the food, it's up to them. Personally, I've always been catered for. I get the most out of what I pay for, the points, it's an excellent system.
		10	Naylor Library	I think that for me, the Naylor Library, has been very good for me this year. Its specially for teaching.
		19	Students' Union	When you have bars and stuff around where which are quite expensive because of the area, it is nice to have a relaxing drink which is cheaper and there is open space with the benches. The main room I think is really good. I think it's really good for what's there. You have football to watch there, I think I'm probably biased, having TVs where they show sport. I just walk up the track 100 meters to the SU to watch it in the SU
		21	All sports photos	Sport at St Mary's is huge. I think the facilities are fantastic for sport and one of the alumni is Sir Mo Farah.

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU6	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	2	Aerial shot of campus	It makes it look very pretty like the area.
		6	Accommodation	I feel like the pictures of the accommodation are quite deceiving. It's just they look more a lot more lively on the pictures than the rooms, like especially the top floor of Old House. It is dark up there and narrow and that's not the third floor.
		15	Study abroad	I always wanted to go to Australia; I only looked at universities who offered a study year abroad
		17	Students outside	You see everyone outside in the sunshine socialising. I think that it's definitely representative of it.
STU7		4	Hanging out	Starbucks and the track I love that. There's not many, when you go to their universities their campus is huge and there's so much going on I think for what you need St Mary's has everything, but it's nice to just have a coffee in Starbucks you can work and hang out really that's nice.
		5	Piazza	I like the piazza I think it's really pretty. I like how the chapel looks over everyone. It's a nice space and when its sunny it's a nice place to sit by Ref.
		5	Ref	I'm not going to lie it isn't Michelin star standard food but it's a great place to catch up and when I make it to breakfast as well it is a really sociable space you always bump into everyone you catch and the food, you get used to it.
	6	D-Mac	I like my Halls because of the location of it, right by the track really pretty, really nice. The rooms are better than I thought they would be. Bigger than my room at home so really good.	

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU7	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	10	Naylor Library	The Naylor library is amazing, I love it, it's obviously for primary ed. I was there the other day, I do use it but I think I should use it more. There are so many great books. Kath the programme director and my tutor said we should use it; we spend all this money on resources and you need to use them. Especially going into schools it's really good.
		19	SU Hall	The SU, I love the SU. I mean, it sort of remind you of a year 6 disco room but you just sort of go, you know everyone in there and it's great in the day. I love the pool table and a couple of drinks and in the evening. The sports socials and freshers was good in there. Obviously, it would be good if it was bigger but it's not where you are but who you are with.
		21	Netball	Sport yes, netball. I love netball so much. It's been so good playing every Wednesday in the BUCS team. I didn't like training.
		23	Rugby	When everyone is on the field and everyone is out all getting together. I love the rugby boys. My boyfriend does football. Everyone's running banter is about the rugby boys, they are so good.
		27	Student ambassador	It's silly things like when we first got here and the student ambassadors show you round, opening doors and that sort of thing, the culture of what the place is like and how people are and what their personal qualities are. I thought that as soon as I got here and fitting in as well.
		Inside back cover	Strawberry Hill House	I love Strawberry Hill house, that is great.

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU8	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	2	Aerial shot of campus	It's really green. I love spaces that are really, really, green, and it's not congested like where I live in the city. There aren't as many green spaces. Coming out to an area like this is peaceful. I really, really like that. I also like that the buildings are not new they have history to them. Like I said before, I like history, the older they are the better.
		10	Naylor Library	I go to this one more, so I'd say this one just because of there are different areas you can go to. There is a quiet section and a group section at the back. There is an area where you can talk and eat and stuff. There is where I usually go to. There is a space I go to with my group. There is space to go to with groups when you have to talk and bring massive posters, for previous, I had to do a massive, massive poster and there wasn't much space and we used the floor and stuff and nobody really cared that we were doing that, we can use that space for it and also there is where I met my... she is called Rosalind. She helps you to improve your essays and stuff. It was the first time I used the library. She helped me to get my first first essay, my first graded essay if that makes sense?
		11	Student Services	It was the place I went to when I talked about finance. I remember it very, very clearly. Because I know where they are now so if anything else happens I can find them. They are useful because at the beginning I didn't think I would have to go to a support area. Now I know how to go.... they treat you well so I am happy to go back there again.
		15	Study Abroad	Studying abroad. I do want to study abroad. I don't think I will be able to but it is definitely something I am looking towards doing. Especially with my degree, I think it is important to see different teaching styles in different countries. I'd like to go to Tokyo. I'd like to go to California and see the teaching styles. It will be very drastic compared to the UK so interesting to see it. I did A level geography so I could go to Iceland. It was absolutely amazing.

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU8	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	18	Chapel	Yeah, the chapel is beautiful. It had a kind of soothing and peaceful aura when you go in. I've never been in there when its packed and I don't know what the service will be like but when you go in there your worries wash away which I think is amazing. I really needed that at times. It's a nice place to go to when you just want to think about things. I do, I really love the chapel.
		21	Mo Farah	When I went on the campus tour they said Mo Farah come here. I was like really and he comes here to jog sometimes but anyway I think he is one of the best positive aspects of this university and it really shows how good the sports programme is at the university because you have so any Olympic athletes who make it. I also like that the successful people always shout out the university, It's not even just Mo Farah. I really do appreciate that. In my mind when I was doing the research I thought if Mo Farah can make it that, not just sports there's actors and stuff and I can make it as well.
		23	Rugby	Not just the rugby, more the sport aspect. When I come in early in the morning I would see the sports people just out there jogging in the morning and it's freezing and I think wow I can't do that. It is really inspiring and I really hope they succeed. You can tell the people who want to make it. The amount of effort they put in. They wake up early, early in the morning and go for a jog. I really respect that. Rugby is popular as well. I haven't seen much football



Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
STU8	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	92	Westminster Graduation	That is a goal for me that is beautiful. I've never been to Westminster.
		Back inside cover	Cheerleaders	Yeah, cheerleading. This is actually way in the beginning of the term. Not that I want to be a cheerleader, I didn't know that St Mary's did cheerleading. I saw someone leaving the campus to go somewhere and I thought we do cheerleading? I just keep looking for them and I found that fascinating. I would love to see them at sports day.
		Back inside cover	Nutrition	So, we did something about that for erm it was this week for design and technology and we talked about nutrition and we made snacks using healthy options with vegetables and stuff and we have to base it on a story and how to make it and swap it with someone else. The ones that they made were disgusting fish for count Dracula and we had to use marmite and Philadelphia and I was so disappointed.
STU9		Front Cover	Students outside	I've never done this (students sitting at back of SHH). I look like part of the old building, Strawberry Hill House. It is very ornate, very nice and really pretty, great. I've never done this... sat outside and talk to people.
		21	Sport compilation	This is always, I like the track, the affinity with the whole athletics thing.
		10	Naylor Library	Yeah. It's wonderful.
		21	Sport compilation	This is resonating, the pitches, sports hall because I've been in sports hall doing badminton. I know him, I've been round the track. This is the picture of, this is how I see St Mary's. From my past experience of St Mary's this is it. See the guys playing and training.

