# Exploring academic perspectives on facilitating study abroad uptake for widening participation students: A pre- and post-1992 university comparative analysis

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**This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**September 2024**

**94,156 words**

# Preface

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

# Abstract

Under-representation in study abroad has become a key concern for universities over recent years, but while efforts to widen participation at an institutional level through targeted funding and awareness raising campaigns have been widely documented, less is known about what happens to increase uptake at departmental level. Academics can make a positive difference by encouraging students to consider study abroad as an achievable option and by offering guidance on the application process, yet their perspective on the issue of unequal access remains underexplored. This thesis aims to fill the gap by drawing on Bourdieu's Capital Theory (1986) to explain academic understandings of the barriers to study abroad and Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) to examine what strategies they use to overcome these. To do this, 17 academics from a variety of disciplines were interviewed at two universities located in the same English city – a pre-1992 research-intensive institution and a post-1992 teaching-focused provider – to compare their outreach interventions and identify the challenges of making study abroad more accessible.

Findings revealed that cost and confidence were cited as the main deterrents to study abroad, with academics at both universities displaying a good understanding of how these factors might inhibit widening participation students from accessing international opportunities. While methods used for promoting study abroad through departmental talks and closing the information gap to redress common misconceptions around funding and eligibility were largely similar, methods for encouraging placement uptake were very different. Emphasis at the pre-1992 university was placed more on the affordability of study abroad by increasing the number of low-cost partner links, whereas preference at the post-1992 university was for communicating the accessibility of study abroad through short-term stays to better accommodate student financial situations and personal circumstances. Competing priorities such as research, teaching and administration made championing study abroad more difficult for some academics than others, with those operating alone being more likely to feel overwhelmed by their workload than those with greater levels of colleague support, despite being equally passionate about expanding uptake.

This thesis argues that study abroad participation is most effectively facilitated by offering a range of options for mobility to suit all student needs like summer schools or overseas field

trips, as opposed to only providing the traditional year or semester abroad model, which is less flexible and more disruptive for those with work or caring commitments. Word of mouth marketing is crucial, not just for generating interest in study abroad, but also for tackling the kind of practical concerns and emotional anxieties that typically cause students to self-exclude, such as finding funding or being separated from support networks. Finally, more support for academics would enable their continued engagement with international opportunities by giving them the time and resources necessary to inform, advise and guide their students through the study abroad process.

# Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Susan Robertson, for being so endlessly supportive and encouraging during both my MPhil and my PhD. It's been a long four years, but you helped me get there in the end.

Thank you also to Dr Tim Herrick, who continues to put up with all of my emails for advice on a regular basis. Your kindness and generosity are very much appreciated, and I hope we continue to stay in touch.

Additional thanks go out to Dr Zoe Baker for sparking my interest in widening participation in my first year as an undergraduate student. Your teaching really left an impression on me, and I know I'm not the only one who found inspiration from your passion for your subject.

Thank you to all the interviewees who gave their time to take part in this research. Our discussions were as informative as they were enlightening, and I hope that you continue to open up the world of study abroad for students like myself.

Thank you also to Professor Eva Hartmann and Professor Rachel Brooks for your thorough and thoughtful viva feedback. This has enabled me to strengthen the thesis significantly and improve the overall quality of my work.

Finally, I would like to thank the Cambridge ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership for funding my research, which I never would have been able to undertake without this scholarship.

# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| BAME | Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic |
| BCS | British Computer Society |
| EU | European Union |
| FLP | Faculty Led Programme |
| GSOEP | German Socioeconomic Panel |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HEPI | Higher Education Policy Institute |
| HESA | The Higher Education Statistics Agency |
| HSES | High Socioeconomic Status |
| IFT | International Field Trip |
| ILP | Instructor Led Programme |
| ISM | International Student Mobility |
| IWP | International Work Placement |
| LSES | Low Socioeconomic Status |
| LTM | Long Term Mobility |
| MBA | Master of Business Administration |
| NUS | National Union of Students |
| RIBA | Royal Institute of British Architects |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| STM | Short Term Mobility |
| WP | Widening Participation |
| UCAS | The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| US | United States |
| VLE | Virtual Learning Environment |

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction to the thesis

This chapter functions as an introduction to the study. It begins by providing a background of the current research context by explaining why international student mobility (ISM) is lower in the United Kingdom (UK) than in other comparable western countries. It continues by offering a brief overview of why some students are more under-represented in study abroad than others, and how this is reflective more broadly of their under-representation in higher education (HE) as a whole, which will be explored in greater depth through the literature review chapter. It then identifies the knowledge gaps from previous empirical studies in the field of study abroad inequalities from both a geographical perspective by outlining why a UK context is worthy of further exploration, and a demographic perspective by justifying the investigation of its chosen stakeholder group. The research scope and aims of the study will also be addressed, and the chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

## 1.1 Research problem: inequalities in study abroad

While academic exchange between universities has existed since their inception, the rise of global connectedness and integration has made international travel, once considered to be the preserve of the elite, more affordable than ever (Altbach, 2004; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Rivza and Teichler, 2007). The number of internationally mobile students has experienced a threefold increase over the past decade – from 2.1 million to more than 6 million – and is estimated to rise further still by 2025 to 8 million (UNESCO, 2023). The number of UK-domiciled students who study abroad is much smaller in comparison, however, with figures from the 2017-18 academic year indicating that incoming international students outnumbered outgoing British students by 24 to 1 (Universities UK, 2019). Similar discrepancies have been noted in other Anglophone countries such as the United States (US), Canada and Australia (Lomer, 2018; Qiang, 2003) where, as in the UK, universities often place more emphasis on attracting overseas students than facilitating study abroad uptake for domestic ones (BIS, 2013; Tannock, 2013). This focus has largely been driven by cuts made over recent years to the HE sector, with tuition fees from international students (who are

charged more of a premium than their home counterparts) viewed as a valuable source of revenue to fill the gaps left behind from previous government subsidy (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Ball, 2012; Lomer, 2014; Lomer et al., 2018; Prazeres and Findlay, 2017; Vaira, 2004).

Although these changes could explain the UK's prioritisation of global initiatives from an institutional perspective, where international student recruitment has become a key survival strategy (Gilligan, 2017; Grove, 2018), they do not shed light on the imbalance between inbound and outbound students from an individual perspective. Some attribute this to the residential model, in which students typically relocate from one region to another to attend university, unlike the localised study model more commonly found in mainland Europe, where the majority of students remain within the family home and attend a university within commutable distance (Christie, 2007; Whyte, 2019). Further differences can be observed in how British higher education institutions (HEIs) market themselves on the student experience, with university facilities, course reputation and social life having considerable influence over an individual's application choices (Daly, 2011; Deakin, 2013; Holton, 2018). Fitting in and making friends is also a key concern for new undergraduates (Read, Burke and Crozier, 2020; Scanlon et al., 2020; Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld, 2005), who then become reluctant to leave these behind at the prospect of receiving an international experience (Beerkens et al., 2016; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010).

Limited uptake is likewise linked with the language barrier, which can be a significant deterrent for students in monolingual countries like the UK (Findlay et al., 2006; King et al., 2011), and although proficiency is not necessary for most study abroad programmes, the misconception of fluency in the host country language being a requirement still discourages many from applying (Doyle et al., 2010; Tran, 2016). Lack of opportunities for language learning, as opposed to lack of interest, similarly obstructs British students from study abroad, with access to language provision having grown more limited after its removal as a compulsory GCSE subject (Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018). This carries additional significance for study abroad, as language learning increases one's confidence to cope in countries that are culturally and linguistically different from their own (Green et al., 2015; Pope et al., 2014), and could explain why the students most likely to participate in said activity are those enrolled on modern foreign language degrees (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Sweeney, 2013; UniversitiesUK, 2022).

Furthermore, the British students who do study abroad fit a certain sociodemographic profile that has remained relatively unchanged over recent years, with the typical internationally mobile student most likely to be female (Cordua and Netz, 2021; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010), financially privileged (Havergal, 2016; Salisbury et al., 2010; Waters, 2009; Waters and Brooks, 2010) and Caucasian (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011). In contrast, the type of students who tend to be under-represented in study abroad are male (Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014), financially disadvantaged (Beech, 2017; Bilecen and van Mol, 2017; Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010) and of ethnic or racial minority (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013). Study abroad participation among students with disabilities, meanwhile, is even lower (Ablaeva, 2012; Heirweg et al., 2020; Kutsche, 2012; Link, 2016; Matthews et al., 1998; Shames and Alden, 2005), with this demographic being least likely of all to study abroad (Allinson, 2017).

This under-representation in study abroad is reflective of inequalities in HE participation rates more generally among students from non-traditional backgrounds, otherwise known as widening participation (WP) students. The Office for Students, a regulator that monitors university access, success and progression, uses the following criteria to classify students as being under-represented in HE, which include – but are not limited to – the following groups:

- Students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) families
- Students from some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds
- Disabled students (includes those with either a physical or mental impairment)
- Mature students (those aged 21 or over upon entering HE)
- Care-experienced students

(Office for Students, 2023)

Existing research has identified a multitude of reasons why study abroad participation rates remain so low for WP students, with cost being cited as the greatest inhibitor (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010). Other explanations include limited information about study abroad opportunities (Deakin, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015), limited support or encouragement from family (McClure et al., 2010; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Robertson, 2019) and friends (Daly, 2011; Netz, 2015),

limited experience with international travel (Beech, 2015; Carlson, 2013; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Smith, Rérat and Sage, 2014), and personal safety concerns or fear of racism abroad (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013).

Obligations and commitments, such as caring for family members (Nguyen, 2014; Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016) or the need to support their studies through part-time work (Brux and Fry, 2010; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008), can also increase the difficulty of going abroad for WP students. They might not consider study abroad as being relevant or desirable in relation to their university experience and future career plans (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017; Findlay et al., 2006; Spiering and Erikson, 2006; Stuber, 2011), or perceive it as a feasible and attainable activity for them to aspire to and participate in for 'people like us' (King et al., 2011; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012), all of which can cause them to self-exclude from international opportunities.

## 1.2 Research significance

### *1.2.1 Identifying the knowledge gaps from a geographical perspective*

Scholars have recently problematised existing research for focusing solely on the individual sociodemographic factors that shape the decision to be internationally mobile, however, as while these do determine the likelihood of study abroad participation to a large extent, they only partly explain inequalities in access (Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022). They argue that understandings of study abroad under-representation could be further improved by accounting for the broader influence of institutional characteristics, and that researchers should consider not only the choices that students make during their time at university, but also the choices they make even before arriving there for how this might affect study abroad proclivity. This assertion is supported by previous studies having already established that study abroad participation rates are higher in research-intensive universities than in their teaching-focused counterparts (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004), and potential explanations for these differences are threefold.

The first is that different types of universities have different types of priorities for student recruitment, with research-intensive institutions emphasising opportunities for an international experience (Russell Group, 2017), while teaching-focused providers focus more on student support and success (Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010; Zhang, 2011). The second explanation is that different types of universities have different types of financial resources, as research-intensive universities bring in more research funding (Baltaru, Manac and Ivan, 2022; Hazelkorn, 2023), attract more international students through higher overseas tuition fees (Altbach, 2004; Cantwell, 2019; Choi and Nieminen, 2012), and receive more endowments and alumni donations (Harvey et al., 2024) than teaching-focused institutions, which allow the former to offer greater availability of study abroad placements and study abroad funding.

The third explanation is that different types of universities have different types of intakes, with WP students more likely to be concentrated in teaching-focused providers (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009), while preference among their non-WP peers is for research-intensive institutions (Christie, 2007; Henderson, 2020; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). Students who choose to relocate for university are typically less bound by personal circumstances and responsibilities (Beerkens et al., 2016; Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010), and have more experience of international travel (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Green et al., 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) than those who opt to live at home and stay local, all of which significantly increases study abroad propensity.

University characteristics therefore play a crucial role in constraining or enabling access to study abroad, but while increasing attention is being paid towards how these might translate into differential participation rates, research has, until now, been fairly limited, with much of the knowledge on this subject generated in the US by comparing study abroad availability between community colleges and traditional four-year universities (Amani and Kim, 2018; Hull, 2013; Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra, 2014; Robertson, 2019; Whatley and Raby, 2020). Studies conducted elsewhere in the western world such as Italy (Di Pietro, 2020), Germany (Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016), Australia (Dall'Alba and Sidhu, 2015) and on a European-wide basis (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013) appear to reach similar

observations on how different types of universities offer different types of opportunity structures for study abroad.

To date, only a handful of studies have explored how the UK fares in comparison, as what little work has been carried out is either quantitative in nature (Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020) or employed a mixed methods approach (Bridger, 2015), which makes a qualitative, in-depth investigation of this phenomenon timely. The thesis also extends upon previous empirical research indicating that while the clustering of study abroad opportunities in research-intensive universities is evident in many European countries, these are typically less socially segregated than the UK, where inequalities are more prevalent (Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020).

The UK consequently offers a valuable context from which to explore the link between social segregation and study abroad participation, due to its hierarchical university structure, but while distinction is now made between HEIs based on age and reputation (Boliver 2011, 2013), differentiation in the past was somewhat simpler. The UK once operated on a binary model, with students entering traditional universities through an academic stream, while those at technical colleges or polytechnics came in through the vocational stream, where courses were geared more towards meeting industry needs (Finn and Holton, 2020). This changed to a unitary model with the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, when the granting of university status to the latter increased the number of HEIs from 33 in the 1960s to 164 as of 2018, and although the system technically became a unified one, a new distinguishment emerged between the so-called 'old', or pre-1992 universities, from 'new', or post-1992 ones (Boliver, 2015).

These differences were made apparent both in terms of their admissions requirements, where pre-1992 universities were – and continue to be – more academically selective than their post-1992 counterparts, and in their perceived prestige through the formation of the Russell Group, a collective of universities seeking to further enhance themselves on the basis of their worldwide research rankings, in 1994. Post-1992 universities have likewise developed a reputation for themselves, albeit one viewed as being of lesser value and quality based on their lower criteria for entry (Blackman, 2017). In short, while different types of universities used to attract different types of students depending on their choice to either pursue theoretical knowledge or gain professional training, differences in intake now stem from

whether a university is both socially and ethnically homogenous – and thus considered the domain of the financially privileged – or whether it is more diverse and inclusive, and attended by the financially disadvantaged (Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010; Wyness, 2017).

The current political context presents another clear gap for investigation as a result of Brexit – the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2020 – and its potential impact on international exchange for British students. Loss of access to the EU's freedom of movement scheme, for example, has created new barriers to mobility through the need for visa requirements, thus making study abroad even more expensive for the type of students who already tend to be deterred by the cost of an international experience (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010). Concerns have also been raised over the difficulties associated with obtaining a visa, such as the need to obtain legal documentation or medical certification, again deterring students who may find the study abroad process overwhelming and intimidating, by adding further complications (Deakin, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015).

These apprehensions were exacerbated with the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus on 24 December 2020, a programme that has existed since 1987 to promote ISM among EU member states and associated third countries, and its replacement with the Turing Scheme in March 2021. While Turing's emphasis on making study abroad more accessible by targeting funds at the students least likely to participate in said activity – in other words, those from WP backgrounds – was welcomed by many, questions were still raised as to whether or not these would be sufficient. Some pointed out how Turing was less financially generous than Erasmus in terms of the amount made available for non-repayable grants and bursaries (Brooks, 2021). Others argued that Turing would worsen existing inequalities between universities by making them compete against each other for funding (James, 2021), as such a system ensures that the more resourced and better-connected institutions are better placed to achieve a successful bid for this (Ali, 2021; Guibert and Rayón, 2021). The issues highlighted by these developments are therefore worthy of further exploration as to what study abroad might look like in a post-Brexit and post-Erasmus UK, where options for mobility have become more limited over recent years, to determine the impact this has had on access to study abroad for WP students.

### *1.2.2 Identifying the knowledge gaps from a demographic perspective*

Meanwhile, another knowledge gap presenting itself is that while previous studies have established that different types of universities offer different types of opportunities for study abroad (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004), little is known about whether different types of universities utilise different types of strategies to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. What research does exist in this area focuses more generally on what is being done at a university-wide level to raise awareness of international activities through promotional marketing, such as student testimonials or social media campaigns (Di Pietro, 2020; Leask et al., 2020; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), and on information events, such as study abroad fairs and open days (Gray et al., 2018; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015), with comparatively less attention given to what is being done at departmental level. Less still is known about the role that academic staff members – in particular, those operating in the capacity of study abroad adviser – play in increasing study abroad participation rates.

Academics are well-positioned not only to offer guidance on the study abroad process, but also to encourage the pursuit of said activity as a realistic and achievable option for under-represented groups (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). Those who do participate often identify tutors as having the biggest influence on their decision to study abroad, which indicates the positive difference staff can make in helping them to overcome the barriers that might have otherwise resulted in their self-exclusion (Amani and Kim, 2018; Doyle et al., 2010; Paus and Robinson, 2008). While it is widely agreed that exposure to someone who is willing to champion the cause of international mobility can have a significant impact on uptake for students from non-traditional backgrounds (Bruce, 2012; Brux and Fry, 2010; Coldwell, 2013; Deakin, 2013), most research has only explored the influence of peers (Ahn, 2014; Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016; UniversitiesUK, 2021) or of family (Brooks and Waters, 2010; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Whatley and Canché, 2022) on the decision to study abroad, whereas other key stakeholders continue to be overlooked.

The purpose of this study is therefore to expand upon these findings, not through the student voice which much of the literature has prioritised until now, but from a relatively under-

explored perspective: that of the academic. Despite being acknowledged as a key influential figure in convincing WP students to take part in international activities, little is known about what motivates academics to engage with study abroad, what shapes their attitudes towards study abroad, and what methods they use for facilitating the take up of study abroad. It also makes a distinct contribution to knowledge by extending the limited amount of research that has been conducted on this stakeholder perspective, most of which consists mainly of unpublished doctoral theses (Barbour, 2021; Danjean, 2017; Hull, 2013; Savishinsky, 2012). Although other studies have been published in the wider academic community, these investigated academic staff perspectives on engagement with internationalisation activities more generally, of which study abroad makes up only a small part (Childress, 2010; Dewey and Duff, 2009; Giedt, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015; Leask et al., 2020). Many also focus solely on academic engagement with a specific type of study abroad programme (Conran, 2019; Keese and O'Brien, 2011; Meier and Smith, 2016; Mule, Aloisio and Audley, 2018; Oh and Arthur-Banning, 2021; Whatley et al., 2021), which thus presents ample opportunity to better understand what shapes the decision for academics to engage with study abroad on a broader scale.

The contribution of this thesis is made all the more novel due to the majority of these studies having been conducted in a US context, with only one to date exploring the academic staff perspective on study abroad engagement from a UK context (Bridger, 2015). Almost a decade has passed since the publication of this particular paper, and much has changed politically since then, as the effects of Brexit and the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus have both been keenly felt on study abroad participation levels. This thesis offers a timely vantage point into how academic staff have been responding to these changes, and the extent to which they might potentially continue to influence their future engagement with study abroad.