Table L-1 Thematic Analysis of photographs (cont)

Participant	Characteristics	Page Number	Image Description	Reason for choice – verbatim
SAL1	This information has been redacted to ensure the anonymity of participants	5	Piazza	I like that one
		11	Student Services	That is one of our counsellors not a student.
SAL2		5	Piazza	So straight away there are not a lot of different cultured people, but we do have loads of them. I found some! It's like that the heart of the campus isn't it and that's where you see you see exactly that people just walking. This group shot, personally it is very staged because nobody sits outside of the Waldegrave Drawing room. There is only one white guy in it.
SAL3		22 and 23	Rugby	Because it's rugby.
		5	Piazza	Because it's an open green space which has got people in it
		19	Clubbing	I like this as well.
		18	Chapel	It's like an iconic building in the centre of campus. It has a focus.
SAL4		92	Graduation	I say a picture that probably best describes St Mary's best is that one there.
		21	Sport	Yeah because as a student I was very heavily involved in sport.
		Inside back cover	Strawberry Hill House	I would say my favourite one is that one

## Appendix M, Coding of the Themes, Prospectus Imagery

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Piazza</b>	It's the main area and throughout all my time here I've spent a lot of time in that room there, in the chaplaincy and we people watch through the window so also a lot of time in the chapel where this picture would have been taken from so for me that is what I associate most.	Chapel, Chaplaincy, Support	Catholic ethos Support
<b>Piazza</b>	That looks edited quite a bit but it still has that feeling of St Mary's. That not been staged or it doesn't look like it.	Campus spaces and campus life	Campus Life
<b>Ref and outside of the Ref</b>	This evidences daily life on campus and is truly representative.	Campus spaces and campus life	Campus Life
<b>Picnic benches</b>	Unrealistic, the one outside of Cronin, that one that's never as busy as that.	Campus spaces and campus life	Campus Life
<b>Hanging out</b>	It's just everyone is enjoying themselves in that picture and getting on. That's something that stands out to me.	Social opportunities	Social opportunities
<b>All sports</b>	Sport, just any of the sport	Sport	Sport

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Chat on the stairs</b>	That looks like a lecturer and a student just having a conversation, talking about things, making sure everything is ok that stands out to me.	Student support	Support
<b>Graduation hats</b>	Just happiness and the feeling of success.	Success	Academic Achievement
<b>Aerial shot of campus</b>	The birds eye view of the university, seeing the open space of it going across, seeing that you think that's it, that is the campus and the sports facilities and Halls and everything. That really appeals to me because everything is there at the reach of a hand. Rather than living here and my lectures are all the way over here and you have to leave like an hour.	Campus based Green spaces	Campus Life Location
<b>Ref</b>	I am quite a fussy, not badly fussy but there are other options that are there there's not one food there are a couple of options. People can comment on the standard of the food, it's up to them. Personally, I've always been catered for. I get the most out of what I pay for, the points, it's an excellent system.	Value for money	Affordability
<b>Naylor Library</b>	I think that for me, the Naylor Library, has been very good for me this year. Its specially for teaching.	Academic resources	Resources
<b>Students' Union</b>	When you have bars and stuff around where which are quite expensive because of the area, it is nice to have a relaxing drink which is cheaper and there is open space with the benches. The main room I think is really good. I think it's really good for what's there. You have football to watch there, I think I'm probably biased, having TVs where they show sport. I just walk up the track 100 meters to the SU to watch it in the SU	Value for money Social opportunities	Affordability Social opportunities
<b>All sports photos</b>	Sport at St Mary's is huge. I think the facilities are fantastic for sport and one of the alumni is Sir Mo Farah.	Sporting reputation	Sport
<b>Aerial shot of campus</b>	It makes it look very pretty like the area.	Location	Location

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Accommodation</b>	I feel like the pictures of the accommodation are quite deceiving. It's just they look more a lot more lively on the pictures than the rooms, like especially the top floor of Old House. It is dark up there and narrow and that's not the third floor.	Accommodation	Campus
<b>Study abroad</b>	I always wanted to go to Australia; I only looked at universities who offered a study year abroad	Academic opportunities	Academic opportunities
<b>Students outside</b>	You see everyone outside in the sunshine socialising. I think that it's definitely representative of it.	Social opportunities	Social opportunities
<b>Hanging out</b>	Starbucks and the track I love that. There's not many, when you go to their universities their campus is huge and there's so much going on I think for what you need St Mary's has everything, but it's nice to just have a coffee in Starbucks you can work and hang out really that's nice.	Social opportunities	Social opportunities
<b>Piazza</b>	I like the piazza I think it's really pretty. I like how the chapel looks over everyone. It's a nice space and when its sunny it's a nice place to sit by Ref.	Social opportunities	Social opportunities
<b>Ref</b>	I'm not going to lie it isn't Michelin star standard food but it's a great place to catch up and when I make it to breakfast as well it is a really sociable space you always bump into everyone you catch and the food, you get used to it.	Value for money Social space	Affordability Campus Life

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>D-Mac</b>	I like my Halls because of the location of it, right by the track really pretty, really nice. The rooms are better than I thought they would be. Bigger than my room at home so really good.	Accommodation	Campus
<b>Naylor Library</b>	The Naylor library is amazing, I love it, it's obviously for primary ed. I was there the other day, I do use it but I think I should use it more. There are so many great books. Kath the programme director and my tutor said we should use it; we spend all this money on resources and you need to use them. Especially going into schools it's really good.	Academic resources	Academic resources
<b>SU Hall</b>	The SU, I love the SU. I mean, it sort of remind you of a year 6 disco room but you just sort of go, you know everyone in there and it's great in the day. I love the pool table and a couple of drinks and in the evening. The sports socials and freshers was good in there. Obviously, it would be good if it was bigger but it's not where you are but who you are with.	Social opportunities	Social opportunities
<b>Netball</b>	Sport yes, netball. I love netball so much. It's been so good playing every Wednesday in the BUCS team. I didn't like training.	Student sport	Sport
<b>Rugby</b>	When everyone is on the field and everyone is out all getting together. I love the rugby boys. My boyfriend does football. Everyone's running banter is about the rugby boys, they are so good.	Student sport	Sport
<b>Student ambassador</b>	It's silly things like when we first got here and the student ambassadors show you round, opening doors and that sort of thing, the culture of what the place is like and how people are and what their personal qualities are. I thought that as soon as I got here and fitting in as well.	St Mary's culture	Culture
<b>Strawberry Hill House</b>	I love Strawberry Hill house, that is great.	Iconic building	Campus
<b>Aerial shot of campus</b>	It's really green. I love spaces that are really, really, green, and it's not congested like where I live in the city. There aren't as many green spaces. Coming out to an area like this is peaceful. I really, really like that. I also like that the buildings are not new they have history to them. Like I said before, I like history, the older they are the better.	Green spaces Historic buildings	Campus

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Naylor Library</b>	I go to this one more, so I'd say this one just because of there are different areas you can go to. There is a quiet section and a group section at the back. There is an area where you can talk and eat and stuff. There is where I usually go to. There is a space I go to with my group. There is space to go to with groups when you have to talk and bring massive posters, for previous, I had to do a massive, massive poster and there wasn't much space and we used the floor and stuff and nobody really cared that we were doing that, we can use that space for it and also there is where I met my... she is called Rosalind. She helps you to improve your essays and stuff. It was the first time I used the library. She helped me to get my first first essay, my first graded essay if that makes sense?	Study spaces Academic resources	Campus Academic resources
<b>Student Services</b>	It was the place I went to when I talked about finance. I remember it very, very clearly. Because I know where they are now so if anything else happens I can find them. They are useful because at the beginning I didn't think I would have to go to a support area. Now I know how to go.... they treat you well so I am happy to go back there again.	Financial support	Support
<b>Study Abroad</b>	Studying abroad. I do want to study abroad. I don't think I will be able to but it is definitely something I am looking towards doing. Especially with my degree, I think it is important to see different teaching styles in different countries. I'd like to go to Tokyo. I'd like to go to California and see the teaching styles. It will be very drastic compared to the UK so interesting to see it. I did A level geography so I could go to Iceland. It was absolutely amazing.	Academic opportunities	Academic opportunities
<b>Chapel</b>	Yeah, the chapel is beautiful. It had a kind of soothing and peaceful aura when you go in. I've never been in there when its packed and I don't know what the service will be like but when you go in there your worries wash away which I think is amazing. I really needed that at times. It's a nice place to go to when you just want to think about things. I do, I really love the chapel.	Chapel	Campus Catholic ethos