## 1.3 Research scope

While study abroad, according to Kingingner (2009), can be understood in a general sense as "a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes" (p. 11) that can be experienced at any level of education, this thesis will focus solely on study abroad activities undertaken at university. Given the aim of the thesis – to explore study abroad inequalities from a UK context – attention will be given only to one particular direction of

study abroad – that of outbound student mobility, which involves sending outgoing domestic students to overseas universities – as opposed to inbound student mobility, which involves the receiving of incoming international students to British universities. The decision was also made to investigate one specific type of study abroad participation – that of within-degree mobility, where international exchange is undertaken as part of one's studies that may or may not contribute towards the credits required for graduation with honours – rather than whole-degree mobility, where an entire HE level qualification is completed abroad (King et al., 2010), due to how rare practice of the latter tends to be in the UK.

Further distinction was made regarding the duration of study abroad, given how most UK universities offer a combination of both long-term programmes, where students spend either a 6-month semester or a full academic year abroad, and short-term programmes, where overseas stays typically last between two to four weeks. Long-term mobility (LTM) can be undertaken on a voluntary basis, which does not integrate study abroad within the degree structure, or on a mandatory basis, where an international component is built into a course by design. While the latter is most commonly found in modern foreign language degrees, which are designed to give the experience of studying in a country with native level speakers (UniversitiesUK, 2022), there has been a small but growing trend of extending a typical three-year non-language programme to a four-year one instead over recent years.

Conversely, short-term mobility (STM) is available mostly as a voluntary model, and does not count towards a student's final degree classification. Its focus on flexibility is therefore more appealing for students who are either constrained by course demands, such as those in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and other professionally accredited degrees, such as Architecture and Journalism (Bridger, 2015; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014), or by personal circumstances, such as those with work or caring commitments (Gwost et al., 2021; Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016). While STM can take many forms, including that of research internships, field trips, work placements and volunteering, summer schools remain the most popular type of programme within the UK (UniversitiesUK, 2021).

For the purpose of this thesis and its focus on study abroad inequalities, reference will be made to what is being done at departmental level by academic staff members to facilitate uptake for WP students specifically, rather than the student body as a whole. Attention to WP

students is significant because they are most likely to benefit from study abroad, but least likely to participate in this activity (Allinson, 2017). For example, study abroad has been linked with greater retention levels (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004), higher degree classifications (Findlay et al., 2006; Malmgren and Galvin, 2008), and higher wages (Di Pietro, 2015; Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019; Kidd, O'Leary and Sloane, 2017; Stiwne and Alves, 2010). All of these are of considerable interest to universities, who have become increasingly concerned with improving progression and attainment levels for this group as of late, hence the targeting of support and resources to ensure their success (Jerrim, 2014; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019).

Meanwhile, recent research has criticised the emphasis of previous studies for their tendency to examine certain WP subgroups in isolation when explaining their under-representation in study abroad, with LSES students (Beech, 2017; Bilecen and van Mol, 2017; Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Salisbury et al., 2010) and those from BAME backgrounds (Brux and Fry, 2010; Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011; Sweeney, 2013) having received the most consideration. There also exists a significant number of studies on students with disabilities (Ablaeva, 2012; Heirweg et al., 2020; Kutsche, 2012; Link, 2016; Matthews et al., 1998; Shames and Alden, 2005), although other WP subgroups, such as mature students and care experienced students, continue to be overlooked.

Another, more pertinent critique of the focus of prior studies on individual sociodemographic characteristics highlights the need to recognise that some students can belong to multiple WP subgroups – also known as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) – and identify as having more than one indicator of disadvantage, such as a mature student with disabilities or a BAME student with a care experienced background. Adopting an intersectional approach would therefore enable a broader understanding of how overlapping identities might influence the likelihood of study abroad participation. Conversely, researchers should also acknowledge that simply meeting one WP indicator does not automatically equate to them meeting another. Some BAME students might not come from an LSES background, for example, or be considered to be socially disadvantaged in other ways, such as being the first in their family to attend university.

As such, the WP definition has since changed to acknowledge that not all minority ethnic groups are under-represented in HE, with recent figures demonstrating higher participation rates among students from Chinese and Indian backgrounds than those from Black Caribbean backgrounds (Bolton and Lewis, 2023), with participation rates among white males from LSES backgrounds even lower (Baars, Mulcahy and Bernardes, 2016; Lewis and Demie, 2015). These figures also appear to be reflected in study abroad, where in the UK at least, students identifying as coming from an Indian or Chinese background are more likely to engage with international opportunities than those from Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds (Allinson, 2017).

This level of differentiation is significant, because while previous research has long since noted an ethnicity imbalance in terms of who studies abroad and who does not, few studies have brought to light how or why participation rates might differ between ethnic groups. Some scholars are now beginning to argue that BAME students from LSES backgrounds might actually be more predisposed towards study abroad than their Caucasian counterparts, for instance, as a result of their familiarity with international travel and the ability to speak more than one language (Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014; Perkins, 2020), both of which have been shown to increase the likelihood of participation (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010).

## 1.4 Research aims and questions

Having addressed the knowledge gaps, the aim of this study was to determine how access to study abroad is being made fairer for WP students from all under-represented backgrounds, as opposed to singling out any subgroup in particular, from an overlooked stakeholder perspective: that of academic staff members with the role of study abroad adviser. It also sought to achieve the following objectives:

1) Explore academics' understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students;

2) Identify what strategies are being used by academics to overcome the barriers to study abroad for WP students, and;

3) Highlight the challenges associated with facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students by academics.

To achieve these, the thesis will firstly adopt a modified conceptual framework to examine factors influencing the likelihood of study abroad engagement for academic staff members before applying established theory to explain the existence of study abroad inequalities for WP students. It is anticipated that this combination will be useful not only for investigating what academics are doing to encourage and support WP students to pursue study abroad, but also for how academics themselves can be supported and encouraged to engage with said activity.

The research questions to be explored in this study are:

1) What are academics' understandings of the barriers to study abroad for widening participation students?

2) What are academics doing to overcome these barriers and increase study abroad uptake for widening participation students?

2a) How does this compare between pre- and post-1992 universities?
2b) How does this compare between academic fields of study?

3) What do academics perceive to be the main challenges of facilitating study abroad participation for widening participation students?

## Organisation of the thesis

The literature review section follows on from this introductory chapter, which begins by combining the conceptual contributions of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) to explain academic willingness to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students and Bourdieu's Capital Theory (1986) to indicate why there is a need for academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. Both of these will highlight the challenges faced by academics in facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students. Existing

empirical research by scholars in the field of study abroad inequalities will be utilised to determine how a variety of factors on an individual, departmental and institutional level may enable or constrain the capacity of academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. A critical evaluation of these studies will then present the opportunity for identifying present knowledge gaps, whilst also demonstrating how the study will aim to address these through its chosen research questions.

The thesis then progresses on to the methodology chapter. This chapter begins by outlining the study's choice of research strategy, which consists of a case study inquiry and a qualitative approach. It goes on to justify why semi-structured interviews were chosen for the research and discuss the rationale for conducting these remotely, rather than face-to-face. It then explains how the research sites for this study were selected and how research participants were recruited, and provides a demographic breakdown of the study's sample characteristics. Attention will be given to how data from the interviews were analysed, before moving on to a critical reflection in terms of the researcher's relation to both the study's research topic and its chosen research participants. This chapter concludes with an exploration of ethical considerations involved with conducting the research.

Findings from the thesis are divided into three separate parts, each of which analyse and discuss interview data simultaneously, as opposed to separating these into an explanatory findings section and a critical analysis discussion section. The first of these investigates understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students from an academic staff member perspective. The second section delves into strategies used by academics for overcoming the barriers to study abroad for WP students, while the third identifies challenges associated with facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students.

Finally, the conclusion chapter of the thesis answers the research questions informed by the literature review. It then illustrates the contributions to knowledge made by the study and acknowledges its limitations, before offering recommendations for future research.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

This chapter explains how a thematic approach was used to explore the existing literature on study abroad inequalities. Scholarly work on both the under-representation of particular student groups and the under-representation of certain academics is examined to determine what shapes the decision to engage – or not – with international opportunities.

The first section of the literature review employs Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) to consider the role that individual factors, such as background demographics and international experience, departmental factors, such as field of study and professional rank, and university characteristics, such as resources and priorities, all play in influencing study abroad involvement among academics on a personal, professional and institutional level.

The second section of the literature review adopts a Bourdieusian framing (Bourdieu, 1986) to explain why WP students might self-exclude themselves from taking up study abroad opportunities. It also identifies why there is a need for academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students by highlighting how access to financial resources, or economic capital, access to experiences and activities, or cultural capital, and access to knowledgeable others, or social capital, impacts the likelihood of receiving an international experience.

The third section of the literature review outlines how academics can facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students by focusing on research that offers recommendations and suggestions as to how international activities could be made more inclusive. These include methods for enhancing study abroad, such as making programmes more accessible, methods for encouraging the pursuit of study abroad, such as making the experience more achievable, and methods for raising awareness of study abroad, such as making the process more transparent. This section also investigates the challenges associated with these strategies for academics, before identifying how said difficulties could be overcome.

This chapter concludes with a brief summary. It then presents the research questions to be explored in this study, as formulated by the literature, to be answered and re-addressed fully in the final conclusion chapter of the thesis.

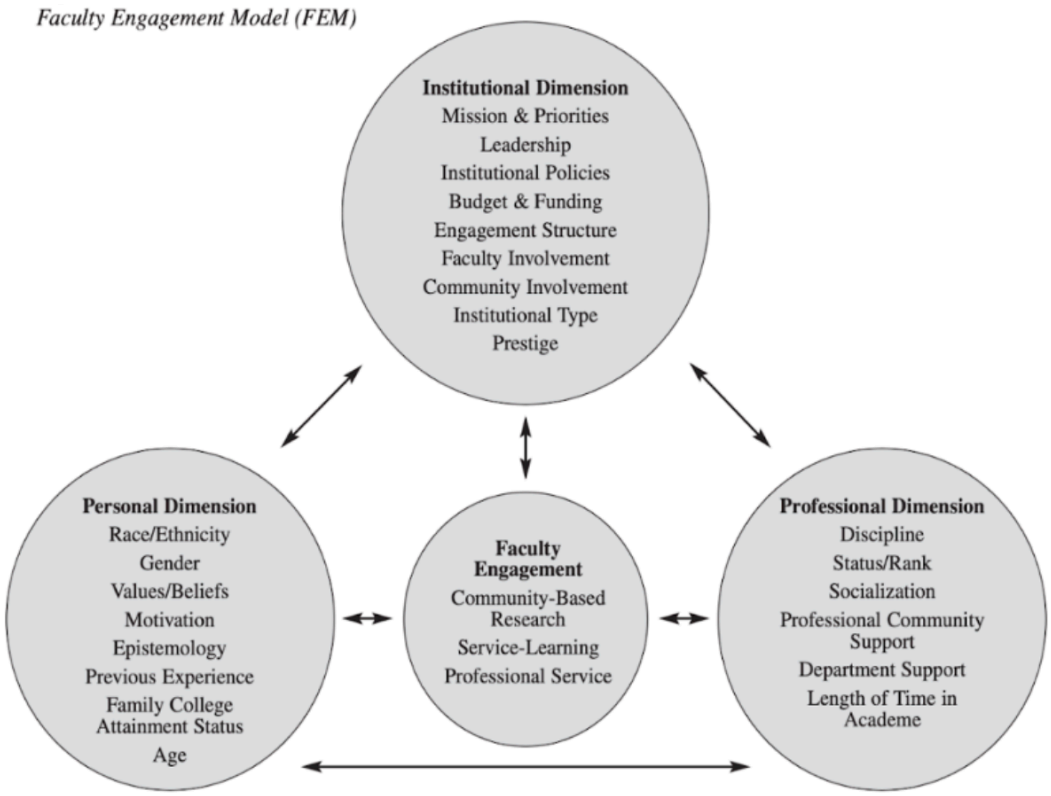
## 2.1 Conceptual considerations: what explains academics' willingness to facilitate study abroad uptake for widening participation students?

Academic engagement with study abroad – or the act of being involved with advising, encouraging and supporting students to pursue international opportunities – is typically done on a voluntary basis, as opposed to an obligatory one. Engagement, in other words, is a personal choice, albeit one that can be influenced by a variety of factors. While there exist numerous models and frameworks explaining student engagement with study abroad, theoretical and conceptual understandings of academic engagement remain limited in comparison. Danjean (2017) was the first to bridge this gap by modifying Wade and Demb's Faculty Engagement Model (2009) – originally designed to identify what shapes the decision to become involved with service activities – and applying it to the study abroad context. As with study abroad, service activities, or the use of academic expertise "to directly address or respond to real-world problems, issues, interests, or concerns", such as outreach and WP (Wade and Demb, 2007, p. 7), generally extend beyond an academic's mandatory responsibilities of research, or the production and advancement of knowledge, and teaching, or the development of student skills and capabilities, hence the need to understand what drives their engagement.

As such, the original Faculty Engagement Model was created to examine why some academics are more likely to engage with service activities than others, and analyses what enables or constrains their involvement from three different aspects. The first of these identifies factors that shape the decision-making process on a personal level, which include: (a) values and beliefs, (b) sociodemographic background, and (c) prior experience. The second of these explores factors on a professional level, which consists of: (a) field of study, (b) rank or tenure status, and (c) departmental and university-wide support. The third and final of these investigates institutional level factors, which contains: (a) recognition policies,

(b) administrative and financial resources, (c) university priorities, and (c) university ranking and reputation (Wade and Demb, 2009).

**Figure 1: Wade and Demb's Faculty Engagement Model (2009, p. 8)**

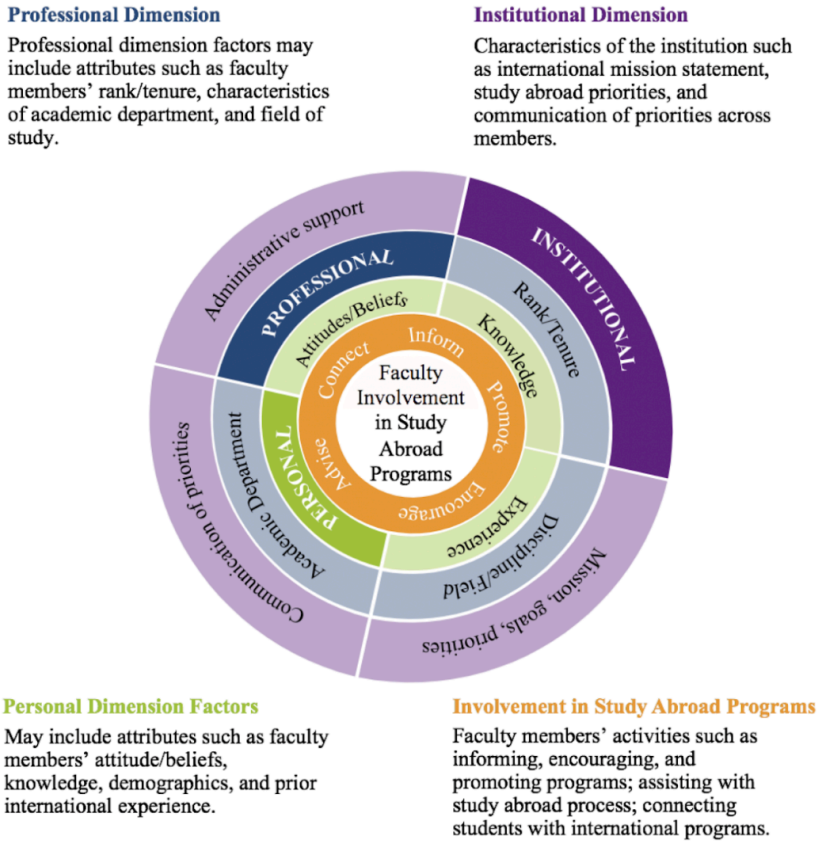



Although the factors in Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) are broadly applicable to those of Wade and Demb (2009) on a personal, professional and institutional level, an international element was added to determine academic proclivity for study abroad engagement. Similar to Wade and Demb's original model (2009), the modified version by Danjean (2017) seeks to provide insights not only into what facilitates engagement, but also into what impedes engagement. Danjean's model therefore explains how the choice to engage with study abroad is shaped on a personal level, which considers an individual's background characteristics and previous international experience, a professional level, which considers departmental affiliation and priorities, and an institutional level, which considers university characteristics and resources.

While the modified Faculty Engagement Model (Danjean, 2017) is a useful one for understanding academic engagement with study abroad, it should be noted, before delving

into any further specifics, that the name of said model is not entirely transferable from its original US context to a UK setting. These HE systems are very different, both in culture and terminology which, in this instance, is relevant for defining how 'faculty' can be construed in each environment. In the US, the term faculty is usually reserved for individuals employed solely in an academic capacity, such as professors and advisors, while those employed in non-academic roles, such as campus management and organisation, are referred to as staff. In the UK, however, faculty is used to describe the collective division of degree subjects in the same field of study, such as the Faculty of Social Sciences (under which would consist of disciplines including, for example, Sociology, Politics and Education). Meanwhile, unlike the US, both academic and non-academic employees in the UK are referred to as 'staff', albeit with the former distinguished as academic staff members, or simply 'academics', while the latter is more commonly known as professional services staff, or administrators. Given the focus of this study and its research significance of exploring the knowledge gaps from a UK perspective, the term 'academics' will be applied consistently from now on to describe its target demographic, rather than 'faculty', although referral to the chosen conceptual model will remain unchanged.

**Figure 2: Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017, p. 43)**




The next section will investigate how each of the three dimensions of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) influence academic involvement with study abroad, with emphasis placed on what shapes willingness to facilitate uptake for WP students in particular.

### *2.1.1 Individual characteristics*

Understanding what motivates academics to engage with study abroad on an individual level is a crucial first step towards explaining why some are more willing to get involved with international activities than others. The personal dimension of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) therefore offers a useful framework for identifying which factors play a role in shaping attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards study abroad, and for what might influence the drive to increase participation rates among under-represented groups.

***International experience***

While scholars broadly agree that having lived, worked or travelled overseas increases the likelihood of study abroad engagement, reasons for why academics with international experience encourage students to follow in their footsteps are varied. If academics understand the value of study abroad, for instance, then they will likely perceive said activity as beneficial for student learning outcomes and development (Bridger, 2015; Green and Olsen, 2003; Paus and Robinson, 2008). Of these, intercultural competence, or the broadening of one's horizons through exposure to other countries and contexts, is considered key for building tolerance and empathy for diversity, and for increasing willingness to integrate with different cultures (Black and Duhon, 2006; Clark et al., 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Edmonds, 2010). Study abroad has also been shown to reduce prejudice and ethnocentrism, or the belief of one's own culture as superior to others, by challenging inaccurate stereotypes (Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Maharaja, 2018), and gives students greater insight into how their home country might appear from an outsider's perspective (Carlson and Widaman, 1988).

This can be seen in how study abroad was described to have been an 'eye-opening experience' for participants in a paper by Ingraham and Peterson (2004), where students from the US – a place considered by many as culturally isolated and inward-looking – were surprised to learn how negatively their country was viewed by inhabitants of Latin America. Students from the US who spent a semester abroad in the UK were similarly taken aback to discover how annoying Americans were perceived as being in a study by James (2008). This resulted in a change of outlook, where students went from having previously little interest in the outside world to becoming more understanding and accepting of cultural difference, and becoming more critical of their own culture after developing a new frame of reference. Findings from both studies align with those by Wright and Clarke (2010), whose survey compared pre- and post-trip attitudes among US students who studied abroad in Belgium. Students became not just culturally aware but also culturally sensitive, as learning how to modify their own behaviour in a culturally appropriate manner gave them the confidence needed to adapt to a foreign environment.