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Mo Farah</b>	When I went on the campus tour they said Mo Farah come here. I was like really and he comes here to jog sometimes but anyway I think he is one of the best positive aspects of this university and it really shows how good the sports programme is at the university because you have so any Olympic athletes who make it. I also like that the successful people always shout out the university, It's not even just Mo Farah. I really do appreciate that. In my mind when I was doing the research I thought if Mo Farah can make it that, not just sports there's actors and stuff and I can make it as well.	Sporting reputation	Sport
<b>Rugby</b>	Not just the rugby, more the sport aspect. When I come in early in the morning I would see the sports people just out there jogging in the morning and it's freezing and I think wow I can't do that. It is really inspiring and I really hope they succeed. You can tell the people who want to make it. The amount of effort they put in. They wake up early, early in the morning and go for a jog. I really respect that. Rugby is popular as well. I haven't seen much football	Sporting opportunities	Sport
<b>Westminster Graduation</b>	That is a goal for me that is beautiful. I've never been to Westminster.	Academic achievement	Academic achievement
<b>Cheerleaders</b>	Yeah, cheerleading. This is actually way in the beginning of the term. Not that I want to be a cheerleader, I didn't know that St Mary's did cheerleading. I saw someone leaving the campus to go somewhere and I thought we do cheerleading? I just keep looking for them and I found that fascinating. I would love to see them at sports day.	Sporting opportunities	Sport
<b>Nutrition</b>	So, we did something about that for erm it was this week for design and technology and we talked about nutrition and we made snacks using healthy options with vegetables and stuff and we have to base it on a story and how to make it and swap it with someone else. The ones that they made were disgusting fish for count Dracula and we had to use marmite and Philadelphia and I was so disappointed.	Academic resources	Academic resources



Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Students outside</b>	I've never done this (students sitting at back of SHH). I look like part of the old building, Strawberry Hill House. It is very ornate, very nice and really pretty, great. I've never done this... sat outside and talk to people.	Iconic buildings Social opportunities	Campus Social opportunities
<b>Sport compilation</b>	This is always, I like the track, the affinity with the whole athletics thing.	Sports facilities	Sport
<b>Naylor Library</b>	Yeah. It's wonderful.	Academic resources	Academic resources
<b>Sport compilation</b>	This is resonating, the pitches, sports hall because I've been in sports hall doing badminton. I know him, I've been round the track. This is the picture of, this is how I see St Mary's. From my past experience of St Mary's this is it. See the guys playing and training.	Sports facilities and opportunities	Sports
<b>Piazza</b>	I like that one	Social opportunities	Social opportunities
<b>Student Services</b>	That is one of our counsellors not a student.	Support	Support
<b>Piazza</b>	So straight away there are not a lot of different cultured people, but we do have loads of them. I found some! It's like that the heart of the campus isn't it and that's where you see you see exactly that people just walking. This group shot, personally it is very staged because nobody sits outside of the Waldegrave Drawing room. There is only one white guy in it.	Diversity Social spaces	Diversity Social opportunities
<b>Rugby</b>	Because it's rugby.	Student sport	Sport
<b>Piazza</b>	Because it's an open green space which has got people in it	Green space	Campus
<b>Clubbing</b>	I like this as well.	Social opportunities	Social opportunities

Table M-1 Coding of the themes, prospectus imagery (cont)

	<b>Reason for choice – verbatim</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Chapel</b>	It's like an iconic building in the centre of campus. It has a focus.	Iconic building	Campus
<b>Graduation</b>	I say a picture that probably best describes St Mary's best is that one there.	Academic achievement	Academic achievement
<b>Sport</b>	Yeah because as a student I was very heavily involved in sport.	Sports participation	Sport
<b>Strawberry Hill House</b>	I would say my favourite one is that one	Iconic building	Campus

# Appendix N, Themes mapped against values for all students, categorised as traditional and non-traditional

## Traditional Students

Table N-1 Traditional students, themes

Student	Themes arising from the interview in study one	Adjectives	Values	Higher order value
STU2	Support services – mental health support was important	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	International student paying a higher fee and accommodation but quicker to complete in the UK making it more cost effective	Affordable	Security	Conservation
	Catholic Ethos – specially chose a Catholic university. Takes part in daily mass and socialises with Catholic society and support from the Chaplaincy	Faith	Tradition	Conservation
	Friendships – difficult to make friends at first and friendship group is mainly in the Catholic Society	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation

Table N-1 Traditional students, themes (cont)

Student	Themes arising from the interview in study one	Adjectives	Values	Higher order value
STU3	Critical of Freshers and societies. Does not like clubbing and other activities mundane. Would prefer to go to the pub.	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change
	Lives in Halls of residence but misses pets and cooking.	Harmony	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Catholic Ethos – social life gravitates around Catholic Society and course peers.	Faith	Tradition	Conservation
	Not interested in other societies or sports or the gym.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Visited the campus on a school trip and loved the campus. Feels open and friendly.	Unity with nature	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Diversity – in terms of gender (not ethnicity). Inclusiveness – in terms of religion	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Dislikes the Refectory atmosphere and food. Spends a lot of money on eating out.	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence

Table N-1 Traditional students, themes (cont)

Student	Themes arising from the interview in study one	Adjectives	Values	Higher order value
STU5	Had limited life experience and so being campus based felt like a safe option. The size was also a benefit as it felt less intimidating.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Scared of travelling out of area and not confident travelling into London or catching trains or tubes	Social Order	Security	Conservation
	Member of the football team and described the team as his 'family'	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Friendships made in Halls and in the football society.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Struggled to live independently – cleaning, washing, budgeting etc.	Cared for	Security	Conservation
	Diversity – thought mix of ages 'strange'	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Course reputation important and one of the main reasons for selecting St Mary's	Ambition	Achievement	Self-Enhancement
	Had received support from lecturers and financial support	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
Campus based a positive as everything is conveniently located.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation	

Table N-1 Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
STU7	Small and friendly campus, feels really welcome. Had friends and relatives who are Simmies. Considered the Ref a social space and provides a good opportunity to meet people	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Made friends for life in Halls and met her boyfriend	True Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Confident and enjoys social life. Enjoyed Freshers. Is a student ambassador	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Sports opportunities - member of netball and dance	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Inclusive – backgrounds	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Support – pastoral care (counselling) and support from tutor	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Safe environment, feels nurtured.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
STU10	Sporting reputation and position in academic rankings	Recognition	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Proximity to London – other international students and transport links	Security	Security	Conservation
	Support services – careers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Friendly and safe	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation

Table N-1 Traditional students, themes (cont)

Student	Themes arising from the interview in study one	Adjectives	Values	Higher order value
ALM1	Small social circle in Halls/course. Did not have time to engage in any societies.	True Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Campus location – close to London but in safe suburbs	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Critical of societies – lack of non-sports options	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change
	Diversity – more ethnic diversity than home location	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Critical of lack of sexual health advice and Catholic ethos	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Supportive staff	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
ALM5	Unhappy in Halls	Harmony	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Felt unsupported by lecturers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Concerns re Catholic ethos due to sexuality	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Liked the campus – beautiful	Unity with nature	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Outsider on course, fitted with hockey team	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Parental pressure to attend university	Respect for tradition	Tradition	Conservation
	Small size a negative	Safety	Security	Conservation

Table N-1 Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
SAL4	Recommended by a teacher	Respect	Conformity	Self-transcendence
	Beautiful campus and campus based	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Some staff live SM values but others don't	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Welcoming environment, community feel	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Small size important	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Supportive and people know your name	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Lack of diversity but that is slowly changing	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
SAL5	Supportive and friendly lecturers – open door policy	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Small friendly campus, everyone knows each other	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Critical of inclusive value due to lack of ethnic diversity at senior level	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Friendships in Halls and sports societies	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change