Although findings were largely positive, Wright and Clarke (2010) still challenge the normative assumption that study abroad delivers only positive outcomes, at least in terms of intercultural competence. They highlight the methodological limitations not only of their own paper, but of other studies by pointing out selection bias of the sample population, and how

this could skew results. These should consequently be treated with some level of caution, given that the type of students most likely to study abroad are those who are most likely to have gained international experience through school trips or family holidays abroad, and thus are already accustomed to cultural differences.

The generalisability of such findings are also called into question when accounting for how demographics might impact one's ability to develop intercultural competence, or how these skills are even acquired in the first place, and suggests that adjustment to the host country may be easier for some students than others. Those from East Asia – and China in particular – often adapt poorly to the host country when studying abroad, and struggle more with culture shock, which may be explained by their reluctance to interact with the local community and a preference to stick with others of their own kind (Xiao and Petraki, 2007; Zheng, 2010). Development of intercultural competence thus becomes more difficult when opting to limit opportunities for cultural immersion by living in an 'international student bubble', so to speak, and using their compatriots as a buffer from the unfamiliar to reduce their fear of the unknown (Nada and Legutko, 2022). Lack of integration with the host culture can actually increase tension between home and overseas students, where refusal to interact may cause resentment among the former (Beech, 2017; Bell, 2016; Deakin, 2013) and risks pre-existing views of being entrenched among the latter, rather than being changed for the better (Chao, Kung, and Yao, 2015).

European students are not immune to this phenomenon, as found in a mixed methods study by Cots et al. (2016) that surveyed Spanish Erasmus participants to determine whether attitudes had changed as a result of a study abroad experience. A significant number of participants resented having to fit in with their host countries, which contradicts findings from other studies indicating that study abroad makes students more tolerant and accepting of diversity, as some may choose instead to "cling to habits from their home culture" (p. 317). Demographic factors once again come into play, which suggests that the more ethnically and culturally homogenous one's own society is, the more resistant a student will be towards adapting to a foreign environment. This also makes Spain and China an interesting comparison with the US, which may be insular but does, given its status of cultural melting pot, appear more open to change.

Regardless of consensus, the key point to consider is that if academics with personal experience of study abroad and its benefits are more likely to champion the cause of international mobility, then those without are typically more skeptical of its relevance (Childress, 2010). While there are a number of reasons explaining why these academics might not see the value of study, which will be discussed at length later in the literature review, how buy-in among this group could be increased remains overlooked. Creating opportunities for engagement by gaining experience of study abroad through sabbaticals, conducting research or teaching overseas, or simply travelling to attend international conferences could potentially generate interest and investment, which in turn would help them advocate its benefits to students (Klahr and Ratti, 2000; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012).

Given the current economic and political UK context, sustaining engagement among staff members who are already involved in study abroad is equally important, and also explains why different types of academics might favour different types of benefits in relation to study abroad outcomes. Foreign national status plays a key role in motivating academics born overseas to give their students an international experience, as found in a US study by Calikoglu, Lee and Arslan (2022), and the more geographically isolated their adopted country is, the more driven they become to create opportunities for cultural exposure as a means of countering perceived insularity. Similar conclusions were reached by Courtois and Veiga (2020), who found that the more internationally mobile an academic is, the more supportive they will be of study abroad. The authors also raise a salient point about Brexit, and the consequences this could have on study abroad participation rates since the UK became a less appealing place to work for EU academics. These academics are now opting instead to work in Ireland or other countries in mainland Europe, and are taking their expertise, enthusiasm and connections with them that could have otherwise been used to help facilitate study abroad uptake for British students.

Courtois and Veiga (2020) point out another ramification of the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus and its subsequent replacement, the Turing Scheme, which does not, unlike its predecessor, offer funding for staff mobility. This is vital for enabling academics to attend international conferences and other networking events that could lead to future collaboration and exchange between universities. Much of the focus on Turing so far has only considered its impact on student mobility, while its effect on academic mobility is under-researched.

This would be an interesting gap for future scholars to explore, due to how little attention has been paid to academic mobility more broadly. As demonstrated in Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017), knowledge and awareness of international opportunities is key for influencing academic engagement, and those who are familiar with the study abroad process are well placed to advise students on how to effectively navigate this. Such knowledge is not the sole preserve of those from international backgrounds, however, as academics who share similar characteristics with their students can be equally driven to open up international opportunities, albeit for different reasons.

***Sociodemographic profile***

Reincorporating demographic factors – chiefly gender, ethnicity and parental education status – that Danjean (2017) removed from the personal dimension of Wade and Demb's original Faculty Engagement Model (2009) could enable a better understanding of why attitudes towards study abroad – and rationales for getting involved with said activity – may differ. This became relevant in a quantitative US study surveying 473 academics from 72 universities by Niehaus et al. (2018), which found that academics from BAME backgrounds were more likely to engage with study abroad than their Caucasian counterparts. This could be attributed to their wider commitment to addressing social injustice more generally, and to the preference among such academics to place greater emphasis on incorporating diverse perspectives in their teaching. It may also explain their motivations not only to make study abroad more inclusive, but to make universities in general more accessible to those who might otherwise have been excluded from them.

While not addressed by any other scholars exploring study abroad inequalities from the academic stakeholder perspective, having a vested interest in changing the status quo could potentially be explained by parental education status, with first generation students progressing up the ranks to become a lecturer or professor being similarly preoccupied with advancing social justice. This would be an important avenue to investigate, but it does highlight the shortcomings of Wade and Demb's original Faculty Engagement Model (2009) in terms of how this particular factor may have limited transferability to other countries and contexts. Issues of HE under-representation are tackled very differently in the US, from which this model – and Danjean's modified version (2017) – emerged than in the UK, where the former uses affirmative action by remedying historical ethnic and racial disparities

through positive discrimination, while the latter takes a broader approach to rectifying social disadvantage through widening participation.

Despite these limitations, the model is still useful for explaining why academics who self-identify as coming from a WP background are not only more likely to engage with study abroad, but also their rationale for opening up international opportunities to students like themselves. Institutional affiliation can similarly influence motivations for engaging with study abroad, as Hull (2013) found when interviewing academics employed at a US community college, where those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more concentrated compared to traditional four-year universities. When asked about their reasons for sending WP students abroad, participants spoke positively about how much these students had changed as a result of having a study abroad experience, and how this had empowered them to venture beyond their comfort zones, which those from under-represented backgrounds are often reluctant to leave. This suggests that academics from a WP background – or those employed at institutions where WP students make up a large percentage of – are more likely to value the transformative aspects of study abroad, and how these benefit participants on a personal development level. The study was constrained by its sample size, however, which was small even for a qualitative exploration – consisting only of 1 academic from the social sciences and 2 from the arts and humanities – and was recruited solely from one university, thus limiting its generalisability. It may have been more enlightening to broaden the study's scope by recruiting academics from a variety of academic disciplines to determine whether disciplinary affiliation makes any difference in shaping motivations to engage with study abroad.

Bridger (2015) did just that, and was also one of the few studies exploring academic involvement with study abroad from a UK context. Their mixed methods study initially surveyed participants from 30 different universities, which was then followed up with interviews from academics at a further 11 universities. These were drawn from all four regions of the UK, albeit with England – unsurprisingly, given its relative size and population – being over-represented compared to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The scale of this study does make it unique, despite the geographic imbalance, as unlike most other scholars who focus only on one university and only on one academic discipline, Bridger (2015) recruited from multiple universities and from multiple academic disciplines. While effort was made to achieve a reasonable spread of disciplines and target traditionally under-

represented fields of study, some subjects inevitably received more representation than others, with STEM, as usual, being in the minority. This could be attributed to the study's research approach, as while a solely quantitative focus would have enabled the creation of an evenly matched comparison group, qualitative methods are more reliant upon the willingness of its participants to take part. More importantly, effort was made to recruit not just from different academic disciplines, but also from different types of universities, although the sample was again skewed somewhat by containing more pre-1992 universities than post-1992 universities, despite the latter outnumbering the former on a nation-wide level. This could be explained by how academics at research-intensive institutions are more likely to be engaged in study abroad than those at teaching-focused providers, and thus, by extension, more likely to engage with scholarly exploration of this phenomenon.

Even so, while findings align with those of Hull (2013) in that the majority of academics were motivated to give students a transformative learning experience by pushing them out of their comfort zone, they also demonstrate the importance of ensuring that those from under-represented backgrounds are sufficiently supported to prevent these benefits from being negated and turning what should have been a positive occurrence into a negative one. While the impact of study abroad is often amplified for WP students by enabling young people who have never moved out of the family home to become more confident (Allinson, 2017; Dean and Kelly, 2020) and better equipped to handle unexpected problems independently, rather than relying on parents to solve these for them (Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Martinez, Ranjeet and Marx, 2009; Norris and Dwyer, 2005), such students still face more challenges not only in transitioning to university, but also in progressing through HE, and thus require more support to study abroad.

This is an important point, and one that Bridger (2015) did not examine in greater depth by learning what could have been done to avoid any unfavourable outcomes. It is also reflective of how policy and practice more broadly has shifted away from simply getting WP students into HE – then leaving them to flounder without adequate guidance or assistance – and more towards ensuring that they achieve success at all stages of their academic careers. Applying the same holistic approach to study abroad as is taken to the student lifecycle, which now looks beyond access and considers the likelihood of retention, or completion of a degree within the traditional 3-year timeframe, to attainment, or degree classification, and finally

progression, or pathways into graduate employment and further study, could thus enable more students to gain the benefits of a study abroad experience.

This also explains why academics are so keen to push WP students out of their comfort zone, given how study abroad is linked with higher persistence rates (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004), which would be of considerable benefit to those deemed most at risk of non-continuation (Jerrim, 2014; Quinn, 2004; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2009; Yorke and Thomas, 2003). Retention and success have become increasingly important since universities became more accountable for student satisfaction metrics, such as drop-out rates, and demonstrates a growing need to evidence outcomes at both an individual and an institutional level (Kinzie et al., 2008). As discussed earlier, however, assumptions should not be made about the benefits of study abroad, even for WP students, and while studies examining the impact of said activity on those from under-represented backgrounds remain largely positive, questions should still be raised over the representativeness of these findings.

A quantitative study by Young (2008), for example, stands out from most others through its inclusion of commuter status among the more traditional WP variables, such as SES and ethnicity. Its focus on commuter students was an unusual but welcome choice, and also carries added significance, given the higher likelihood such students face of dropping out from their studies. Although their study did find a link between study abroad participation and higher continuation rates – and aligns with retention theories suggesting that the more socially integrated one is with their campus community, the more likely they are to persist with their degree (Tinto, 1977) – there is a need for further studies on this topic to determine whether these benefits are experienced equally among all WP students, or whether different types of study abroad programmes deliver different types of benefits, at least in terms of retention and persistence.

The same question was raised by Haupt and Castiello-Gutiérrez (2021), who cast doubt on whether short-term stays like summer schools, which WP students are more likely to take part in, have the same impact on degree completion as long-term stays, such as a semester or a year abroad. They also recommend further examination of whether the correlation between study participation and degree persistence is equally applicable to different cultural contexts, as most of the findings in this area have been conducted in a US setting. This could be more

significant than programme duration, given the extent to which educational pathways differ in the US from, say, the UK, and how American students are typically more preoccupied with completing their studies on time, or why they might be more concerned about prolonging their degree for an international experience. It would also be an interesting comparison to explore, due to how emphasis on the liberal arts model in the US, where students start off broad and gradually narrow down their interests over four or more years, contrasts with the UK's – or rather, England's – three-year model, which requires specialisation from the start. This suggests that the structure of a programme, rather than its duration, may leave British students less concerned with time-to-degree than their American counterparts, although future research is advised to discover whether study abroad is as beneficial for retention among those from WP backgrounds in the UK as it is for those in the US.

### *2.1.2 Departmental characteristics*

While the role of individual characteristics is widely acknowledged for their role in motivating academics to engage with study abroad, departmental characteristics can be equally significant for shaping attitudes towards said activity. Disciplinary affiliation largely determines whether these tend more towards the positive or the negative, as indicated by the professional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), along with the extent to which this constrains or enables an academic's involvement with international opportunities.

***Field of study***

One reason why some academics might view study abroad less favourably than others stems from how different fields of study prioritise different learning outcomes for their students. Industry-focused disciplines such as Business and Finance, for example, emphasise career development and enterprise-related learning (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Smart and Umbach, 2007). STEM subjects, meanwhile, focus on the application of objective knowledge, unlike the arts, humanities and social sciences, which value more subjective forms of critical thinking and analysis that challenges and develops pre-existing beliefs (Giedt, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Scholars also attribute negative attitudes among STEM academics to their concerns over the perceived academic rigour of overseas universities (Green and Olson, 2003; McBurnie, 2000), which may have some

validity, given that scholars are now beginning to question the impact of study abroad on educational outcomes. While these are generally viewed as positive, and link study abroad participation both with stronger academic performance and higher degree classifications (Findlay et al., 2006; Malmgren and Galvin, 2008), doubt has since been cast over the applicability of such findings.

Twombly (2012) was one of the first to identify the methodological weakness of these studies, namely in terms of sample size – which tends to be small and drawn only from one specific department or university, thus making it difficult to generalise findings on a larger scale – but also sample characteristics. The majority of these studies recruited from research-intensive institutions, which are academically selective by nature and attract the highest achieving applicants, so it could be argued that students at such universities would continue to perform well anyway, regardless of whether or not they studied abroad. Claims of improved educational outcomes should therefore be appropriately limited if grades are only compared before and after a study abroad experience, and should consider how academic performance prior to entering university is often a stronger indicator of future success.

While Czarnitzki, Joosten and Toivanen (2021) agree that future studies exploring the link between study abroad participation and academic performance should achieve greater sample diversity to avoid excluding certain groups and thus becoming unrepresentative, findings by Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra (2014) suggest that institutional context might not be as influential as would initially appear. Their mixed methods US study was one of the few to investigate study abroad outcomes at a teaching-focused university, and argues that students most likely to be enrolled at such providers – namely those from WP backgrounds – benefit just as much from an international experience as their more socially privileged counterparts at traditional four-year institutions, despite the difference in prior academic achievement. They conclude that study abroad can actually be more impactful for WP students, and could even help to redress the attainment gap. This could be explained by how academic readiness, or preparation required for university level learning, is typically lower among WP students, whose difficulty in navigating the transition from compulsory to higher education also places them at higher risk of dropping out (Smith and Naylor, 2001). Study abroad, however, offers such students the opportunity to experience different educational environments and experiment with different learning strategies, which in turn enables them to develop better

time management skills and more effective study habits (Cardwell, 2020; Courtois, 2017), all of which contribute towards improved academic performance.

Despite the lack of consensus, this does raise questions as to who would benefit the most from an international experience. It also highlights a key limitation of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) regarding who gets to take part in an international experience. The organisation of study abroad, or allocation of overseas placements, should therefore be considered when explaining why some academics might view study abroad more favourably than others, and how this, too, could factor into academic outcomes. This is because while some universities operate an open-access policy to study abroad and offer placements on a first-come-first-served basis, the majority assign these on a competitive basis, where access is determined by a student's grades. As Nerlich (2021) observes, if only the strongest students are selected for study abroad participation, then it would not be unreasonable to expect these same students to continue either performing at the same level or at a higher one upon returning to their home institution.

Eligibility criteria matters, then, not only for academic outcomes, but also for shaping the rationale behind restricting access to study abroad in the first place. Interestingly, a mixed methods study by Whatley and Raby (2020) surveying academics at 24 different universities in the US found that even those affiliated with community colleges were opposed to applying the same open-access mindset to study abroad as was used in their institution's overall entry requirements for the purpose of making international opportunities more inclusive. Some preferred instead to keep study abroad exclusive and reject students with lower grades, who they believed were ill-equipped to cope with the challenges of an international experience. Unlike research-intensive universities, where access can either be enabled or constrained based on the desire to uphold intellectual standards, risk aversion at teaching-focused institutions arose more from concerns over student success. Retention and completion are generally more important at the latter, which would rather channel resources into pastoral support rather than extracurricular activities, and demonstrates how even these providers might "struggle to balance an open access mission while maintaining what some see as important standards in the field" (p. 94).

Merit-based selection is similarly significant not just in terms of who can access study abroad placements, but also who can access study abroad funding. This barrier was first brought to

light in a study by Lorz, Netz and Quast (2016), and highlights how access to study abroad will continue to remain unequal, even in more egalitarian countries like Germany, for as long as study abroad grants and scholarships are awarded on academic achievement rather than financial need. The study's quantitative focus, however, prevented any further exploration of this issue, and while its sample size was appropriately large enough – with statistical data being drawn from more than 6,000 school leaver pupils – to be considered representative of the population as a whole, a qualitative approach could have enabled a deeper understanding of how such allocation strategies are perceived, and the extent to which these are considered to be equitable.

Another problem with awarding study abroad funding through a merit-based system, rather than a need-based one, is that it risks being distributed towards those from high-income backgrounds, despite being initially established – as in the case of Erasmus – to make study abroad more affordable. Another German study by Netz and Finger (2016) analysing data drawn from undergraduates on a nationwide basis found that such students are more active in seeking out monetary assistance, not because they need it to support their studies, but because the scarcity and prestige of these scholarships has since been repurposed as a method of distinguishment. The authors thus take a critical view of financial aid by arguing that it only increases the elitism of study abroad, not its accessibility, and unless this is changed, then inequalities will continue to exist.

Scholars are increasingly beginning to question whether merit-based selection is the most appropriate method of allocating both study abroad funding and study abroad placements, and argue that measuring all students on the same criteria is inherently unfair when some face more barriers to participation than others (Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020). Competing demands, such as work or caring commitments, can prevent WP students from reaching their full academic potential (Christie, 2007; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009), as can illness or disability (Shames and Alden, 2005), and indicates the need for a more holistic evaluation, as opposed to adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

This issue will be discussed at length later in the literature review, but for now, attention turns once again to the drawbacks of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017), as while it does acknowledge how field of study might shape attitudes and beliefs towards study abroad among academics, it also neglects to consider the influence of

other discipline specific factors, namely curriculum flexibility. Adding this element would contribute towards a greater understanding of why academics in STEM are less willing to encourage their students to study abroad than those in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Numerous studies indicate that the more time-consuming and intensive a course is, the more challenging it becomes to match up content at a student's home institution with its overseas equivalent (Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Courtois, 2018; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012). STEM degrees are sequentially structured and require prerequisite modules to be passed before progressing from one level to the next, which makes learning less transferable compared to other disciplines (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010).

The need to meet professional accreditation requirements, as with specialised subjects like Architecture or Engineering, only adds to the complexity of organising international placements (Ahn, 2014), which could explain the perception of study abroad among STEM academics as a high effort, low reward activity (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016). Such academics would consequently benefit from increased support, be it from administrative staff colleagues or their peers, to share the workload of ensuring that host universities are closely matched with their own more effectively (Leask et al., 2020), while the development of study abroad programmes that are closely aligned with STEM curricula and interests is also recommended for increasing academic buy-in (Giedt, Gokcek, and Ghosh, 2015).