Table N-1 Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
SAL2	Lack of diversity, although improved over time Experienced racism	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Nostalgic vision of SM in the past as a family and unhappy with recent changes particularly senior staff who are less caring and less accessible to staff	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Critical of St Mary's values	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Supportive lecturers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Positive of support for students' well-being	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Change in students over time, more consumeristic	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
SAL3	Sporting reputation and opportunities, especially rugby	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Sceptical that senior managers live SM's values	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Nostalgic vision of SM in the past and unhappy with recent changes	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Positive experience of the campus, size, atmosphere and community spirit	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Mixed relationships with colleagues and students	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Change in students over time, more consumeristic	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence

## Non-Traditional Students

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes

Student	Themes arising from the interview in study one	Adjectives	Values	Higher order value
STU1	Has received support and has a positive relationship with lecturers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Catholic Ethos – concerns re sexuality. Initial concerns unfounded and has had a positive experience	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Feel there is a unique community, small size makes the campus welcoming and friendly atmosphere on campus	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Concerns re value for money especially contact hours	Recognition	Power	Conservation
	Diversity – lack of other mature students	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
STU4	Visited the campus for sports events and like it. Small and everyone knows each other's names.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Sports reputation and opportunities. In receipt of a sports scholarship. Member of athletics team. Shy and sports help integration	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Student support important – well-being and finance. Enquired before attending. Has a mentor	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Friends in Halls – open door policy	True Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Small campus preferable – chose SM over Brunel because of size	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
STU6	Support from Lecturers and support services (library)	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	SM recommended by PE teacher	Respect	Conformity	Self-transcendence
	Works to fund study and this impacts on social activities.	Affordable	Security	Conservation
	Friendship group mainly Halls – leave doors open, trust each other. Friends for life.	True Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Diversity – said there is an ACS society	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Sports reputation and opportunities really important. Member of the Cheer Leading Society.	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change
	Keen to study year abroad	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change
	Positives of small campus but negative is gossip	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
STU8	Importance of course reputation in relation to employability	Ambition	Achievement	Self-Enhancement
	Influenced by athletic reputation (Mo Farah) although not sporty	Ambition	Achievement	Self-Enhancement
	Support Services – financial	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Good resources – library	Possessions	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Catholic ethos important	Faith	Tradition	Conservation
	Diversity – knew that SM has more white students and was concerned but feels everyone has been respectful	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Commute expensive and difficult	Wealth	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Does not engage with social activates or societies	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
Supportive lecturers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence	
STU9	Sporting reputation, facilities and opportunities of importance. Had used the facilities before becoming a student.	Recognition	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Location, commutes as has 3 children	Security	Security	Conservation
	Diversity – age, gender and ethnicity. Few men on course and mainly younger students. Lack of ethnic diversity	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
ALM2	Inclusive– varied backgrounds	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Campus location as was commuting and had a family to look after. Like the general atmosphere	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Catholic ethos – founding values and caring	Faith	Tradition	Conservation
	Sporting reputation and opportunities of importance. Although not actively participating, her children had attended athletics on campus.	Recognition	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Course reputation important in terms of employability	Ambition	Achievement	Self-Enhancement
	Recommended by a teaching colleague	Respect	Conformity	Self-transcendence
	Regrets not living in Halls and participating in social activities and societies	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
ALM3	Sports reputation and facilities, especially the PEC	Recognition	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Regrets not living in Halls and was commuting from South London and felt this impacted his experience.	Excitement	Stimulation	Openness to change
	Worked alongside studying	Affordable	Security	Conservation
	Supportive and friendly lecturers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Size made it more inclusive and fostered community	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Generosity of spirit – library staff helping	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Catholic ethos – similar values and chapel there if needed	Faith	Tradition	Conservation
ALM6	Felt course lacked academic rigour	Recognition	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Friendship group in Halls	True Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Poor value for money including amount of contact time and quality of food	Wealth	Power	Self-Enhancement
	Found quality of food counterintuitive with sporting environment.	Healthy	Security	Conservation
	Critical of drinking culture, especially Freshers fortnight and sports societies	Pleasure/self-gratification	Hedonism	Openness to change

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes (cont)

Student	Themes arising from the interview in study one	Adjectives	Values	Higher order value
SAL1	Recommended by a PE teacher.	Respect	Conformity	Self-transcendence
	Sporting reputation and societies and friendships	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Lack of ethnic diversity	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Concerns re student sexuality and the Catholic faith	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Positive experience of support services and availability of staff	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Disappointed at recent changes and impact on staff – lack of values	Justice and Harmony (Fairness)	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Small size both a positive and negative as can be a rumour mill	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Referred to the 'St Mary's Way' as the culture	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
SAL6	Affordability – worked to self-fund	Affordable	Security	Conservation
	Availability and support from lecturers although some elements of favouritism and bullying. Could be cliquey.	Justice and Harmony (Fairness)	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Friendships made in Halls and stuck within the same friendship group. Did not attend any clubs or societies because of course demands	True Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Positive in terms of diverse in terms of ethnicity and cultures. This was a new experience, having grown up in a predominantly white area.	Equality	Universalism	Self-transcendence
	Critical of Catholic ethos regarding sexual health and availability of condoms	Equality and Social justice	Universalism	Self-transcendence

Table N-2 Non-Traditional students, themes (cont)

<b>Student</b>	<b>Themes arising from the interview in study one</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Higher order value</b>
ALM4	Immediate attraction to the campus. Ideal location – Central too overwhelming	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Friendships – Made friends in Halls and college friend joined at the same time. Joined Gaelic football team and was welcomed despite not having played before.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Support and quality of lecturers. First name basis with lecturers	Helpful and Friendship	Benevolence	Self-transcendence
	Sports opportunities and reputation. Likeminded people	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation
	Catholic ethos, multicultural and tolerant	Faith	Tradition	Conservation
	Campus, size, safety and atmosphere. Easy to settle in. Couldn't name the je ne sais quoi.	Sense of belonging	Security	Conservation



# Appendix O, Location of UK based participants in Phases Two and Three

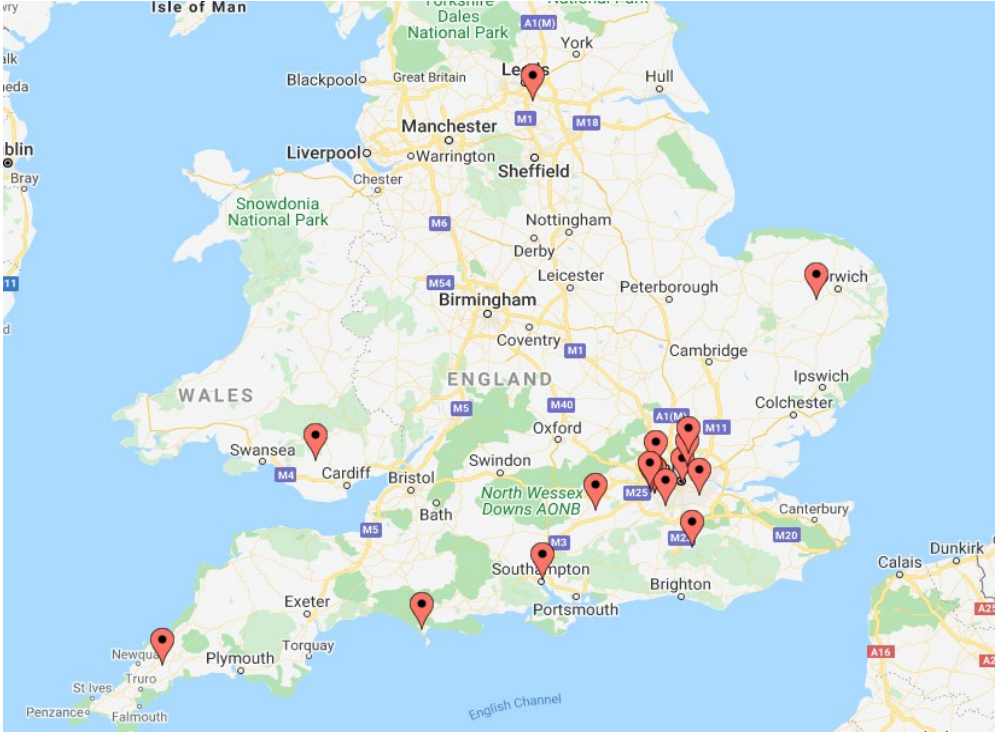


Figure O-1 Location of all UK participants

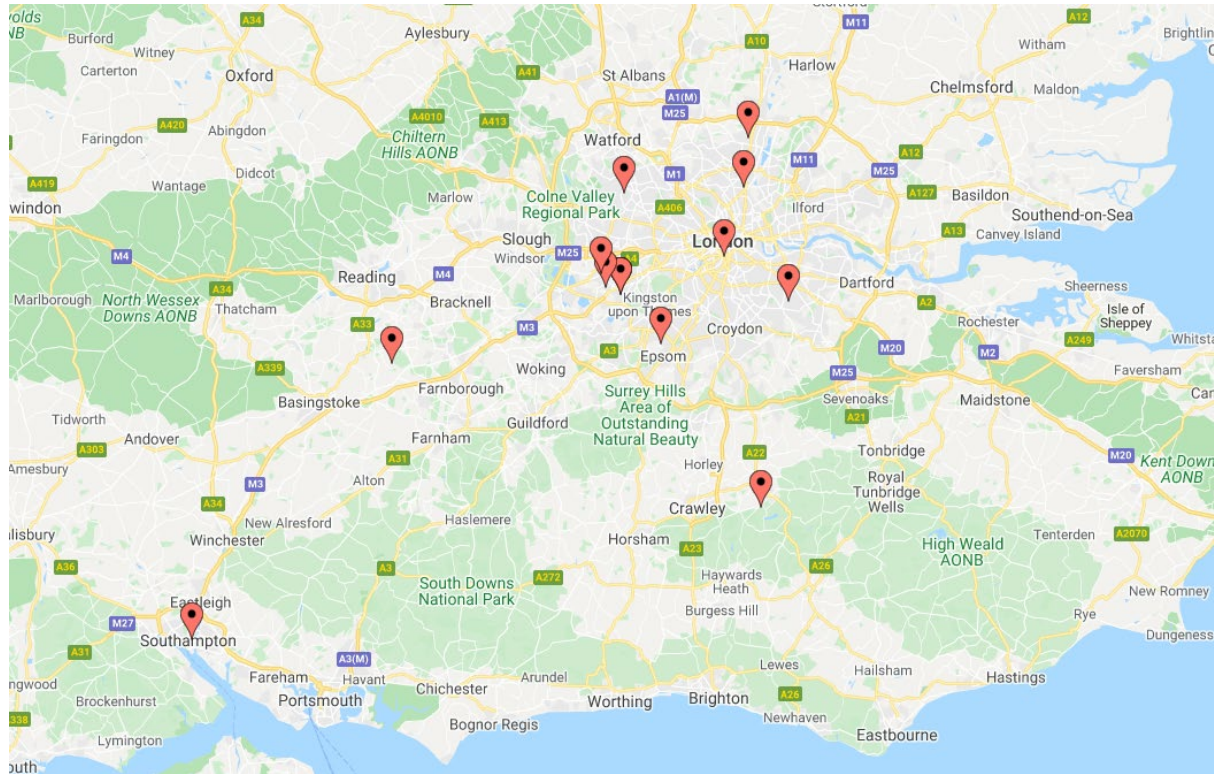


Figure O-2 Participants in the South of England

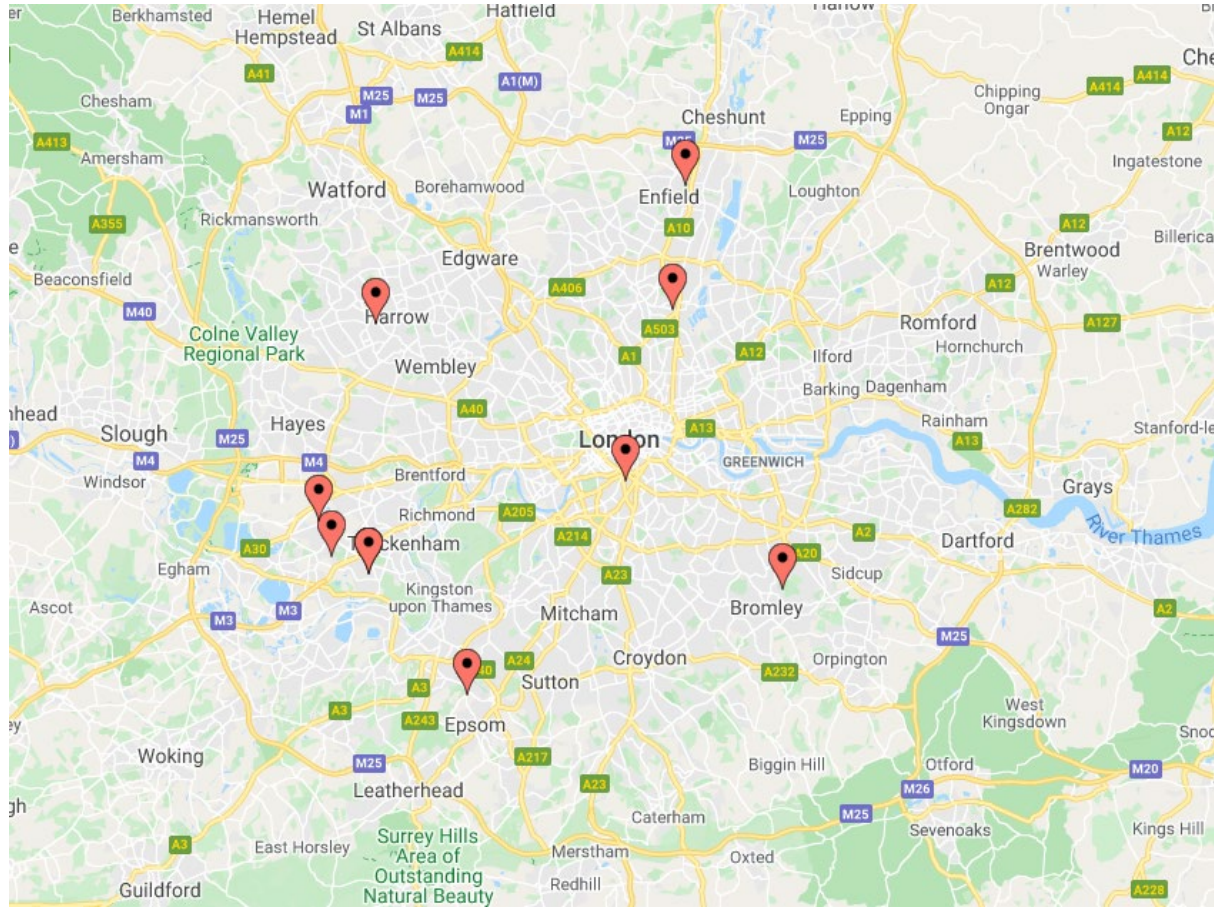


Figure O-3 Participants within the M25

## Appendix P, Fit Model Iterations

Figure I-1, below depicts the initial concept for the model. This developed over several stages.

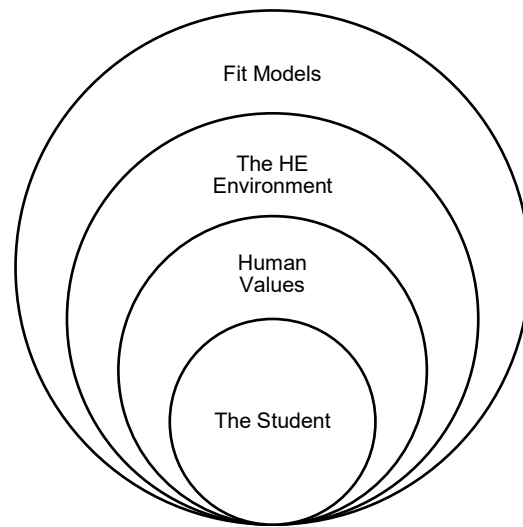


Figure I-1 Initial concept of the Holistic Student Fit Model

Figure I-2, below develops the initial concept for the model by labelling the layers of the model and the contents for each layer.