***Professional rank***

While tenure status could be considered less significant than field of study, at least from a UK context, job security should still be factored into what affects an academic's willingness to – and more importantly, capacity for – engaging with study abroad. On the surface, the inclusion of professional rank in Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) may limit its transferability somewhat, but it still provides a useful explanation for behaviour and decision-making. While tenure, or indefinite employment, was abolished in the UK through the 1988 Education Reform Act, similarities can still be observed with the US, where this still exists, in how growing casualisation of the academic workforce has led to greater competition for permanent roles (Dnes and Seaton, 1998). These are becoming increasingly scarce, though, and with universities now preferring to employ less established researchers in both countries on a temporary or casual basis (Wolf and Jenkins, 2020), advancing one's

career becomes more difficult when many have little choice but to move from one fixed-term contract to the next (Batterbury, 2008).

Studies on the influence of rank on study abroad engagement have been mixed, however. Some scholars, such as Niehaus et al. (2018), found that early career researchers tend to be more involved than their tenured counterparts, not just with international opportunities specifically, but with teaching and other extracurricular activities more generally, who may have had less freedom to pursue their own interests, but were also less burnt out from the demands of academia. Green and Olson (2003), in contrast, found that the more stability an academic had in their job, the more likely they would be to engage with study abroad, whereas those with less secure prospects were too preoccupied with grants and publications to divert their time elsewhere.

Similar claims were made by Raczkoski and Robinson (2019), who conducted interviews with four academics from a US research-intensive university involved with short-term study abroad programmes, all of whom were tenured. While this was a small sample size, and limits the study's findings to some extent, these are still of interest in that participants were recruited from the Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, which are some of the most under-represented disciplines in study abroad, even among STEM as a whole. Also of interest is how findings suggest that type of employment may matter more than security of employment. All three participants were on teaching only contracts with no research obligations, and thus were able to direct more of their time towards outreach and extracurricular activities that would have otherwise been taken up by managing multiple conflicting responsibilities.

Participants were highly motivated to expand learning opportunities beyond the classroom with the aim of exposing their students to other cultures and contexts – unusually so, in a field of study that values 'hard skills', or the development of technical and discipline-specific competence over 'soft skills', such as adaptability and communication. Although this was a welcome counter to other studies demonstrating how attitudes among STEM academics are typically less favourable towards study abroad and its outcomes, findings may not be representative due to how most established academics are expected to balance their time between research, teaching and administration. Participants did acknowledge, however, that being required to do only one of these things was a luxury, whereas academics without this

same privilege focus – by necessity – on what would be rewarded most, not on what they value most: another issue that will be further explored in the following section.

### 2.1.3 Institutional characteristics

When considering what factors might shape the decision to engage with study abroad or not from an institutional perspective, it should be noted that while Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) does recognise the role of university culture and university priorities, it fails to consider how university status can be equally influential in enabling or constraining involvement. The decision to remove this aspect from Wade and Demb's original model (2009) was appropriate for Danjean's study (2017), given its focus only on one field of study – Agricultural Sciences – and only on two universities of a distinctive type and function – land-grant colleges – which were originally established to provide practical knowledge and skills for rural populations. This focus may have been suitably narrow, as such universities are neither selective nor prestigious, and although it does limit transferability of the author's conceptual model somewhat, recommendations were made accordingly for future researchers to extend this by applying it to other institutional contexts.

***University priorities***

As discussed earlier, scholars are increasingly beginning to acknowledge how different types of universities offer different types of opportunities for a study abroad experience (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Di Pietro, 2020; Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022). Studies also show that different types of universities have different types of priorities, and attract different types of students. Non-academically selective universities tend to be locally focused and recruit from the immediate community, prioritise retention and completion, and market themselves more on career development (Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). Academically selective universities, in contrast, are globally focused and recruit from the country as a whole, prioritise a well-rounded education, and market themselves on international exchange (Russell Group, 2017). The more internationally-oriented a university is, the more partner links they tend to have (Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Stier, 2004; Waters, 2009), and the more prestigious a university is, the more money it tends

to receive from endowments and alumni donations, and the more study abroad placements they can fund (Zhang, 2011).

Ranking and reputation were found to be pivotal in determining the likelihood of study abroad uptake in a qualitative Irish study by Courtois (2017). Content analysis of university websites and interviews with students who had either already studied abroad or who were currently studying abroad revealed that research-intensive institutions had a wide variety of destinations, while choice at teaching-focused providers was considerably more limited. These differences had significant implications for study abroad uptake, where offering a greater range of options resulted in a greater likelihood of students finding a host country that would suit their interests. Despite Ireland's relatively homogenous population, findings from this case study are just as applicable to more culturally and ethnically diverse countries, and have been widely replicated in the US to highlight the importance of programme fit for increasing participation among under-represented groups.

Offering a diverse variety of destinations for a diverse student body is crucial for generating interest in study abroad, as is recognition of the preference for visiting countries that are culturally and linguistically similar to one's own, because while traditional European links may appeal to Caucasian students, links with heritage countries in Asia or Africa might be more relevant to those from BAME backgrounds (Kasravi, 2009; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). Findings are also reflective of those by McClure et al. (2010), who observed that the interests of Latinx students interviewed in this paper were not well-served by their universities. Although many were initially keen to take part in study abroad, their preferred destinations – the Spanish-speaking countries of South America – were incompatible with what their university had available, which was mainly placements in Western Europe.

Equally significant is how ranking and reputation determine the level of administrative infrastructure available for study abroad management, or what Wade and Demb refer to in the original Faculty Engagement Model as "a centralised organisational framework to support engagement" (2009, p. 10). Research-intensive universities generally employ more staff to both manage study abroad in an official capacity than their teaching-focused counterparts, and market study abroad through large-scale promotional campaigns (Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). The larger a dedicated study abroad office is, the more support they can provide on practicalities such as running information sessions or other awareness raising

events (Savishinsky, 2012). Most academics with the role of study abroad adviser receive little assistance from their department or their colleagues in facilitating uptake of international opportunities, so sharing the workload with a centralised study abroad team can make a positive difference not only for enabling their engagement, but also for sustaining their engagement (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Leask et al., 2020).

***Promotion policies and reward systems***

Considering how institutional priorities impede or facilitate study abroad engagement thus highlights another limitation of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) – again originally accounted for in Wade and Demb's initial construction (2009) – when questioning not only whether study abroad engagement is supported, but also whether study abroad engagement is actually rewarded. There is a need, then, to make the distinction between attitudes toward study abroad and capacity for engagement with study abroad, which universities can impede if there is a mismatch between what individual academics value and what their institutions prioritise.

Misalignment of values could explain why some academics are less willing to take on the role of study abroad adviser than others, even when they have experienced the benefits of an international opportunity for themselves. This can be more demanding than they expect, and takes time away from their existing responsibilities such as teaching, research and administration (Leask et al., 2020). More importantly, study abroad involvement is rarely rewarded in performance evaluation metrics, and thus "carries little career benefit" (Courtois, 2017, p. 44) when the number of papers published, conferences attended or research grants awarded offer more weight for career advancement than less easily quantifiable metrics such as outreach initiatives (Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Jessani et al., 2020). Pressure to raise one's individual profile is arguably more pronounced for early career researchers, for whom focus on scholarly productivity often comes at the detriment of study abroad engagement (Moseley, 2009).

Expanding on these findings in a qualitative study, Savishinsky (2012) interviewed 18 academics engaged with study abroad from three different types of universities – a community college, a research-intensive university, and a private university in the US – to examine their perceptions of whether this was recognised. Participants spoke about lack of

incentives to become involved with study abroad, which was viewed as being "professionally counterproductive" (p. 73) in terms of the sacrifices required, and for how little this counted towards tenure or promotion. Many were disheartened over how efforts to raise study abroad participation rates had gone underappreciated, which resulted in even the most committed and enthusiastic academics losing motivation over time. Findings indicate that sustaining engagement with study abroad is just as important as creating engagement, because if this is not acknowledged by their colleagues or their universities, then it will likely lead to disengagement.

While Savishinsky's research (2012) is broader in scope than most other papers on this topic, impressively so for a PhD level study, its sample was still limited by focusing only on academics who were engaged with one type of study abroad model – a short-term programme – and would have benefited from comparing attitudes among those involved with long-term programmes to determine whether the academics running these felt similarly discouraged. Findings were still largely reflective of those from other studies, and add to growing concerns over the need to incentivise study abroad engagement if academics are to dedicate themselves to this activity. Findings also highlight the need to change policy and practice by recognising their involvement as a contribution towards their professional advancement, and suggest that changing reward structures could potentially change attitudes towards study abroad as a result.

## 2.2 Theoretical underpinnings: why is there a need for academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for widening participation students?

There exists a general consensus in the literature that students are more likely to study abroad when encouraged to do so by academics, with those who participate in said activity often citing this stakeholder group as having the greatest influence over their decision to pursue an international sojourn (Amani and Kim, 2018; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010; Salisbury et al., 2010). The existence of an authority figure who is willing to advocate for study abroad can also help to increase participation rates for under-represented groups, particularly when an official role is created for them to operate as a named contact that students can consult for advice and support (Brux and Fry, 2010; Chang,

von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Leask et al., 2020). Championing the cause of international mobility can likewise make a difference for under-represented disciplines, chiefly those in STEM (Ahn, 2014; Loh et al., 2011; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Ramakrishna, Sarkar and Vijayaraman, 2016). However, while Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model is useful for understanding what influences academics to engage with study abroad in general (2017), it does not explain what influences their understandings of the barriers to study abroad for under-represented students, or why such students face these obstacles in the first place.

Given this study's aim of exploring what influences academic willingness to facilitate study abroad for a specific type of student – those from WP backgrounds – it was therefore crucial to address the limitations of this model, which highlights a need to increase uptake among the student body as a whole, rather than singling out any one demographic. Extending the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) to examine what deters WP students from accessing study abroad carries additional significance, given that exposure to international opportunities is largely dependent on the type of university attended (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; Stier, 2004; van Mol, 2022). These are often clustered in academically selective research-intensive institutions, which tend to attract socially privileged students (Christie, 2007; Henderson, 2020; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), while non-selective teaching-focused providers, where socially disadvantaged are concentrated (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009) are less well-resourced and internationally connected.

As such, it was considered appropriate to combine the study's chosen conceptual model with a theoretical underpinning to account for the existence of inequalities in access to study abroad from a sociodemographic perspective, as opposed to a disciplinary focus. While a number of mobility scholars have previously utilised a Bourdieusian Social Reproduction framework (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) to explain why participation rates are so unequal (Netz and Finger, 2016; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012), this study is the first to augment Bourdieu's Capital Theory (1986) by exploring differences in study abroad uptake from a non-student stakeholder perspective.

While Rational Choice Theory (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997) could have been a useful alternative for understanding what might cause WP students to self-exclude themselves from study abroad, a cost-benefit analysis framework would not only confirm what has already been established by a multitude of studies – the acknowledgement of finance as the greatest deterrent (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Stroud, 2010) – but would also not have fully explained why some students are less likely to participate in study abroad than others. More importantly, this theory places too much emphasis on internal background characteristics, and does not consider how an individual's past and current external social contexts affects the likelihood of receiving a study abroad experience (DesJardins and Toutkoushian, 2005).

This can be seen in how distribution of educational add-ons during one's formative years, such as language learning and school trips abroad (King et al., 2011; Findlay et al., 2006; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018), or prior international experience, such as foreign family holidays (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010), is far from even, both of which develop the confidence and familiarity needed for overseas travel and exposure to other cultures (Carlson, 2013; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Smith, Rérat and Sage, 2014), and highlight how the decision to study abroad or not is shaped long before a young person even enrolls at university. Rational Choice Theory also fails to acknowledge how access to information is unequal, given its focus solely on the choices made at an individual level (DesJardins and Toutkoushian, 2005), and not on what influences a student's awareness of the practicalities involved with study abroad. This can be more affordable than they think, due to the level of financial support, such as non-repayable grants and scholarships – most of which is targeted specifically at those from low-income backgrounds – made available (Collinson, 2015; Lulle and Buzinska, 2017). Knowledge of this is often patchy, however, which suggests the need for universities to promote funding more effectively if students most in need are to take advantage of it (Carroll, 1996; Coldwell, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Netz and Finger, 2015).

Capital Theory, in contrast, takes a more holistic approach by considering how participation can either be enabled or constrained by a student's level of resources for, familiarity with and information required for study abroad, or in other words, their stock of economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Although this theory offers a useful tool for the analysis of study abroad inequalities, it has been criticised by scholars for being too deterministic, and

for its assumption that all WP are impacted by the same barriers, or that they view and react to these in the same manner. This includes Netz (2015), who argues that what deters some students from taking up international opportunities might act as a driver for others, and makes an interesting distinction between subjective, or perceived barriers, and objective, or externally identifiable obstacles. Mature students are a common example of the latter, particularly those who are parents, but while it is generally accepted that having children makes it more difficult for this WP subgroup to study abroad, Netz (2015) points out that the same types of students in similar situations might have different means of circumventing these constraints, or simply might not perceive this as a barrier to begin with.

Other critiques have arisen from the tendency of WP research and policy to adopt a deficit approach more generally by focusing on what these students lack rather than what they might possess (Morley, 2003; Whitty, Hayton and Tang, 2015), but also from those specifically addressing study abroad inequalities (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020). Not all WP students are similarly disadvantaged, as while the ethnicity imbalance has long been recognised (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011; Sweeney, 2013), more recent research in mobility has begun to challenge the notion that BAME students self-exclude themselves from study abroad due to an absence of certain attributes or experiences. One's migration background, or whether they come from second- or third-generation immigrant families, for instance, might actually increase their likelihood of participation, given how the two main factors many of them possess – prior international experience and foreign language ability – significantly predisposes such students towards study abroad (Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014).

Nevertheless, integrating the epistemologically compatible Bourdieu's Capital Theory (1986) with Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) will enable this thesis to build on previous studies by exploring not only what contributes to study abroad inequalities, but also what could be done to address these. Understanding what deters study abroad for WP students from the perspective of those who have the most contact with and influence on them – academic staff – is therefore key to identifying effective strategies for helping them to overcome these barriers.

### *2.2.1 Limited resources for study abroad*

A Capital Theory framework (Bourdieu, 1986) is therefore useful for understanding what enables or constrains study abroad participation, and for explaining why financial resources in particular are so widely acknowledged in shaping the decision for WP students to self-exclude themselves from international activities (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010). These are necessary not only for covering the costs of study abroad, but also for determining the likelihood of taking part in said activity, which is often shaped long before an individual even arrives at university. This is because economic capital – typically comprised of wages from work or assets, such as stocks or shares, or other commodities, such as property ownership – is unequally distributed, as the more wealth one accumulates, the more options and opportunities become available to them (Bourdieu, 1986). Purchasing power carries additional significance for education in how this can be used to improve their children's life outcomes, and while independent schools have long been criticised for bestowing unfair advantages on society's most privileged (Cribb et al., 2013; Gorard et al., 2006; Hobbs, 2016; Lewis and Demie, 2015), monetary manipulation can also deny access to state schools in the best catchment areas by pricing out other families so that their offspring are given priority over those with comparatively limited financial reach (Benn, 2012).

Whether housing is affordable or prohibitively expensive not only dictates the type of school one attends, but also their level of academic achievement. Children from high socioeconomic (HSES) backgrounds are more likely to have stable environments containing a quiet space conducive to study, along with books and other educational tools to help with stimulation, whereas those from LSES backgrounds tend to live in overcrowded and insecure accommodation, which makes it more difficult to learn at home (Raffo et al., 2007). The impact of educational biographies will be discussed at greater length, but in short, children from LSES backgrounds are less likely to attend high quality schools, which not only impacts their access to educational add-ons and extracurricular activities, such as trips abroad or language learning (King et al., 2011; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018), both of which spark the desire to become internationally mobile later in life (Carlson, 2013; Gerard and Sana, 2017; Smith, Rérat and Sage, 2014), but also their educational attainment and thus their access to academically selective universities, where study abroad opportunities are most concentrated (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004).

***Cost minimising choices***

What should be noted, however, is that even when LSES pupils overcome adversity and achieve the same A Level grades as their HSES counterparts, the choices they make when applying to university can be very different, with preference among the former being to stay at home and commute to a local provider (Reay, 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), and preference among the latter being to relocate, often at a considerable distance (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009). Some scholars attribute "setting their sights lower" (Sutton Trust, 2004, p. 4) to pragmatic decision-making, where localised study is undertaken to reduce living expenses (Christie, 2007; Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). This choice may be an economically rational one, but it does have consequences for the likelihood of study abroad participation, where the need to employ such risk management strategies constrains their ability to cover the direct costs of a study abroad programme, such as accommodation, travel and subsistence (Lien, 2007; Stroud, 2010).

Others counter that study abroad is more affordable than students think, given the wide availability of non-repayable grants, scholarships and bursaries (Collinson, 2015; Lulle and Buzinska, 2017), plus tuition fee reductions (Courtois, 2017; Doyle et al., 2010), much of it targeted specifically at those with limited stocks of economic capital. Knowledge of this can be patchy, however, and suggests the need for universities to better communicate the cost-effectiveness of study abroad if students are to take advantage of these opportunities (Gray et al., 2018). Even then, financial aid might not cover costs in their entirety, which can once again deter those without the means to meet this shortfall (Bridger, 2015; Kehm, 2005).

Similar conclusions were reached in a mixed methods study by Ballatore and Ferede (2013), which compared 364 Erasmus participants drawn from three different universities in France, Italy and England with a further 394 non-participants to determine what had influenced their decision to take part in the scheme or not. Unusually for a study of this size, the authors took care to ensure that comparison groups were evenly matched in terms of university type and by field of study, therefore increasing the validity and representativeness of their findings. Unsurprisingly, students with an absence of economic capital were more likely to be deterred by the cost of a study abroad experience, and perceived the Erasmus grant to be insufficient for meeting their financial needs. Ballatore and Ferede (2013) therefore question the

inclusivity of Erasmus, which may have been originally created to make study abroad fairer for students in Europe, but will remain inaccessible to those on lower incomes unless the grant increases to cover living costs in full.

Students with an abundance of economic capital are therefore not only better placed to make up the shortfall in funding, usually via contributions from family or from having greater availability of financial assistance from their university, but also for coping with any potential delays that may arise in receiving stipends. The UK context sheds further light on this issue, where Turing was criticised from the start for being less financially generous than Erasmus, and how the administrative difficulties of replacing one scheme with another have left many students struggling to survive financially while waiting for payments to be processed (Staton and Foster, 2023; IFF Research, 2024). As with Erasmus, then, the extent to which Turing actually supports WP students in having a study abroad experience, as it was originally designed to do by government and policymakers, is debatable. A UK context adds further significance given how withdrawal from the EU – and consequently, freedom of movement – has made study abroad more expensive for those from low-income backgrounds, who now need to account for visa applications and other additional costs that would previously not have been applicable, and thus more of a deterrent (Adams and Hall, 2021).

The opportunity costs of study abroad, meanwhile, are also less palatable to WP students, who typically take on part-time work through economic necessity to support themselves through their studies (Allinson, 2017; Callender, 2003). Study abroad carries a higher financial burden for such students, particularly if this results in forgone income from having to suspend or give up said jobs, which those on low incomes are understandably disinclined to do (Brux and Fry, 2010). WP students may likewise be reluctant to prolong their degree by adding an optional year abroad, which would potentially postpone their entry into the labour market (Findlay et al., 2006; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Spiering and Erikson, 2006), and are thus more concerned with completing their studies on time than those who can afford to delay their graduation (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017).