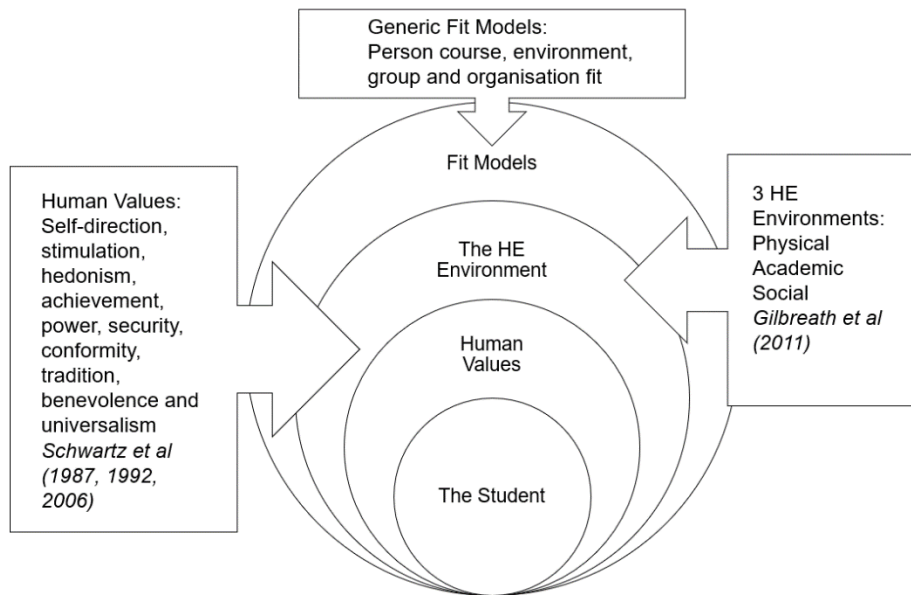


Figure I-2 V2 of the concept of the Holistic Student Fit Model

Each of the layers of the model were considered. Version one starts with Schwartz et al's (1992) model and attempts to overlay and map generic fit models and Gilbreath et al's (2011) three HE environments.



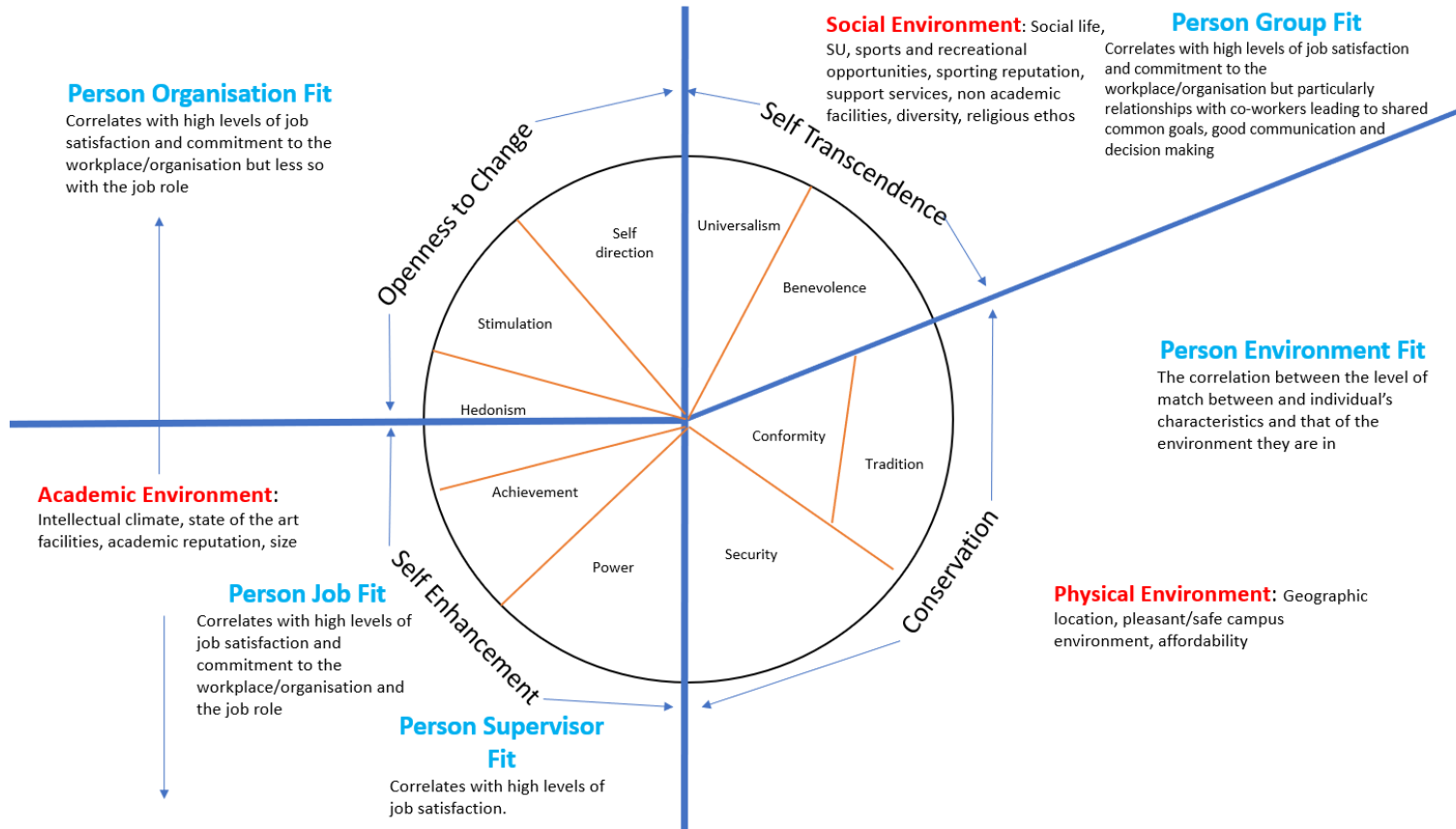


Figure I-3 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 1

Version two of the fit model is an expansion of version 1 to include the values definitions to enhance the mapping.