Not all WP students are equally risk averse, and rather than being preoccupied with the short-term losses incurred from an international experience, may focus more on its long-term gains in anticipation that study abroad could potentially be the first and only chance to explore the world (Whatley and Raby, 2020). This appeared to be the case for those from non-traditional

backgrounds in another US study conducted in the same year by Perkins (2020), who found that such students are often driven by "an undertone of urgency" to try something new during a relatively risk-free period of their lives, with university perceived as having "presented the optimal time to travel" before being tied down by traditional adult milestones such as securing full-time employment, meeting a partner and starting a family (p. 159). Findings might not be entirely transferable, however, given the study's methodological limitations, because as Perkins (2020) acknowledges, no limit or differentiation was placed on participant recruitment, with participants in both long-term and short-term programmes being surveyed to discover what had motivated them to study abroad.

This raises the question of whether different types of programmes carry different levels of risk aversion, and whether duration makes it easier for WP students to be more adventurous with their choices. It can only be assumed that the type of student participating in a year abroad – and their attitudes towards its impact on their future goals – would be very different to the type of student most likely to take part in a week-long summer school. The open text responses utilised in the study's survey did offer some insight into their reasoning, and indicated that those participating in shorter stays perceived these as an opportunity to travel, as opposed something that would benefit their education and development. A mixed methods or qualitative comparison would therefore have been more beneficial for comparing student attitudes, choices and, most importantly, demographics, if a connection between programme duration and risk aversion is to be fully established.

***Cost maximising choices***

Differences in decision-making should consequently be accounted for when considering how motivations for applying to university – and by extension, one's choice of degree – affects the likelihood of receiving a study abroad experience. As discussed previously, different academic disciplines offer different opportunities for study abroad (Ahn, 2014; Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Loh et al., 2011; Ramakrishna, Sarkar and Vijayaraman, 2016; Salisbury et al., 2009; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; Stroud, 2010), with different types of degrees attracting different types of students. Choices among WP students are often – but not entirely – based on future economic payoff and labour market returns, which is demonstrated by their preference for courses with a clear pathway to employment, such as Engineering or those allied with healthcare (Callender and Melis, 2022). Unlike their more financially privileged

peers who view university as a rite of passage, WP students view university as a route out of poverty (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009), and focus on career development over personal development as a way of escaping the alternative of "low-paid, low-status jobs or benefit dependency" (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005, p. 88).

This explains the perception of study abroad as being neither relevant nor worthwhile for obtaining financial stability and security (Stuber, 2011), and one that appears to be more widespread among male students than females (Allinson, 2017; Twombly et al., 2012), suggesting that the gender imbalance in participation rates may also explain why different types of students have different experiences of – and expectations from – their universities. A US quantitative study by Hurst (2019) demonstrates that females were more likely to cultivate their own self-interests and dedicate their time to volunteering or society involvement, while males were more concerned with enhancing their careers through internships or placements. Males were also more reluctant to deviate from their goals once these had been decided, unlike females, who were more open to the idea of study abroad, and of trying new and different things in general. Findings may have been skewed somewhat by the study's sample demographics, however, given that participants were only recruited from one type of university – liberal arts colleges – that is more selective and thus attracts a certain type of student, suggesting that the gender gap might not solely be attributable to differences in attitudes and motivations.

While Hurst (2019) does acknowledge the intersection of social class, and how the female students sampled were primarily drawn from privileged backgrounds, this still limits the representativeness of their findings. Attitudes among female students enrolled in community colleges to study abroad might well be more aligned with those expressed by the male students in Hurst's paper (2019), for example, which indicates the need to look beyond gendered differentials to better understand female participation rates. Rather than comparing male and female perspectives, as is commonly the case when exploring the gender gap in study abroad, it would have been more enlightening to compare females from different social classes or socioeconomic backgrounds, and from different university types, to explain their preferences and choices. Exploring whether age differentials factor into this by comparing male mature students with female mature students may also shed further light on gendered differentials, and offers considerable novelty for future research seeking to investigate a stakeholder perspective that would otherwise have gone overlooked.

An earlier qualitative case study conducted at a research-intensive university by Thirolf (2014), meanwhile, adds a more unique perspective on the gender imbalance by sampling male participants who had initially expressed interest in study abroad but decided not to follow through on their intent, rather than those with no interest in study abroad and no intention of participating. The study's chosen university is also set apart through its targeted attempt to increase uptake among under-represented groups by specifically designing a programme to give them both work experience and credits counting toward their final degree, thereby tackling two key obstacles that typically deter such students from study abroad. Even then, the more abstract benefits of study abroad were considered to be less valuable than the concrete outcomes of traditional employability enhancement, which the majority of participants confessed as being under considerable pressure to develop. This could be explained by how increased competition for graduate jobs has led students to become more career-oriented over recent years (Allen et al., 2013; Andrews and Higson, 2008; Budd, 2017; Tomlinson, 2007), given the uncertain economic climate and increasing precarity associated with the modern-day labour market (Jackson, 2014; Mavromaras et al. 2013; Verhaest and Van der Velden 2013), and suggests that even if students themselves value study abroad, their prospective employers might not.

### *2.2.2 Limited familiarity with study abroad*

Bourdieusian theory adds further insight into what impedes or facilitates study abroad propensity when considering the role of cultural capital, or the practices and preferences passed down "from one generation to another" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 10), in shaping an individual's dispositions and expectations. This is typically cultivated through out-of-school activities such as museum and theatre trips, but can also be developed via in-school activities in the form of music lessons and sports coaching, all of which are prized by the middle and upper classes for enabling a well-rounded education (Bourdieu, 1986). The cost of these activities, however, excludes families with limited financial means, who are more time and resource poor than those from higher income brackets, as does the cost of acquiring other indicators of prestige, which can include ownership of luxury items such as artworks or antiques (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). Even the type of learning equipment one has access to is determined by their family's financial resources, as seen in how Apple devices are increasingly being used as a marker of distinction and social status by university

students (Oakes and Andrade, 2017). Those who cannot afford the latest Macbook or iPhone make do with something less expensive, or for society's most disadvantaged who struggled to engage with remote schooling during the Covid-19 lockdowns, possess no device at all (EPI, 2020; Holmes and Burgess, 2020; OfS, 2020).

Education, then, is also significant for cultural capital accumulation in terms of the value and importance one's parents attach to this. Access to books at home, or even a quiet study space, can make a positive difference to cognitive and communication skills development, and thus academic achievement (Gerhards and Hans, 2013). Securing future advantage is not determined solely by wealth, however, but rather by a parent's willingness – or capacity – for investing in their child's learning. Even those without money can still devote time and effort into improving their offspring's life chances, as seen in the parenting style of so-called 'Tiger Moms', by instilling a strong work ethic and encouraging the drive to excel (Cribb et al., 2013). Such parents similarly demonstrate a preference for certain types of educational institutions, be it private or independent schools at the compulsory level or elite universities at the higher education level, both of which can have significant implications for the likelihood of a study abroad experience.

***Preference for localised study***

While the choice to move away or stay at home for university can enable or restrict access to study abroad depending on what opportunities are made available (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; Stier, 2004; van Mol, 2022), the decision to take advantage of these or not is largely influenced by how much risk a student is prepared to accept, both financially and psychologically. In other words, migratory propensity, or willingness to relocate, is strongly reflected in one's study abroad propensity, or willingness to study abroad, because if travel of any kind, whether it be domestic or international, falls outside of an individual's cultural norms, then this reduces their likelihood of study abroad participation (Cairns, 2017; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010). The UK and its association with the residential model of HE, where full-time students live in or near campus in purpose-built halls of residence – a pathway towards adulthood historically followed from boarding school to Oxbridge (Whyte, 2019) – therefore offers an interesting context from which to explore this link.

Unlike Mainland Europe, where students typically attend a nearby university and participate in a more localised model, moving away for university in the UK has traditionally been viewed as a rite of passage and a marker of independence (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). It also requires a willingness to detach from one's existing home environment and social support networks, which is more difficult for some students than others. For first generation students, the choice to live at home and commute could stem from what Henderson (2020) refers to as imaginable futures and "possible selves" (p. 4), where simply getting into university is an achievement on its own for those living in so-called 'cold spot' communities with low levels of HE progression rates. Getting such students to step out their comfort zone, which many might never have left before – physically and emotionally – and consider the prospect of study abroad can be difficult, as even "20 miles is a long way away and a real challenge" (Bridger, 2015, p. 47). Distance, then, could be viewed as "an indicator of adventurousness", which suggests that study abroad – and the subsequent separation from family and friends – carries a higher social cost for 'stayers' than for 'movers' (Hurst, 2019, p. 1248).

This appeared to be the case for students in a European-wide study by Beerkens et al. (2016), which surveyed three specific student groups – those who had already participated in study abroad, those who were interested in but had not yet applied to study abroad, and those who had no interest and no intention of participating in study abroad – to determine how barriers to participation compared between different countries. Although the study was somewhat unique in its effort to address the methodological limitations of previous papers that tend only to sample study abroad participants or compare mobile and non-mobile students, findings remained broadly similar in terms of how self-exclusion was attributed to the strength of one's home ties and established routines. Unsurprisingly, UK students were found to be less bound by these ties than their counterparts in Mainland Europe, and while the authors attribute this largely to SES, financial privilege alone does not explain why students from high-income families are more likely to participate in study abroad than those from low-income backgrounds. As with most quantitative studies, only three variables of analysis are considered when exploring study abroad inequalities: SES, gender and ethnicity. Adding a crucial fourth component – residential status – would have been more illustrative of the ease or difficulty of detachment experienced between students who commute to university and those who relocate.

Further demographic breakdown of a university's intake is therefore needed if this connection is to be fully investigated, because while SES can explain why an abundance of economic and cultural capital makes it easier for more advantaged students to attend academically selective and internationally connected universities, which also tend to be located in high cost of living areas, other factors could remain at stake that influence the decision to study abroad or not. Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2015), for example, argue that the residential model actually makes it more difficult to study abroad, and that the more involved students are with campus life, the less likely they will be to take up international opportunities. These findings stand in stark contrast to other studies that demonstrate a positive correlation between campus engagement and study abroad participation, and indicate that residential students can be just as bound as commuter students when it comes to social ties. Findings could also be context dependent, though, given the integral nature of athletics programmes and marching bands in the culture of American colleges, and how this could be a disincentive to study abroad for participants who were actively engaged in sports or music societies.

How embedded an individual is in campus life also explains why the residential model could make study abroad participation more challenging from a UK context, where the student experience is marketed to such an extent that many applicants base their choice of institution not on course or career prospects, but on which universities have the best nightlife or facilities (Holton, 2018). The pursuit of an active social life is often driven by concerns over making friends and fitting in, and once these social groups have been established, students then become apprehensive at the thought of leaving these behind to study abroad, or of graduating without them upon their return (Daly, 2011). Friendships can likewise be an impediment to study abroad participation for those from WP backgrounds, who may have little time or interest in social activities (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Holdsworth, 2006; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010), but do value the social support from their peers which can help them feel more integrated and less isolated from the wider student community (Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Wilcox et al., 2005).

In other words, the stronger a student's social ties are, the less willing they will be to detach from established routines and existing relationships (Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010). While the general consensus remains of how social costs are higher for 'stayers' with little or no experience of independent living than for 'movers', or those who gain more control over their

lives by relocating for university (Bridger, 2015; Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019), the reality may be more nuanced, at least from a WP context, as perceptions of the barriers to study abroad can differ significantly between subgroups, or even between countries. An online survey of Italian students by Heirweg et al. (2019), for example, found that those with disabilities were less deterred by separation from family and friends than initially expected. The practicalities of study abroad far outweighed the psychological risks for these students, which does make sense, given the need to match up any support and adjustments received at the home institution with that of the host institution.

Findings broadly align with those from other scholars, including a 2015 quantitative study by Huják, in which the social costs for students in Hungary were revealed to be very much an issue preventing their participation in study abroad. The Hungarian context is an interesting one, as the majority of studies exploring the drivers and barriers to Erasmus are typically conducted in Northern or Southern Europe, while Central and Eastern Europe remain overlooked. Generalisability of the findings are limited due to students being sampled only from one specific university and just one academic discipline – Business – and as such, might not be representative of Hungary as a whole. Findings still offer valuable insight, however, considering how Business is over-represented in study abroad compared to other subjects (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Smart and Umbach, 2007), so to determine what constrains such students from studying abroad, who are more strongly predisposed towards said activity on the basis of disciplinary affiliation alone, is enlightening.

Interestingly, Huják's study (2015) shares some similarities with the UK context in that students in Hungary do, unlike the wider mainland European norm, tend to relocate for university and live in dormitories or shared housing. While an unwillingness to separate from friends might not be attributed to the so-called student experience in the Hungarian context, where marketisation of HE is more removed, findings still indicate that social isolation may be just as much of a deterrent to 'movers' as it is to 'stayers'. When asked what would enable them to overcome the social barriers to study abroad, almost half of survey respondents claimed they would be more likely to participate had they been able to travel with a friend or course mate. This could stem from how study abroad participation is typically a solitary experience, where students undertake placements alone and on an independent basis, and may thus be perceived as being too socially isolating for some.

These findings were not unique to the European context, as can be seen in a mixed methods New Zealand study by Doyle et al. (2010). Their study likewise identified social isolation as one of the key barriers to study abroad, and while location could explain reluctance to separate from social networks in this paper, given the distance between Oceania and Mainland Europe or North America, where partner links are most commonly located, their argument that better social support structures be put in place to overcome this obstacle remains valid. They recommend making study abroad less intimidating by allowing students to undertake placements in small groups or pairs, although this does raise questions over whether such an intervention would be truly beneficial for their personal development. This also applies to their second recommendation of buddying up outgoing students with exchange students from other countries attending the same host university, because as previous studies point out, there can be a tendency for international students to stick with 'their own kind' and refrain from interacting with either the host culture or with domestic students (Cots et al., 2016; Nada and Legutko, 2022; Xiao and Petraki, 2007; Zheng, 2010), which again calls into question whether this would be helpful for enabling intercultural development.

Disciplinary context may be just as influential as cultural context, as while much has been written about the STEM imbalance and why students in these subjects are less likely to participate in study abroad (Ahn, 2014; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012), comparatively less attention has been paid to other under-represented degrees. A Canadian study by Kent-Wilkinson et al. (2015) that surveyed 1058 Nursing students to determine the drivers and barriers to study abroad, for instance, found social costs to be particularly high for this discipline. Findings could be explained by how Nursing tends to attract mature students, for whom family responsibilities are more likely to be an obstacle – at least to long-term programmes – than their younger peers. This also appeared to be the case in a qualitative Australian study by Wonson, Boetto and Moorhead (2021), where even short-term programmes of only 2 weeks in duration were still too much of a barrier to those with childcare commitments. While the sample size was small – and only interviewed 8 Social Work students in total – findings still suggest that caring obligations are not an automatic deterrent to study abroad for mature students, as interviewees were positive overall about the benefits of an international experience and would have participated in the scheme, had it been shorter in length and more amenable to their schedules.

This indicates that some WP students may be more driven to overcome the barriers to study abroad than others, or not even perceive these as being obstacles in the first place (Netz, 2015). The mature student subgroup thus becomes significant when considering how gender might not be as explanatory for study abroad propensity as initially thought, and while studies widely agree that females are more likely to participate in said activity than males (Cordua and Netz, 2021; Hurst, 2019; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010; Thirolf, 2014), this could depend more on age or parental status. Once again, light is shed upon how intersecting elements of social disadvantage may have more relevance in explaining study abroad inequalities, and suggests that usage of WP students as a single category of analysis could obscure important intra-group differences. More significantly, consideration should be given not only to the structural barriers that constrain such students from taking up study abroad, but also to what might allow them to overcome these obstacles. Although Wonson, Boetto and Moorhead (2021) do highlight how short-term mobility is an effective enabler for study abroad uptake, this can be more precarious than its long-term counterpart. Academics are necessary to develop and lead such programmes, who may or may not be willing to engage, while funding can be unpredictable depending on current government priorities and whether or not universities – or individual departments – can commit to their continued existence.

Returning to the combined factors of gender and academic discipline, a mixed methods Scottish study by Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta (2016) that surveyed 318 students in Education and invited a further 12 respondents for a follow up interview to determine attitudes towards study abroad brings up equally interesting results. This subject has some of the lowest study abroad participation rates, despite being well suited in terms of the opportunities it provides for cross-cultural learning and the comparison of pedagogical approaches. Unlike the aforementioned two studies (Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015; Wonson, Boetto and Moorhead, 2021), the sample recruited by Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta (2016) was not dominated by mature students, which skewed largely towards the younger end and contained only one participant outside the traditional age range bracket. Their study also offers an interesting counter to the argument that social costs might be less of an issue for students in Scotland than they are for England due to degree length differences, given that it was not the prospect of graduating without their friends that prevented students on this course from studying abroad, but rather the idea of leaving them at all.

Findings also contradict those of previous scholars who purport that prior international experience significantly increases the likelihood of study abroad (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Findlay et al., 2006; Green et al., 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Pope et al., 2014), but do align more with those of Lehmann and Trower (2018), who argue that foreign family holidays or school trips abroad do not automatically predispose students towards said activity. They – and Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta (2016) – instead observe that propensity may be more dependent upon the type of international travel previously taken, as while participants in both studies had considerable experience of this, it was, however, gained largely through resort package holidays, with little interaction with – or exposure to – the host culture. This could explain why fear of the unknown was so prevalent in preventing participants in Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta's study (2016) from participating in an overseas exchange. Such holidays tend to be sheltered and structured, and thus are less impactful for developing the confidence required for navigating other countries.

Fear of the unknown could also be explained by psychological immaturity, which suggests that age may be more influential in shaping risk perception. While the study's demographic data did not reveal any information on socioeconomic background, thereby making it difficult to ascertain WP status, residential status did appear to be significant, with the majority of participants choosing to live at home and commute. They may have had experience of international travel but not of independent living, hence the high levels of anxiety reported over disrupting their existing routines and exposure to unfamiliar cultural norms, which the authors attribute to greater family dependence and emotional reliance.

This – and gender – was also found to be significant in a mixed methods study in Ireland by Courtois (2020), where study abroad was made mandatory in 2013 to increase Erasmus uptake. The Irish context offers an interesting comparison to the UK one, which unlike the latter, has an established history and tradition of mobility. Its sample was also more diverse than most in the field of study abroad inequalities, and contained a significant number of LSES students who may have otherwise have been prevented from participation on the basis of their social background. Findings indicate that strong emotional attachments were viewed as problematic, firstly on a national level, which stems from the wider rationale for making mobility mandatory in the first place. While making participation non-negotiable did cause resentment among students who were either unwilling or unable to leave home for an

international experience, it was viewed as an effective enabler for escaping limited career prospects at home by the government.

This is reflective of the neoliberal ideal for graduates to be flexible, self-reliant and, most importantly, unattached and move to where the work, but was, however, at odds with what many of the students from under-represented backgrounds – who would potentially have benefited most from being mobile – wanted, which was security and stability. This preference was viewed negatively on both an individual level by their peers, who considered them as being less successful or ambitious, and at an institutional level, with staff being dismissive of their inability to cut ties and critical of any concerns. Resistance to becoming internationally mobile, and of change to their existing routines or separation from support networks, was perceived differently depending on gender, with males regarded as being "set in their ways" or even "narrow-minded'' (p. 245), while females were viewed as being more reliant on parents or partners through what some staff referred to as "excessive, child-like attachment" (p. 246).