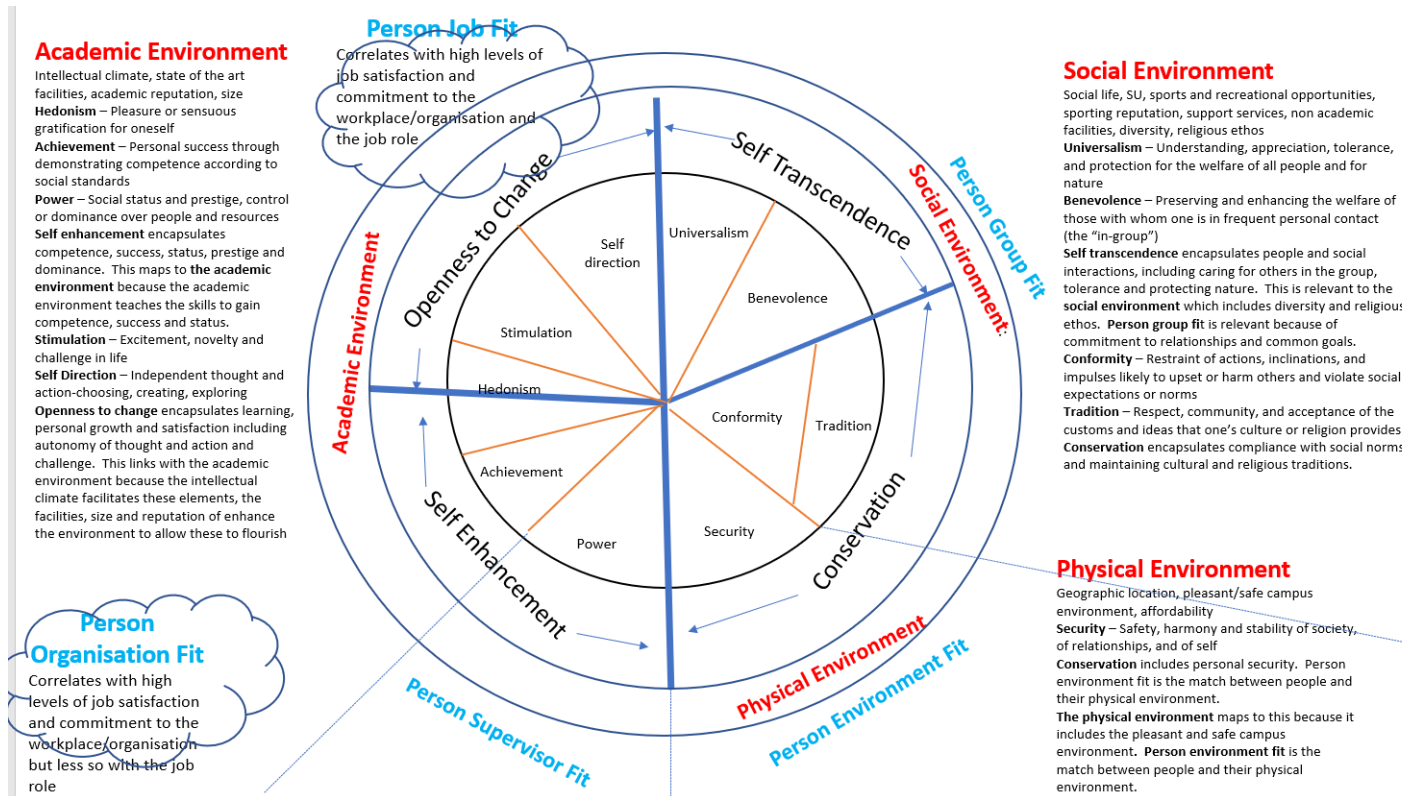


Figure I-4 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 2

Version three was an attempt to simplify the model and to present it in a professional format. The model is to be read from right to left, starting from the individual student, their values, fit and then the environment.

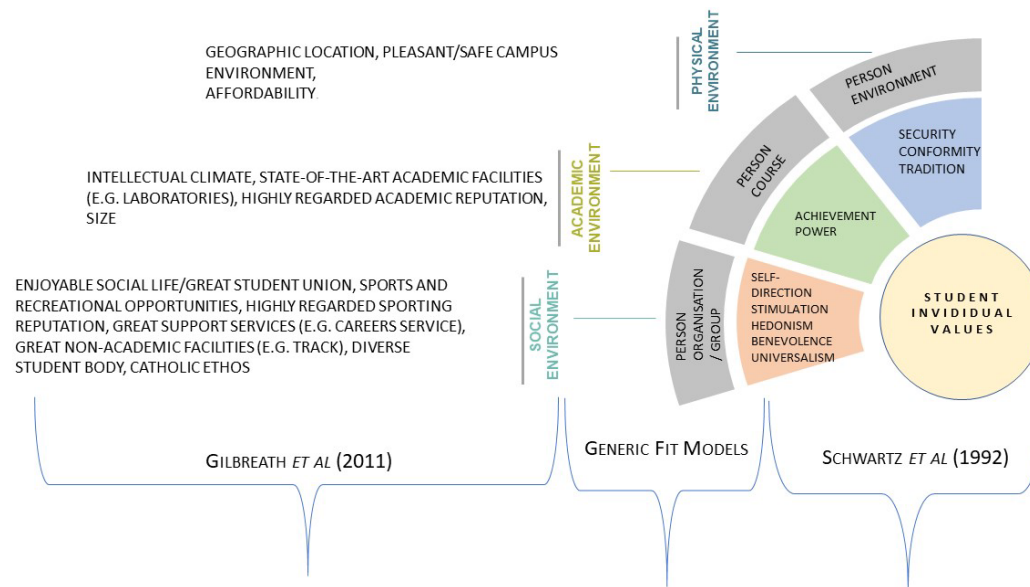


Figure I-5 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 3



After reflecting on version three, version four reflects the overlaps between social and academic environments and the values that are in both, highlighted by using colour. To simplify this, the higher order of values have been used rather than the individual values within them. The model has been reordered reflecting the sequential interaction between familiar figure, values then to expectations and then the outcome or fit. Rather than flowing from right to left, version four now has the student at the heart of the model. This better demonstrates the interaction between a students' familiar cultural capital, values, expectations and whether or not they are satisfied with their university experience or feel that they fit. The fit models have been moved to the final layer as method of measuring the outcome; whether one fits within the environment.

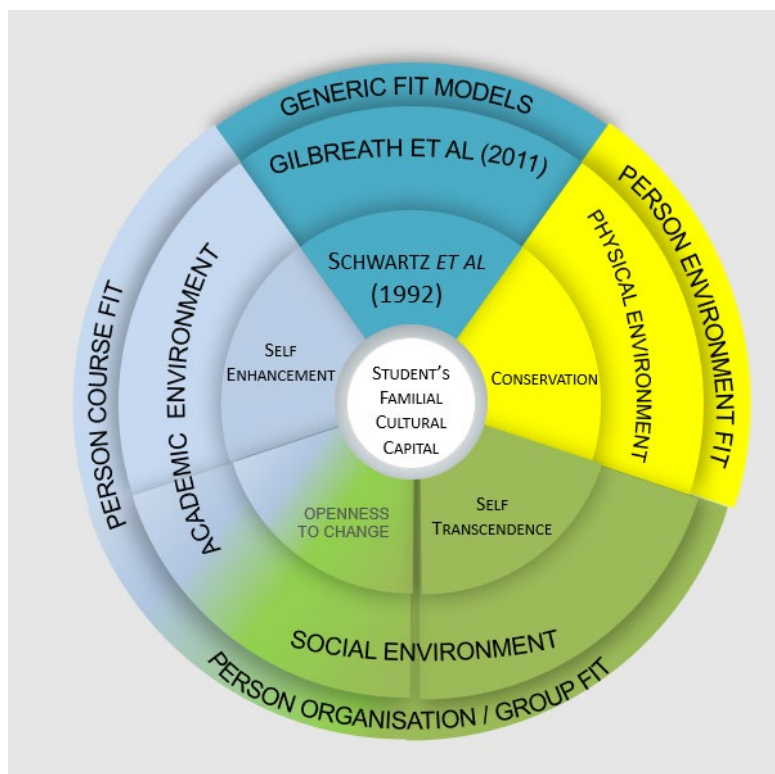


Figure I-6 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 4

Upon reflection, version five was reordered to mirror the position of the values to replicate Schwartz et al's models (1992 and 2006) which were positioned to

represent the conflict and compatibility between values; the model places opposing values opposite each other and compatible values adjacent to each other.

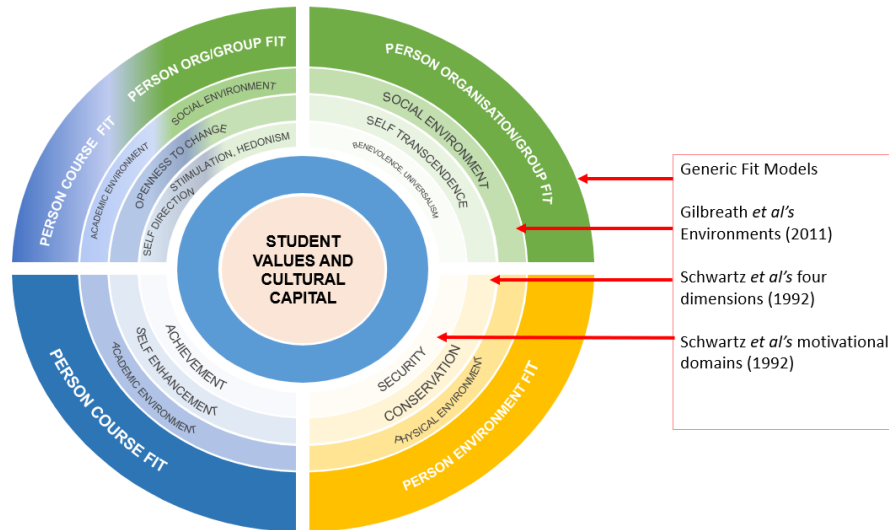


Figure I-7 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 5

Version six was adapted to make the overlap between the higher order value of conservation into the social and physical environments clearer. It does not take account of the environments at a granular level.

## Holistic Student Fit Model

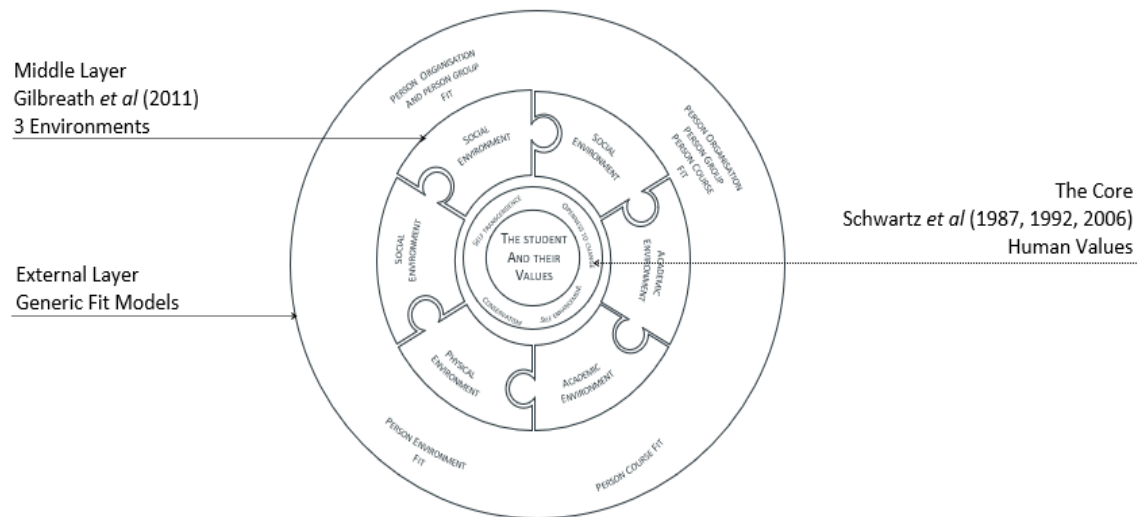


Figure I-8 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 6

Version 7 is depicted below:

## Holistic Student Fit Model

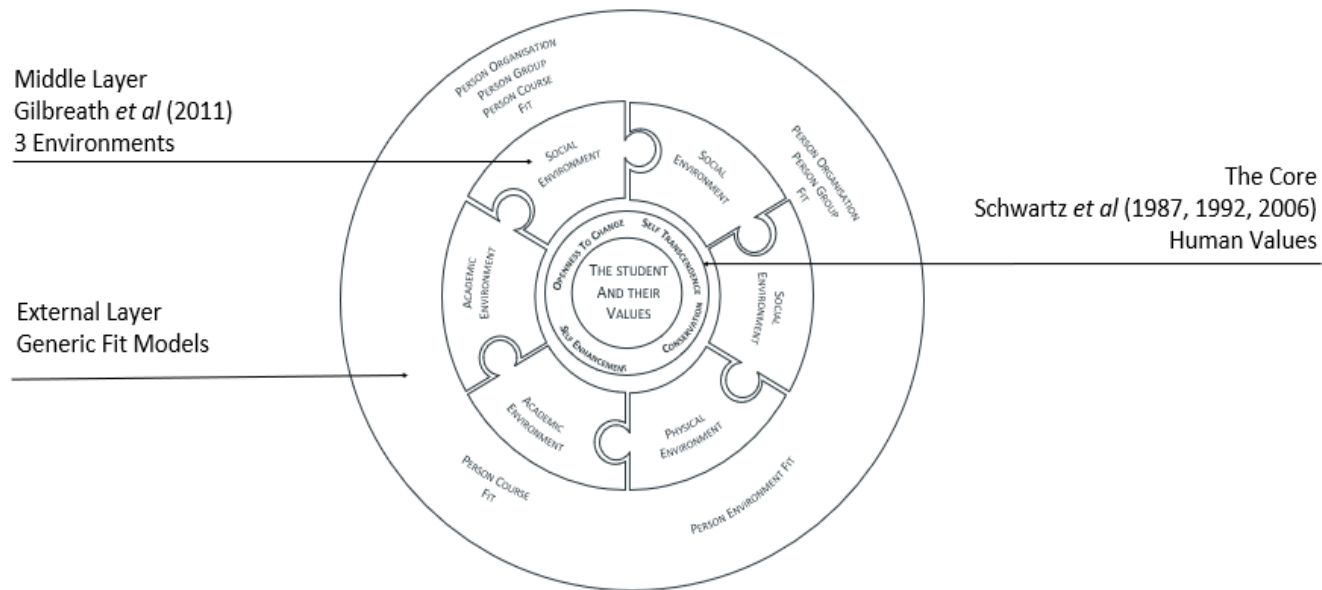


Figure I-9 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 7

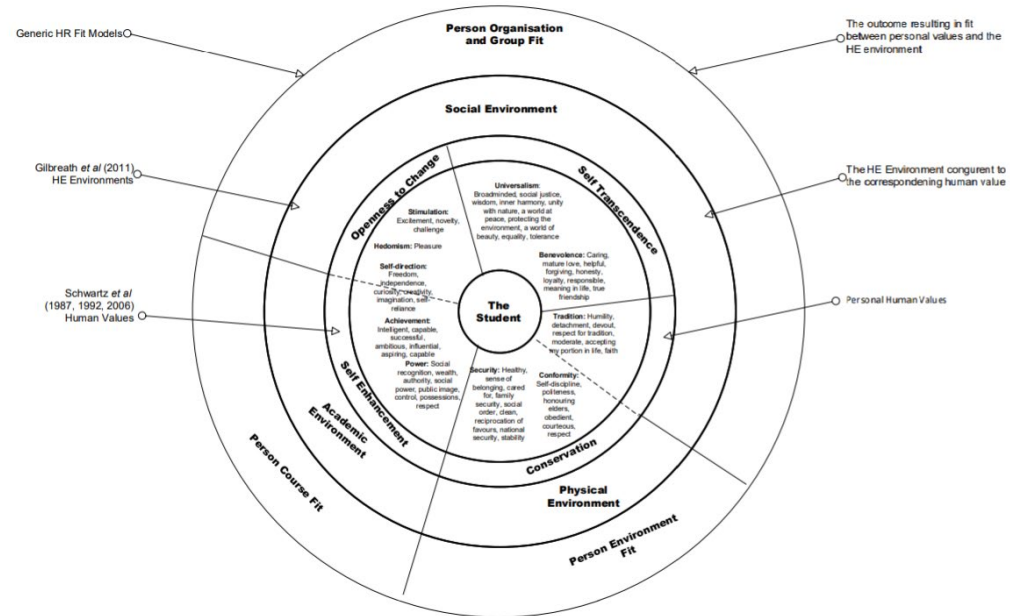


Figure I-10 Holistic Student Fit Model, Version 8

Version 8 of the model reverts back to expanding the definitions of the values. It also reflects a change in thinking regarding the environments each value is in based on the themes. The final version reflects the overlap in openness to change within the academic and social environments and person course/person group fit. It also retains the integrity of Schwartz's model as I had moved self-direction and