In short, the social costs of study abroad are not so easily explainable, as the decision to study abroad or not may be influenced by age, residential status and academic discipline alike, suggesting that reluctance to separate from friends and family is not unique solely to WP students. Of these factors, age remains the most interesting, and ties in with how the student experience, at least from a UK context, has changed significantly over recent years. Concerns have arisen over whether young people are struggling more with the transition to university than previous generations, which appears to be negatively impacting their mental health and leading to increased demand for wellbeing services (Thompson, Pawson and Evans, 2021). Some attribute this to greater levels of parental involvement, or so-called 'helicopter parenting', in student decision-making, and the more parents try to create a safe environment, the less able their children become to navigate the challenges of independent living (Coughlan, 2008). By extension, the more reliant they are on parental support, the more anxious they become at the prospect of leaving this behind for an international experience (Lewis et al., 2015).

From this perspective, it could be argued that 'movers' find separation from existing social networks and familiar routines to be just as difficult as 'stayers', which indicates that family dependence plays more of a role than social disadvantage, and challenges the general

consensus that WP students are affected more by this particular barrier (Breeze, Johnson and Uytman, 2020; Christie, Barron and D'Annunzio-Green, 2013; Pike and Harrison, 2011). It could also be argued that WP students are actually more resilient and self-reliant than their more traditional peers, given the greater number of obstacles they need to overcome simply to arrive at university (Chung, Turnbull and Chur-Hansen, 2017; Murray and Klinger, 2012), again suggesting that the social costs of study abroad are more nuanced than would initially appear. Further research is therefore recommended, given how previous studies in this area are both quantitative in nature and largely dated, so a qualitative country comparison – and detailed demographic breakdown – would effectively provide more insight into where – and why – these differences occur.

Parental support plays a similarly crucial role in shaping the decision to study abroad or not, albeit one in which family members are resistant to the prospect of being left behind for an international experience. Not all parents are accepting of their child's intent to study abroad, or even their desire to leave home and move away for university (Paus and Robinson, 2008; Robertson, 2019). Interestingly, while Hurst (2019) found a positive correlation in their US study between migratory propensity and study abroad propensity, gendered differentials were also observed in that male students who did not relocate were still more likely to participate in study abroad than their female counterparts who made the same decision to live at home and attend a local university. Although they attribute this difference to caregiving commitments, given that female students are generally more likely to provide unpaid support for parents or siblings, the quantitative nature of this study prevented them from expanding further upon these results by determining the full extent to which female 'stayers' were excluded from study abroad.

Another problem of focusing solely on gender differentials – and solely on the student stakeholder perspective – is that this does not account for how other, intersecting aspects of disadvantage can shape an individual's decision-making. Acknowledging the influence of cultural values and religious identity may provide more insight into why study abroad participation is more challenging for BAME students, particularly those in the UK of South Asian descent, where daughters often have limited freedom and autonomy to pursue their own interests (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). While such parents worry more about their children's personal safety or of them experiencing discrimination while abroad (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013), family resistance

towards study abroad can also stem from doubts over its perceived value, relevance and affordability.

This was found to be the case for Latinx students in the US by McClure et al. (2010), who tend to be more family-oriented but also more tied town by family obligations, such as contributing to household finances, supporting younger siblings or older relatives and translating for parents without the ability to speak English. While cultural expectations played a part in preventing such students from taking part in study abroad, cultural acceptance was equally notable in how parents viewed said activity as self-indulgent, or little more than a tourism opportunity. Emphasis was placed instead on academic achievement and employability, which was unsurprising given the extent to which this demographic exists below the poverty line, and explains why parents were so driven for their children to obtain a more financially secure future, and why study abroad might have been perceived as 'getting in the way' of this.

***Prior international experience***

Unequal access once again comes into focus, given how opportunities for cultural capital accumulation – and by extension, educational add-ons such as school trips abroad and modern foreign language learning – are largely concentrated in the private and independent sector (The Centre for Social Justice, 2014; Green et al., 2015; Hobbs, 2016). While options and extracurriculars in the state sector tend to be more limited, geographical location can likewise play a role in educational disparities (Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018). A multi-method study by King et al. in a 2011, for example, found that schools in the more affluent South-East area of England, a region populated by high-income families, were more likely to offer such these add-ons than schools in the North-East of England, a region that contains some of the UK's most socioeconomically deprived neighbourhoods. Schools in this part of the country were noted to have been hit harder by austerity-induced funding cuts, resulting not only in the removal of international activities, but even enrichment activities closer to home, such as museum or theatre visits. The pupil premium formula, or additional government funding to improve outcomes and address the attainment gap, might once have subsidised the cost of overseas excursions for socially disadvantaged pupils, but is now being diverted towards more pressing purposes. The authors caution that excluding the poorest

pupils in this manner thus results in them developing the perception of international travel as something unattainable, for whom "going abroad is only a dream or not even that" (p. 177).

An interesting comparison is Germany, where schools might not be as socially stratified as the UK, yet still offers unequal opportunities for young people to gain international experience during their time in compulsory education. This was demonstrated in a quantitative study by Gerhards and Hans (2013), who used statistical analysis of longitudinal data drawn from the German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP) – an annual population survey measuring household employment, income and health – to determine whether different types of school offer different types of educational add-ons, and whether this predisposes some students more towards study abroad participation than others. Findings were strongly aligned with those of King et al. (2011) in that gymnasiums, or secondary grammar schools with a focus on academic streaming, were revealed to have a wider availability of international opportunities than Realschule, with its technical and administration focus, or the vocational streaming at Hauptschule, both of which offer fewer opportunities for cultural enrichment.

Gaining experience of international travel during one's formative years is crucial for increasing the likelihood of study abroad participation because this normalises the process into something that is "taken-for-granted" (Conradson and Latham, 2005, p. 228), which then becomes a natural aspect of their daily lives (Green et al., 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). As with schools, though, opportunities for an international experience at home in the form of foreign family holidays abroad are unequally distributed among social groups, and exclude those without the financial means to afford these. They also exclude socially disadvantaged young people from developing the skills and confidence required to function in an unfamiliar environment, particularly in countries that are culturally and linguistically different to their own (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Findlay et al., 2006; Pope et al., 2014).

This could, however, depend on the location travelled to and, more importantly, the type of holiday partaken in. Differences in family travel habits and tastes were observed among students interviewed at a research-intensive university in Canada by Lehmann and Trower (2018), who noticed a preference not only for far-flung destinations among students from high-income families, but also for the pursuit of cultural attractions and events. International travel for students from less privileged backgrounds, in contrast, consisted mainly of package holidays with an emphasis on rest and relaxation and little, if any, exposure to local customs,

history or even, for those on all-inclusive catering, cuisine. This suggests that prior international experience alone does not automatically make an individual more confident and comfortable in navigating other cultures, and that different types of foreign family holidays offer different types of benefits, at least in terms of study abroad predisposition.

Findings align with those by Brooks and Waters (2010) in a UK study, who observed that confidence gained from visiting atypical – and, chiefly, more expensive – destinations, such as Asia and Africa, made both the school pupils and university students interviewed more adventurous with their choice of study abroad locations, and equipped them more effectively for independent travel. Confidence was also key, given how only those who had already completed a degree overseas or were planning to do so were recruited for this study. As discussed previously, whole degree mobility for UK-domiciled students is relatively rare, and skews the sample due to the financial privilege required to participate in this type of study abroad programme. The authors do, however, acknowledge the socioeconomic homogeneity of their sample, with the majority of participants, at least at compulsory and undergraduate level, being privately educated. The postgraduate sample was slightly more diverse in comparison, although this was to be expected, due to how masters degrees are both shorter and less expensive than those at bachelors level. Diversifying the sample by both SES, but also by programme type, could have enabled a deeper exploration of whether habitual international exposure through foreign family holidays does indeed predispose students to seek out further opportunities for mobility upon arrival at university, as other studies seem to suggest (Carlson, 2013; Gerard and Sana, 2017; Smith, Rérat and Sage, 2014).

A mixed methods study by van Mol and Timmerman (2014) argues otherwise, which found that while prior international experience often can be a key motivating factor in the decision to study abroad, this does not automatically translate into desire for, or interest in, pursuing an overseas sojourn. While their sample – drawn from 36 universities across Austria, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Poland and the UK – was similarly privileged to that of Brooks and Waters (2010), participants in this study had already lived or travelled abroad extensively before arriving at university, and thus no longer felt the need to ‘scratch the travel itch’, so to speak. Attitudes towards study abroad may also be explained by the type of programme focused on in this paper – the traditional Erasmus model – which might be less appealing to students from high-income backgrounds, given their preference for whole-degree mobility over within-degree mobility.

Similar assumptions of a universal lived experience should also not be made of WP students, as scholars are increasingly beginning to criticise previous research that focuses on what they lack, rather than what they possess, indicating that an intersectional approach could challenge what is currently known about study abroad inequalities. Some suggest that migration-specific experience, such as visiting family members in their country of heritage, and migration-specific competence, such as proficiency needed to communicate in their language of heritage, can predispose BAME students more towards study abroad than their socioeconomically disadvantaged Caucasian counterparts (Whatley and Canché, 2022). Others demonstrate that migration background and the influence of historical ties may also result in second- and third-generation immigrants – those with parents or grandparents who were born overseas – being more likely to study abroad than their native-born peers, such as Perkins (2020). This paper, which surveyed 52 multicultural students from two different US universities, takes a more unique approach by exploring what enables WP students to study abroad, as opposed to what prevents them from doing so. It points out how such students are often assumed, both by existing research and by their universities, to have a paucity of cultural capital, when they actually possess an abundance of this by being well-travelled and well-versed in other languages, both of which are positively correlated with study abroad participation (Beech, 2015; King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Findlay et al., 2006; Pope et al., 2014).

Findings broadly align with those of an earlier qualitative study by Nguyen (2014), which was able to add further nuance by suggesting that there could be differences between ethnic groups in determining the likelihood of study abroad participation and their motivations for taking part in an international opportunity. Unlike the Latinx students interviewed in McClure et al.'s study (2010), participants from the Hispanic community recruited for Nguyen's paper (2014) were strongly encouraged by their parents to study abroad and explore their family heritage, which indicates that cultural acceptance may be greater when study abroad is associated with a specific purpose: the chance to connect with their ancestral roots. Diaspora, or the dispersal from one's country of origin, was also acknowledged as playing a crucial role in the decision to study abroad for multicultural students by Bamberger (2020), many of whom were driven to undertake this as a form of heritage-seeking. Migration background in this instance was found to determine the flow of travel, with Korean-Americans opting to visit their ancestral homeland of South Korea, while those of Hispanic

descent gravitated towards Latin America. Much of the research on this topic has been conducted from a US context, however, so future studies exploring the link between migration background and destination choice in other countries are consequently recommended. A UK comparison could provide an interesting angle from which to investigate this, given the difference in diasporas – which largely stem from India and the Caribbean – and whether this translates to differences in placement preference, or whether such students in Britain are similarly drawn towards historical ties.

### *2.2.3 Limited information about study abroad*

Finally, Bourdieu's theoretical framework can be used to explain what enables or constrains the likelihood of a study abroad experience in terms of social capital, or the level of access that one has to informational resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Insider knowledge can either be acquired from formal relationships developed with authority figures such as teachers and other trusted adults in the community, or from informal relationships through interaction with family and friends (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Access to knowledgeable others not only acts as a valuable source of practical advice and emotional support, but can also, according to Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, "improve an individual's ability to investigate, navigate, and choose advantageous options or opportunities" (2010, p. 126). This can be seen in how access to information – and more importantly, the type of social networks from which insider knowledge is drawn – plays a key role in shaping the university decision-making process.

An applicant's ability to make informed choices is typically determined by whether their influences are diverse, as is the case for those with a family history of HE attendance, or limited, as is the case for those who are first in their family to attend HE (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007). It also relates to how some types of social networks are perceived as being more valuable than others in terms of the information they bequeath, which Ball and Vincent (1998) separate into 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge. The former is often gained from those with lived experience of a certain phenomenon, which is more specific and tailored towards an applicant's interests, while the latter is derived from websites or course guides, and is generally considered by applicants to be less insightful than what 'those in the know' can offer. Residential status, or whether a student chooses to relocate or live at home, can also determine one's level of access to information, with preference for localised study leaving

those from WP backgrounds doubly disadvantaged in their capacity to accumulate social capital both pre- and post-HE entry (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010).

***Capacity for campus involvement***

Social capital therefore determines the level of ease or difficulty one might have in obtaining information about international opportunities, and is considered to be a crucial enabler, given that limited awareness of study abroad opportunities can be just as much of a barrier to participation as cost (Brux and Fry, 2010; Carroll, 1996; Coldwell, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Netz and Finger, 2015). Access to information is challenging when students take a pragmatic approach to university, as the less well-integrated they are in campus life, the more restricted opportunities for networking and socialising become (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Holton, 2018; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). WP students – particularly those who live at home and commute – often have what Holdsworth (2006) refers to as a "functional" relationship with their university by treating it as a job or as a stepping stone towards the next stage of their life, rather than a place to pursue their interests or expand their social circle (p. 508). Interviews, focus groups and questionnaires conducted with students from four different universities in the North of England revealed that those who commute typically have little desire to socialise with course mates, and tend to go straight home after lectures, rather than remain on campus. Those who did attempt to make friends were often stymied by a reliance on public transport, who struggled to engage with societies or other extracurriculars which tend to take place in the evening when services either reduce in frequency or cease altogether, depending on local provision.

Social network formation is key for study abroad participation, as the more exposure to – and interaction with – one has to knowledgeable others, the more well-informed they will be about available options (Carlson, 2013). Awareness of these is patchy, however, especially in terms of funding, or how study abroad can be more cost-effective than many students might think. Misconceptions played a significant role in the decision to self-exclude from taking up study abroad for participants in a New Zealand multi-method study by Doyle et al. (2010), who perceived it as being unaffordable and inaccessible to all but the very wealthy. This was an interesting finding, given how interviewees were all drawn from private schools or from same-sex high-achieving state schools, whose socially advantaged backgrounds should – in theory – have predisposed them more towards study abroad, yet were still deterred from

participation on the basis of cost. The study's chosen sampling method might not be entirely representative, with secondary school pupils being selected for convenience as a way of overcoming time and access constraints, but still offers some unexpected insights into how knowledge of financial aid can be limited even among those who are relatively privileged. Findings suggest the need to demystify the study abroad process for all groups, and for authority figures such as school teachers and academics to help fill in the information gap.

Similar conclusions were reached by Trilokekar and Rasmi (2011), who surveyed 75 first- and second-year undergraduate students at York University, Toronto, and found that many did not consider themselves to be well-informed about either study abroad opportunities or the study abroad process. This was a surprising result, but one that could be explained by sample demographics, which were limited somewhat by the lack of detail given on student background characteristics. While the study was unique in its approach of comparing three different groups of students (participants, participants-to-be and non-participants), rather than the usual two (participants versus non-participants), not breaking down these down further makes it difficult to understand why students were well-travelled internationally, as many reported to be, but not well-informed about study abroad. This disconnect may be attributed to what information the study did collect, namely whether a student identified as being the first in their family to attend university and whether they identified as being a second- or third-generation immigrant. The latter is of particular significance, and could be inferred that a majority of those who ticked this box were of Chinese descent, given that Canada has a sizable East Asian population.

As discussed previously, while migration background has been shown to predispose WP students from BAME backgrounds more towards study abroad than their socioeconomically disadvantaged Caucasian counterparts, the likelihood of study abroad participation could also be influenced by whether one has a family history of HE attendance. First generation status may have shaped the choice for non-participants to self-exclude, who confessed to having limited interaction with either peers or academics, from whom they could have otherwise obtained information about study abroad. These students also perceived receiving little in the way of institutional support, be this for study abroad specifically or for university life more generally. Again, the study's quantitative nature prevents any in-depth exploration of why they might have felt this way, and although no details were given on their residential status, it could likewise be inferred that living off-campus and commuting in for lectures may have

contributed towards their sense of isolation and lack of integration with the wider student community. Such students, according to the authors, "make poor use of available resources – academic, financial, and social, and hence are likely to pose the greatest challenge in terms of information outreach" (p. 507), which suggests the need for more effective interventions by universities to ensure that information reaches all students, rather than assuming they will be willing and able to seek this out on their own.

Widening access to information is not only important for raising awareness of study abroad funding, but also for study abroad deadlines. This window of opportunity is limited, as students often underestimate the narrow timeframe in which they have to submit their application, and may explain why many initially express an interest in participating but few follow through on their intent (Pope et al., 2014). Timing carries additional significance from a UK context, at least for residential students, due to how application deadlines coincide with the mid-semester house hunting period. Those who relocate for university typically spend first year in purpose-built accommodation before moving into private rental sector shared housing for their second and third years, which highlights the need to target information about study abroad prior to being tied into signing a housing contract (Deakin, 2013).

Accommodation abroad, meanwhile, can be just as much of an obstacle to study abroad as accommodation at home, where securing a place to stay overseas – sometimes at short notice, or during deadline season with periods of increased academic workload (Kinsella, Bossers and Ferreira, 2008) – is a considerable cause for anxiety. This issue was highlighted in a qualitative UK study by Bell (2016), which analysed blog posts written by 16 students both pre- and post-sojourn about their semester abroad in Mainland Europe. Concerns were raised over finding accommodation, and more importantly, its quality and legitimacy in terms of avoiding common rental scams. This suggests that information still needs to be targeted effectively to reduce apprehensions, even among residential students who generally have more opportunities to accumulate social capital – and consequently, insider knowledge – because if they worry to such an extent over housing, then commuter students without experience of having relocated for university will likely find it even more challenging (UniversitiesUK, 2021). While Bell's study also indicates the need for greater pre-departure assistance from universities on how and where to safely source accommodation (2016), little is known about how information sharing – and seeking – strategies among students can be

used to share experiences and recommendations in a virtual space, as opposed to a physical environment.

***Emphasis on self-directed learning***

Beech (2015) conducted one of the few studies that acknowledges the growing preference among students for acquiring information about study abroad online, which would have once have been obtained traditionally through formal university outreach events, but is now being sourced acquired through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. While their study is somewhat dated, it does bring attention to how digital communication technologies are making information more accessible than ever for the smartphone generation. It also raises questions over whether the traditional conceptualisation of social capital, where knowledge transfer takes place in an offline physical setting, is still appropriate for the modern era, where information exchange more commonly takes place in an online virtual setting (Hirst, 2022). This carries a number of implications for the democratisation of knowledge, which once would have been contained exclusively within one's existing social circle (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), but has now become openly available to anyone with an active internet connection (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007; Johnston et al., 2013; Wohn et al., 2013).

Even so, acquiring and bequeathing information may have become easier over recent years, but knowing where to find this is still a skill in and of itself. Nguyen and Coryell (2015) caution that online resources – and university culture more broadly – can be difficult for WP students to navigate, both of which require learners to be self-directed when researching potential options. Such students may be hesitant to use their own initiative, or simply find the information-seeking process to be overwhelming, so having someone else to guide them through the practicalities of study abroad can provide valuable reassurance.

Whether a student feels comfortable enough to approach someone in the first place also affects their access to information, and demonstrates how all the forms of capital are inextricably intertwined. As already touched upon, some parents are more willing and able to invest time into their child's education than others, and the more contact they have with teachers, the more likely their child is to become institutionally acculturated by having gained familiarity of interacting with authority figures from an early age (Reay, Crozier and James,

2013). This enables them to accumulate academic capital, or an understanding of an educational setting's unspoken norms and processes (Bourdieu, 1986), which gives them both the confidence to approach tutors for advice and the capability to understand the 'rules of the game', such as awareness of what office hours are at university and how these can be utilised to their advantage (Semper and Blasco, 2018). This has significant implications for the likelihood of study abroad participation, because the more contact a student has with academic staff, the more information they will have about international opportunities (Finger, 2014).

There are a number of reasons why WP students might not make use of tutor time, and although many may be unaware that this is even an option, other explanations exist beyond a lack of familiarity with university practices. Developing institutionalised relationships with authority figures such as teachers or lecturers – and thus the accumulation of social capital – requires trust, which becomes more difficult for a student to build if they feel rejected by the culture of an institution (Read, Archer, and Leathwood, 2003; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). Whether one feels like they fit in with or stand out from the wider student population upon entering HE is determined by their habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), or the internalised dispositions that shape an individual's beliefs and expectations about what is possible or appropriate for 'people like me' (Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall, 2007; Nash, 1990; Swartz, 2002). The extent to which one feels similar to – and compatible with – a social group can either result in a sense of belonging or, if their background, identity and experiences are not shared, a sense of alienation, which leaves them feeling like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Habitus also shapes an individual's choices, and explains why many WP students prefer to attend universities that are more diverse and inclusive, regardless of their academic performance, by reducing the risk of isolation and marginalisation from their peers (Ball et al., 2002; Munro, 2011; Raffe and Croxford, 2015). Feeling of fit may also explain why WP students choose not to make use of tutor time, which MacKay et al. (2021) attribute to the microaggressions, or words and actions, that lead to the perception of being othered by their campus community. How WP students are perceived by the campus community can likewise drive home the perception of being unwelcome, and make it more difficult for academics to develop a relationship with them if said staff members are unwilling or unable to understand their concerns. The authors point out how lack of shared backgrounds and experiences can

leave WP students struggling just as much to identify with academics as they do to identify with their peers – and vice-versa –when those employed at more selective universities place the onus on such students to adapt to their surroundings, as opposed to making them more accessible.

More importantly, if habitus shapes beliefs and expectations about what is possible and appropriate, then this may also explain why WP students self-exclude themselves from study abroad. How this is presented in marketing and promotional materials can reinforce the perception of said activity as being the preserve of a certain type of person – white, wealthy women – and deter anyone who does not fit this depiction (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). This perception can also be influenced by negative media portrayals like the 'gap yah' stereotype, in which students purposely choose to distance themselves from – or ridicule – the privileged school leaver stereotype who was funded by 'the bank of mum and dad' to go on the trip of a lifetime (Hickle, 2013). Knowledgeable others are therefore key for convincing WP students that study abroad is both possible and feasible, and demonstrates not only the importance of making information about this more accessible, but also for encouraging such students to pursue international opportunities. It also demonstrates the need for greater social support – ideally through peer parity, or the ability to relate to other students or academic staff – to change and reframe perceptions of study abroad as being too expensive, or of it as something considered to be 'not for the likes of us' (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011).

## 2.3 Research recommendations: how can academics help to facilitate study abroad uptake for widening participation students?

Having first established why there is a need for academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students, the literature review now considers how academics can help to increase study abroad uptake for this particular group through the use of outreach interventions. This section will discuss recommendations made by existing empirical studies to examine what could be done to help WP students overcome the barriers to study abroad and, more importantly, highlight the challenges associated with employing these strategies.

### 2.3.1 Consider alternative options for study abroad

While Danjean acknowledges the need for academics to support greater uptake of study abroad opportunities in their modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017), they also accept that their suggestions for addressing the issue of under-representation are appropriately limited, given the study's narrow institutional and disciplinary focus. The model is broad enough in scope that it can be applied to the student body as a whole, but applicability to any one specific group – in this case, those from WP backgrounds – would require further adaptation to enable their pursuit of international activities. The most significant oversight of this conceptual model, then, is its failure to account for how different types of mobility programmes can be used to encourage different types of students to study abroad when considering methods for increasing participation rates.

Institutional context is therefore key, considering how different types of universities offer different types of opportunity structures for study abroad (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; Stier, 2004; van Mol, 2022), and if different types of students have different types of obligations or priorities, then adopting a one-size-fits-all approach for tackling issues of under-representation, as advocated by Danjean (2017), is likely to be ineffective. The traditional Erasmus model of mobility, which involves spending between six and twelve months abroad, excludes students who cannot spend this length of time away from home due to work or caring commitments (Christie, 2007; Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), or even those on certain degrees, such as STEM, which are less flexible and more intensive than their counterparts in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Ahn, 2014; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012).

Offering alternative options to accommodate a variety of needs, interests and schedules would arguably achieve greater success at increasing participation rates (Bridger, 2015; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021). Short-term programmes, such as summer schools or field trips abroad, last between one to four weeks, and are not only less disruptive (Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014), but are also more affordable (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Whatley and Raby, 2020). Additionally,

these programmes are more structured and supported, and are a useful way of developing confidence among students with little or no experience of international travel or independent living through a group activity-centered form of residential study (UniversitiesUK, 2021). In other words, short-term programmes can overcome not only the financial barriers for WP students, but also the psychological barriers that deter them from taking part in study abroad.

While short-term study abroad options in the UK largely consist of summer school programmes, international field trips (IFTs) led by an academic member of staff – also known as an instructor led programme (ILP) – can be just as effective at widening access for under-represented students (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019). Such programmes are still relatively uncommon in the UK but have a long history in the US, particularly among community colleges, of making study abroad more inclusive. Some critics accuse them of "dumbing down study abroad", according to Keese and O'Brien (2011, p. 6), by removing the freedom for students to gain independence and maturity, who thus perceive ILPs as being a less legitimate undertaking than the traditional Erasmus model. As countered by the authors, however, this is an elitist perspective that does not account for what these programmes were designed to do or what they can accomplish. They argue that ILPs are just as culturally immersive and transformative as their long-term counterparts, and that the benefits they offer are equally tangible, albeit delivered on a shorter, more intense scale, and aim not only to expand student horizons and broaden their worldviews, but also to give them the confidence and support required to study abroad.

A qualitative study by Amani and Kim (2018) lends support to the claim that WP students are more amenable to participating in study abroad when accompanied by an academic and when travelling as part of a group, both of which provide an element of safety and security that partaking alone in an international sojourn would not. Enabling them to study abroad in a structured environment was therefore a successful way of reducing its risks for the type of students with little or no experience of either domestic or international travel. The latter was deemed to be of particular significance, given that such students often have no frame of reference for how to navigate an airport, which was made less anxiety-inducing by having a trusted mentor to guide them through the process and to plan their overall itineraries. Travelling with an authority figure also opened up study abroad to female students from BAME backgrounds, whose parents would have been unwilling to allow participation in the

more traditional model of study abroad for religious reasons, with ILPs thus found to be more successful at alleviating concerns about the personal safety and security of their daughters.

The academics who lead these programmes therefore put a lot of thought about what their purpose should be when designing an ILP, and what these should deliver in terms of student outcomes. While their focus mainly tends to be on the more life changing aspects of study abroad by exposing students to new and unfamiliar environments in the security of a group setting in the name of personal development (Henthorne and Panko, 2017), encouraging them to think more critically about their own cultures by having something different to compare it to can likewise facilitate intercultural development (Barbour, 2021). Course content can similarly be tailored through ILPs to deliver experiential learning benefits, as demonstrated in a US case study by Conran (2019), which found that such programmes also offer students the opportunity to apply theory from the classroom into practice gained through hands-on experience.

While ILPs are seemingly geared towards vocational degrees for the most part, opportunities for an active learning experience can also be extended to those enrolled on academic courses, as Conran (2019) observed with the MBA (Master of Business Administration) students, whose ILP took them to India. ILPs were deemed to be well-suited not just for widening access to under-represented students, but also to under-represented disciplines, particularly among subjects that tend to attract career-oriented applicants. Demonstrating their potential for employability development by exposing students to international business models and practices, and by developing skills relevant to the labour market in their country of origin, thus made ILPs more appealing by aligning it with their professional goals.

These findings were replicated in an Australian qualitative longitudinal study, where Tran et al. (2021) explored the impact of an ILP to Japan among 19 undergraduate STEM students. Their study was made unique by being one of the few that conducted interviews with the same students multiple times – pre-departure, in-country and on re-entry to Australia, with a final fourth interview taking part post-graduation – to compare how their perceptions compared before, during, and after they took part in the programme. Its setting also makes the study an interesting case because Australia, although having similarly low levels of outbound mobility to its Anglophone counterparts, took steps to dramatically increase study abroad participation rates among its home students through the New Colombo Plan,

introduced in 2014. This government initiative also sets Australia apart in its emphasis on sending students to non-English speaking destinations, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific region, rather than on Europe or North America, as is typical.

Tran et al. (2021) argue that the success of this initiative was achieved by offering programmes that not only suit student interests, but also their timetables, which resulted in a significant increase in STEM uptake. ILPs were found to be less disruptive to their education, thus overcoming the main barrier to participation for students in these subjects – their inflexible curriculum – and providing a more authentic way of applying what they had learned in the lecture theatre to real-world scenarios by developing transferable skills along with the ability to survive and thrive in other cultures and contexts. ILPs were also well-aligned with student goals by enhancing their employability and making them more desirable candidates to companies seeking out globally-minded graduates, thus increasing their appeal to those who typically choose STEM subjects for their job prospects.

In other words, ILPs have been found to have a positive impact on personal and professional outcomes for students both from under-represented backgrounds and under-represented disciplines. Gaining experience of international travel in a safe and supported environment can function as a stepping stone and spark the desire for future mobility, this time on an independent and a long-term basis, which many WP students regret not having taken advantage of sooner (Bridger, 2015; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Lewis and Niesenbaum, 2005). ILPs can also influence their future career choices, as found in a recent UK paper, where a significant number of students who completed a short-term study abroad programme were either planning to apply for graduate programmes or internships abroad, or had already gained employment at an overseas company (UniversitiesUK, 2021). Study abroad consequently opens up a world of opportunities, rather than restricting them solely to the domestic labour market, and benefits WP students in particular by increasing their potential of securing higher wages (Di Pietro, 2015; Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019; Greenbank, 2007; Kidd, O'Leary and Sloane, 2017; Stiwne and Alves, 2010) and avoiding economic insecurity (Cairns, 2017; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003).

Although ILPs carry a number of advantages for students, they can bring about certain challenges for academics. Leading an ILP requires the latter to juggle multiple roles – that of

lecturer, chaperone, and safe guarder – and manage multiple concerns from the former, such as culture shock or separation anxiety from family and friends (Meier and Smith, 2016). The shared experience of taking part in an ILP can bring staff and students closer together, which academics in a study by Berger and Paul (2017) found to be rewarding rather than challenging, and fostered closer relationships between them and their charges that continued even after graduation. This is not the case for everyone, however, as academics are often unprepared for just how much pastoral support and responsibility is needed with these programmes, and can find the experience of them to be overly demanding, which dampens any desire for continued engagement with ILPs. It also raises the question of what type of academic is not just likely to engage with ILPs in the first instance, but also to re-engage with them even after realising the level of commitment required. Hull (2013) found that the likelihood of re-engagement may vary depending on an academic's tenure, with younger, less established staff being more willing to get involved with ILPs than those of higher rank. This was a surprising result, given that greater job security and less pressure to publish should, in line with other studies (Green and Olson, 2003; Raczkoski and Robinson, 2019), have granted senior academics more freedom to engage with ILPs than their junior colleagues, but the associate professors in Hull's findings (2013) were tied not by work but by family obligations.

This suggests that the likelihood of engagement with ILPs is influenced not by career status but rather by age and parental status, and highlights the methodological limitations of this study, which contained a very small sample, even for a qualitative exploration, and was thus limited in scope. Only 3 academics were selected – 1 from the social sciences and 2 from the arts and humanities – and all were employed on tenure-track positions. Expanding the study's recruitment criteria to those on non-tenure track positions would have strengthened its findings, but nevertheless, it does highlight the importance of preparation for ILP involvement to equip academics with the skill and knowledge needed for the role. Rarely do any pre-existing structures or established programmes exist, meaning that academics have to develop ILPs from scratch, with little guidance or support from their departments or their universities on how to do so (Barbour, 2021; Dewey and Duff, 2009)

The need for better training and support was identified as early as 2012 by Savishinsky, who interviewed 18 academics – 6 from a research-intensive university, 6 from a private university, and 6 from a community college – to explore what could be done by HEIs to

support their engagement with ILPs. Unusually for a US study, and particularly for a doctoral piece of research, participants were recruited not only from a variety of university types, but also from a variety of disciplines, with a fairly even mix of staff being drawn from the social sciences, arts and humanities, natural sciences and healthcare allied professions. The majority of research in this context focuses only on one type of university or on one specific discipline, which makes Savishinsky (2012)'s study unique in its scale, and also increases the transferability of their findings.

One of the recommendations they make for ILP preparation is the hosting of workshops to share best practice. These would cover the logistics of leading an ILP, such as choosing a location, sourcing accommodation and arranging transportation, in addition to the practicalities, such as managing student needs and concerns. Access to examples of what works best would also offer useful guidance on developing such programmes, and also on how to market and promote these. More importantly, Savishinsky (2012) points out that sharing of knowledge is crucial, not only to better prepare academics for engaging with ILPs, but also to prevent valuable expertise from being lost when the staff member responsible for the role steps down from this, or leaves their university to pursue employment elsewhere. This would ensure the sustainability of ILPs and lower the barrier to entry for the next academic to take their place.

While these recommendations would resolve a number of the issues associated with ILPs, they do call attention to how the workload involved with these programmes needs to be shared just as much as knowledge, because if only one academic takes ownership of the role, then this, by necessity, limits the number of students they can realistically accept onto the programme. There are positives to smaller intakes, which make ILPs more manageable for academics and ensures greater levels of support for students (Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019), although this would mean denying opportunities to their peers who might have wanted to participate but were never given the chance. Henthorne and Panko's claim that ILPs are not the magic bullet for tackling study abroad inequalities that other scholars purport them to be (2017), however, should be granted further scrutiny, given how choice of destination may have factored into the need for smaller staff-to-student ratios. The authors do admittedly acknowledge that taking students to Cuba, as they did in this paper, meant limiting numbers by necessity, due to its relative isolation from the US and the amount of research and familiarity required for such an atypical placement. This suggests that picking a

less challenging destination could have enabled them to widen access, rather than restricting it, but while the applicability of their findings may be questionable, they still provide valuable insight into another challenge of leading and developing ILPs: namely the amount of effort required for choosing an appropriate location.

Keese and O'Brien (2011) observe that economies of scale can make ILPs a more cost-effective option for universities, given the discounts hotels and travel companies typically offer when arranging large group bookings, but logistical complexities can make them demanding to administer for academics. They also explain how picking a destination – and by extension, activities to do and places to visit – requires careful thought in terms of its accessibility, such as a country's proximity and affordability, but also its attractiveness to students and its relevance to their course content.

The effort required overall for ILP involvement, meanwhile, is not always understood by colleagues and peers, who may view such programmes as a 'perk of the job' at best, or a "a career-limiting move" at worst, according to a study by Madden, McMillan, and Madden (2019), with one participant cautioning that "you don't want to be known as the person who is spending their summer running around Europe with students" (p. 193). This can be a disincentive to ILP engagement, and indicates the need to demonstrate both their value and their academic credibility if negative perceptions are to be addressed. How ILPs are marketed – and described – may play a role here, as referring to these as 'trips' may carry the connotation of them being little more than a holiday, and not a valid educational experience.

Oh and Arthur-Banning (2021), for example, recommend directing students to write a reflective diary during their stay for enabling them to understand what they have gained from the experience, but also for enabling the academics involved to understand what went well and what did not. Evaluating the programme in this manner would therefore allow them to make changes for future cohorts, whilst also leaving them better equipped to handle the challenges of future sojourns. Another, more pertinent benefit of these reflective diaries lies in their potential not only for improving ILPs themselves, but for their use as an example of their benefits. Hull (2013) indicates that while study abroad engagement might not necessarily be recognised or rewarded by university promotion policies, student satisfaction and feedback are, both of which could be utilised in student recruitment and in impact assessment exercises.

### 2.3.2 Encourage the pursuit of study abroad

Offering alternative options for mobility is only one solution to facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students, however, and there are other ways of making international activities more inclusive to those with limited stocks of cultural capital. Raising awareness of international opportunities only becomes effective when confidence is instilled among under-represented students that study abroad is realistic and achievable, and when misconceptions about what – and who – study abroad is actually for are challenged.

The general consensus among mobility scholars is that students from under-represented backgrounds are more likely to take part in study abroad when they are encouraged and supported to do so by academics (Amani and Kim, 2018; Doyle et al., 2010). Academics therefore play a key role in helping students overcome the psychological barriers to participation by legitimising the possibility of study abroad, which involves persuading them to view it as a worthwhile and affordable endeavour (Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015), but also to reassure them that study abroad can be accommodating of their schedules and commitments (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Paus and Robinson, 2008). Allaying these concerns are necessary because, as noted by Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator (2010), while their financially and socially privileged peers "might approach study abroad with a sense of adventure", WP students, in contrast, "may do so with a sense of foreboding and fear of the unknown" (p. 337).

How study abroad is promoted and portrayed may also influence perceptions of who WP students think is most likely to take part in said activity, and result in the decision to self-exclude themselves due to a perceived lack of representation (Nguyen, 2014). This was identified as the key reason for low uptake levels among multicultural undergraduate students in a US study by Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella (2011), who found images used in their university's marketing materials of the 'stereotypical' study abroad participant – white, wealthy women – to be alienating, and thus reinforced the perception of study abroad as something unattainable, or 'not for the likes of us'. It could be argued that this paper is somewhat dated, considering how universities have since made more effort to diversify not just the promotion of study abroad, but also to market themselves as being more

representative of the general population over recent years, yet participation rates among WP students – and those from BAME backgrounds in particular –remain imbalanced.

This would indicate that representation is not the sole reason for deterring such students from study abroad, which Brux and Fry (2010) attribute to issues of relatability and the perceived lack of role models, rather than an inability to picture themselves taking advantage of international opportunities. They suggest that academics – particularly those from similar ethnic and social backgrounds – can make a positive difference by championing the cause of study abroad, and by changing perceptions of what is "ab/normal, un/desirable and im/possible" (Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall, 2007, p. 220). Elements of perceived similarity therefore make not only academics a credible and authentic advocate of study abroad (Leask et al., 2020; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), but also fellow students with shared characteristics and experiences (Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016). From an institutional perspective, positive word-of-mouth promotion is a more cost-effective method of promoting study abroad, as utilising returnee students – those who have already studied abroad – to talk about their time overseas can be done at minimal or even no cost (Bridger, 2015; Savishinsky, 2012). From a personal perspective, connecting returnee students with prospective study abroad applicants can be similarly useful for enabling knowledge transfer, thus overcoming the social capital barrier (Deakin, 2013; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010).

Furthermore, returnee students function as a form of inspiration to those from under-represented backgrounds by demonstrating the possibility and the visibility of study abroad as something that is available to all (Ahn, 2014). Seeing an example of what they can aspire to – and more importantly, relate to and identify with – has been shown to increase participation rates among BAME students (Bruce, 2012; Coldwell, 2013; Sweeney, 2013), which is crucial for sending the message that study abroad is not restricted to certain social groups, and that they, too can follow in the footsteps of those who blazed a trail before them (UniversitiesUK, 2021). Peers from similar backgrounds are also more likely to understand the concerns of WP students, having overcome similar obstacles to take part in an international experience, which makes them well placed to offer emotional support and practical advice on how others like themselves can do the same. This is needed more so for disabled students than for any other WP subgroup who, as Ablaeva (2012) observes in a qualitative US study, are generally viewed as being too high maintenance from an

institutional perspective in terms of the support they require to study abroad, and as such, are not encouraged to pursue international opportunities.

This contrasts with interventions used to increase participation rates among BAME students, who have received considerably more attention over the years compared to those with disabilities. Such neglect, explains Ablaeva (2012), may have arisen from limited expertise among disability services of advising these students on the reasonable adjustments needed to help them study abroad, or from how universities themselves might not have the funds required to cover the additional costs incurred from a study abroad experience for those with disabilities. Disabled students are frequently left to self-advocate and do their own research into whether an international experience is feasible for someone with their needs, which is why Ablaeva (2012) recommends drawing on the lived experience of those who have been abroad for students and universities alike to use as a resource on what kind of accommodations are available, or on what would be helpful for enabling those with disabilities to study abroad.

### *2.3.3 Create a platform to promote study abroad*

The promotion of study abroad programmes, according to Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017), is vital for increasing visibility of international opportunities, but there remains some debate over what scholars consider to be the most effective way of doing this. While formal events such as open days and study abroad fairs are useful for generating initial interest in, and awareness of, study abroad (Di Pietro, 2020; Leask et al., 2020), such strategies run the risk of becoming "a pitch that is meant to 'sell' the course as a commodity or good rather than an objective discussion about best-fit, goals, academics, costs, and logistics" (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015, p. 34). Informal events, on the other hand – particularly those that are smaller in scale and run by individual departments – allow prospective applicants to acquire more specific information, and are thus considered more impactful than generic marketing campaigns (Gray et al., 2018).

What Danjean (2017)'s model neglects to consider in its recommendation of creating an appropriate platform for information sharing, however, is the level of knowledge required for being the conduit. Rather than connecting students with a centralised study abroad office, as advocated in their modified version of the Faculty Engagement model, it might be more

pertinent to connect academics instead, given that knowledge among this stakeholder group can be just as patchy, if not more so, than students (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Deakin, 2013). In other words, although experience of the study abroad process – often gained as a beneficiary of schemes like Erasmus or the New Colombo Plan – can increase the likelihood of study abroad engagement, this does not necessarily translate into knowledge of the study abroad practicalities.

A mixed methods study by Bridger (2015), for example, demonstrates that while academics who had studied abroad were keen to encourage the uptake of international opportunities among their students, they often struggled to advise on the specifics of these. They could identify the barriers most likely to deter students, such as cost, but were unable to offer guidance on funding availability. An earlier study by Doyle et al. (2010), meanwhile, reached similar observations in that academic involvement with study abroad is largely limited to approving student applications and module choices, as opposed to assisting with financial queries. This indicates the need for universities to make information on study abroad – and funding in particular – clearer and more accessible not only to students, but also academics, who described locating this by themselves in a more recent paper by Criswell and Zhu (2015) as a "burden" and a "headache" (p. 33).

Greater collaboration between departments and the central study abroad office would rectify the issue, but as noted by Castro et al. (2016), these rarely tend to interact with each other. This does raise questions over how involved academics ought to be with study abroad, or whether it is even possible for them to provide detailed and personalised guidance on its specifics. Adopting a two-pronged approach, with academics demonstrating the possibility of study abroad to students while study abroad offices inform them on the practicalities of study abroad, could therefore benefit each stakeholder group by sharing both the workload and their expertise. Proactively targeting information about study abroad is considered to be more effective than adopting a more reactive approach, with prospective applicants being expected to seek it out for themselves, given that different types of students will have different levels of knowledge on how – and where – to obtain this (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015).

Adjusting to, and learning to navigate the – often unwritten and unexplained – social norms of university, such as making use of office hours to gain advice and support, can be difficult

for WP students, who might not be aware that academics can be engaged with outside of lectures, or even have the confidence to approach them in the first place (Semper and Blasco, 2018). While this has been attributed to the so-called hidden curriculum, the pedagogic practices associated with academically selective institutions may also be perceived by WP students as being 'hands-off' at best and unsupportive at worst (Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). Academics themselves might not consciously give the impression of being uninterested or unapproachable, but their university's prioritisation of research output over pastoral support can, in the words of Read, Archer, and Leathwood (2003), create a sense of "'distance' between lecturer and student" (p. 270).

Limited availability for interaction therefore makes it difficult to develop a relationship with students, and more significantly, share information about international opportunities (Lehmann and Trower, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Umbach and Wawrynzki, 2005). As discussed previously, it should also be noted that different types of students also have different capacities for engagement with campus life, where residential status (Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2018; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010) and personal circumstances (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Hurst, 2019; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) can both impact one's access to information about study abroad (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Trilokekar and Rasmi, 2011). Acknowledging these structural barriers is key for increasing uptake among under-represented groups, according to van Mol and Perez-Encinas (2022), as information is more likely to reach the kind of students who typically prioritise academics and work or caring commitments over university social events and extracurricular activities when this is given while they are already on campus. Such students otherwise struggle to attend drop-in sessions or non-compulsory departmental talks, so promoting study abroad either before or after lectures would arguably raise awareness better than one-off occasions.

## Summary

This chapter reflected on how findings from existing studies informed the current research project, which aims to explore what influences willingness – and, more crucially, capacity – for study abroad engagement among academics. Literature from a variety of international and cultural contexts was used to: a) determine the factors that shape academic understandings of

the barriers to study abroad for WP students; b) acknowledge the factors that shape strategies utilised by academics for overcoming these barriers and; c) identify the factors that shape the challenges of helping students to overcome these barriers, as perceived by academics.

The first of these themes analysed studies that demonstrate why there is a need to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. This was done by investigating what might cause their self-exclusion from international opportunities through an economic capital perspective, or access to financial resources, a cultural capital perspective, or access to experiences and activities, and a social capital perspective, or access to knowledgeable others.

The second of these themes examined research that offers suggestions and recommendations as to how academics can facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. This was done by exploring what is currently known about methods used for encouraging those from under-represented groups to consider the possibility of study abroad and to inform them about the process of study abroad.

The third of these themes discussed studies that focus on the difficulties associated with facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students and how this might impact on academic involvement. This was done by raising attention to the need for support, both on an institutional and departmental level, to prevent the issue of burnout and to ensure sustained engagement. The need for best practice sharing was also brought to light, both in terms of lowering the barrier to entry for academics new to the role of study abroad adviser, and to prevent knowledge from being lost when academics leave this role.

Finally, this chapter highlighted knowledge gaps in the literature, which are later addressed in the findings and discussion chapter. The first of these includes a commonly overlooked barrier to study abroad for WP students that was brought to light by academics: how the UK's residential model of HE makes it more difficult for British students to study abroad. While securing accommodation overseas has long been recognised as one of the main deterrents to study abroad, the prospect of leaving accommodation at home once friendship groups have been established and rental contracts have been signed has largely gone unnoticed. The second of these determine the effectiveness of taking a centrally managed approach to study abroad promotion, as recommended by multiple scholars for easing the workload among academics, and whether this method actually helps to facilitate study abroad

uptake for WP students. The third of these illustrates another strategy for facilitating uptake – alternative study abroad programmes in the form of ILPs – from a non-US context to explore whether these are similarly successful at widening access to under-represented groups.

As outlined in chapter one, the introduction to the thesis, and reiterated here for reference, the following research questions were formulated by the literature:

1) What are academics' understandings of the barriers to study abroad for widening participation students?

2) What are academics doing to overcome these barriers and increase study abroad uptake for widening participation students?

2a) How does this compare between pre- and post-1992 universities?
2b) How does this compare between academic fields of study?

3) What do academics perceive to be the main challenges of facilitating study abroad participation for widening participation students?

These will be answered in depth in chapter four, the findings and discussion section of the thesis, before being summarised more concisely in chapter five, the conclusion section of the thesis.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter explores the methodological considerations undertaken as part of the research process, before explaining and justifying its choice of research methods. It begins by detailing the suitability of an interpretivist approach for the study's research strategy before outlining the effectiveness of a qualitative design for addressing the methodological limitations of previous research on study abroad inequalities, and for understanding the perspective of an overlooked stakeholder group – academic staff members – on this particular issue. An overview of the study's case study research inquiry is also provided in its comparison of two different types of universities located in the same city to highlight the influence of institutional factors on strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake among WP students.

Attention is then turned to the data collection tools utilised for this research, which consisted of semi-structured interviews. In line with the study's qualitative design, this research method was chosen partly for its flexibility to enable deeper understanding of the topic of investigation, but also to fill the methodological gap left by previous scholars in the field, whose papers are largely of a quantitative or mixed methods nature.

This chapter then presents the method of sampling used to select both the research sites – a pre-1992 institution and a post-1992 provider – and the research subjects – academics with the role of study abroad adviser. Challenges in relation to access and recruitment are later discussed, along with how this influenced the study's response rate during participant recruitment, before moving onto the method of analysis chosen to interpret the study's findings.

Finally, ethical considerations of the study are covered, which include reflections on the impact of engagement with the study on participant commitments and workload, how to ensure they were informed about the research project and the research process, and to ensure confidentiality and consent. Reflections are also made upon the researcher's own characteristics, and how these might have influenced access to information.

## 3.1 Research strategy

Before conducting any empirical research, consideration was first given towards the most appropriate research strategy for exploring the chosen topic (inequalities in study abroad) through a specific stakeholder perspective (academic staff with the role of study abroad adviser) to better understand a certain phenomenon (what is being done to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students) within a particular context (a university setting). The need to make sense of this issue therefore informs a researcher's stance towards their research topic, which logically stemmed from their ontology, or philosophical views of the world, a concept that underpins one's assumptions made about "the nature of reality" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 3). These shape the researcher's personal beliefs regarding what is known about the social world – in other words, that inequalities in access to study abroad exist – and epistemology, which concerns itself on what can be done to learn more about the social world and how knowledge can be generated (Blaikie, 1993), or to find out what is being done to tackle these inequalities.

If ontology begins the initial research process by determining the nature of reality, then epistemology expands upon this further by questioning how reality can be understood, which in turn dictates the research focus by determining the most appropriate ways of generating knowledge about reality (Blaikie, 1993). This study consequently positioned itself within the epistemological stance of interpretivism, which emphasises the understanding of human behaviour, as opposed to positivism, which focuses more on explaining it. An interpretivist paradigm thus stems from the belief that the social sciences cannot be explored using the same methods as the natural sciences, which makes it "critical of research that treats people studied as objects rather than subjects, and they challenge and reject claims to value neutrality and objectivity in educational research" (Morrison, 2007, p. 13). The interpretivist approach is also associated with an inductive research strategy, one that follows a "'bottom-up' process through which patterns are derived from observations of the world" (Ormston et al., 2013, p. 6). Knowledge is not acquired through deductive reasoning, as with a positivist stance, but through gaining an in-depth understanding of the social world and the meanings subscribed to it by individual actors, with the purpose of developing theory from findings, rather than testing a hypothesis (Taber, 2007). This would not have been suitable for learning what leads to inequalities in study abroad, or what could be done to reduce these.

Furthermore, interpretivism lends itself to an idiographic approach, allowing for a social phenomenon to be investigated from a variety of perspectives, all of which can differ vastly depending on the context, and the generation of rich and detailed data (Pring, 2000). This arises from its emphasis on the uniqueness of an individual's lived experience, which enables research to delve into the nature of the specific, but while such a narrow focus does limit transferability somewhat, it also prioritises the personal over the general, and therefore does not need to be representative of the population as a whole (Klein and Myers, 1999). Adopting a "'people-centred' approach" (Atkins and Wallace, 2012, p. 21) in this way makes social research inevitably subjective, given that the subjects involved are human beings with agency and free will, not inanimate objects in a laboratory setting (Robson and McCartan, 2016). Objectivity is neither possible nor desirable from this perspective, and researchers should not attempt to distance themselves from what is being studied. Social research is an interactive process, meaning that the researcher and their participants do not operate independently of each other, unlike molecules in a sterile laboratory. This process is not a value-free one, given that a conscious decision has been made about the topic to be explored, which is why the researcher should always be transparent and reflective when justifying their choice of research approach and design (Bourke, 2014).

From an interpretivist theoretical perspective, the most appropriate way of acquiring knowledge about the social world is by exploring "the understanding and meanings ascribed to the social phenomenon by the social actors" (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p. 23), which makes it a more fitting approach for this study's aim of investigating academic stakeholder perceptions of, and attitudes towards, study abroad. As such, an epistemological orientation arose not only from the desire to make sense of the factors that influence these perspectives, but also from the belief, as Gray (2004) maintains, that "subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (p. 17). This perception of reality is inevitably subjective rather than objective, due to its belief of how the same phenomenon can be experienced and interpreted by different people in very different ways (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge gained through these experiences is considered to be uniquely personal and tends to be influenced by the environment in which one lives, therefore making it socially constructed (May, 2011). Understanding of reality is equally fluid, and is shaped through interaction with other social actors, meaning knowledge and perspectives can change over time after encountering new information and upon being exposed to unfamiliar cultures

(Snape and Spencer, 2003). Knowledge is thus situated socially, culturally and historically, with the impact of these contextual factors on people's attitudes and values differing greatly depending on which part of the world they are located in (Ormston et al., 2013).

More importantly, an interpretivist approach was deemed to be most suitable for exploring why academics working in the same role of study abroad adviser, but employed at different types of universities, might have different views on the same subject of study abroad inequalities to determine how these differences are influenced by their personal backgrounds, individual experiences and even the institutional context in which they function. By extension, an interpretivist approach was also suitable for understanding why different types of academics at different types of universities might take different approaches to facilitating study abroad uptake for WP, and how institutional context can enable or constrain these due to differences in resources levels and priorities.

### *3.1.1 Case study inquiry*

The research strategy adopted by this thesis was a case study, which Yin (2009) defines as "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (pp. 18-19). A case study inquiry was considered appropriate given both the "underlying research philosophy which is based on an interpretative understanding of the world" and for the exploratory nature of the research, which sought to "answer the 'how' and 'why' questions" regarding perceptions of, and attitudes towards, study abroad from participants in their own words (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 254). The main strength of case study research also lends itself well to the purpose of this thesis to investigate an under-explored phenomenon – inequalities in study abroad from a UK context – from a previously overlooked perspective – academic staff members – to better understand what is being done by this demographic to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. The case to be studied for this thesis therefore concerned itself with a particular geographical location – one English city – and a particular institution – one pre-1992 university and one post-1992 university.

The emancipatory effect of case study inquiry, which utilises research to "give voice to people who are marginalised, disadvantaged, excluded or vulnerable" (Schwandt and Gates, 2018, p. 607), was also a good fit for this thesis and its aim to bring about positive change: in other words, making access to study abroad fairer and more equitable. This ties in with

another strength of case study inquiry by comparing what approaches are being used to facilitate study abroad uptake by academics and evaluating what makes them effective (Yin, 2018). A comparative case study, or the inclusion of more than one case, was therefore considered to be more effective at identifying examples of best practice than a single case study, as comparing and contrasting strategies for increasing study abroad participation rates for WP students would enable a broader understanding of why these might vary depending on institutional context (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017; Khan and VanWynsberghe, 2008).

Contextual differences are significant, due to what is already known about study abroad inequalities in terms of how some HEIs are more internationally-oriented and better resourced than others (Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Russell Group, 2017; Stier, 2004), so comparing two different types of university – a research-intensive university and a teaching-focused institution – within the same city would yield interesting insights into whether different institutional intakes and priorities translate into different approaches to facilitating study abroad uptake. Further exploration was also warranted as to whether differences could be observed not just between universities, but also between fields of study, given that previous research in this area has been limited either to specific academic disciplines such as Business, Law and Geography (Ahn, 2014; Deakin, 2013; Ramakrishna, Sarkar and Vijayaraman, 2016), or on the under-representation of the natural sciences as a whole (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Twombly et al., 2012). As such, it was deemed crucial to address this oversight by recruiting from all available degree subjects to ensure a reasonable amount of representation, but also to compare and contrast strategies between disciplines.

Issues have been raised regarding lack of rigour over the context in which case studies are situated, as these are unique only to the people and settings being studied, and some critics argue can prevent findings from being transferable to other examples (Taber, 2007). It should be noted, however, that the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise but rather to illuminate a specific phenomenon by increasing our understanding of a social issue, and how this might affect the sample being studied for this research (Walliman, 2011). More importantly, while findings from the chosen universities in this study are not intended to be representative of all UK HEIs, demonstrating good practice examples of what is being done in one particular institutional setting to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students may be of interest to other universities, regardless of their type and status. This brings attention to the

relatability, rather than the representativity, of case study research by acknowledging what could be learned from research findings and the extent to which these could be applied to other universities (Schoch, 2020). These could potentially be utilised as part of a benchmarking exercise to offer recommendations about what works best for diversifying study abroad programmes (Teichler, 1996), thus making research contributions meaningful not just for future scholarly work to extend on, but also for the development of policy and practice.

### *3.1.2 Qualitative approach*

Due to the stakeholder group involved with this research – academic staff members with the role of study abroad adviser – and the aim of the thesis – to explore what shapes perceptions of the barriers to study abroad for WP students – methods for facilitating study abroad uptake, and the challenges associated with doing this – a qualitative methodology was considered to be most appropriate for understanding their values, beliefs and circumstances regarding international opportunities and issues of under-representation (Snape and Spencer, 2003). This necessitated interacting directly with said stakeholders in the real-world setting of an HE environment via the use of inquiry-based research methods (Jennings, 2012), which also required subjectively interpreting the many "meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on" assigned by academics to the topic of investigation (Schwandt, 2007, p. 296). The characteristics of qualitative research were therefore well suited to the kind of flexibility and openness required for capturing an academic's lived experience of the phenomenon being studied in their own words, which a less flexible alternative approach would not (Flick, 2014).

As such, a quantitative approach was considered inappropriate for examining at length and in detail what influenced academics to take on the role of study abroad adviser, or what shaped their experiences of this. It would, however, have been a useful alternative to data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic, when restrictions on travelling and socialising presented unforeseen difficulties in accessing human participants for research purposes. Existing statistical data could have been drawn from HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency), for example, which collects information that would have been of relevance to this study, including the number of internationally mobile home students within the UK and the type of university these students are enrolled in, to enable a broader understanding of which students

are more likely to study abroad from a UK context. However, there exists a multitude of studies already, as established in the literature review chapter, highlighting how the typical study abroad participant tends to be female (Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014), Caucasian (Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011), from a higher socioeconomic background (Havergal, 2016; Salisbury et al., 2010; Waters, 2009), reading an arts, humanities or social sciences degree (Cordua and Netz, 2021; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Stroud, 2010) and be studying at an academically selective university, where study abroad opportunities are more widely available (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Dall'Alba and Sidhu, 2015; Di Pietro, 2020; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020).

Any new data would likely confirm these findings, and although these might offer a somewhat novel contribution by highlighting how England has the lowest uptake levels of study abroad, despite having a larger population and a greater number of universities than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (UniversitiesUK, 2022), the limitations of statistical analysis would not have explained why participation rates differ so widely between UK nations. While surveys would have been an effective alternative method for exploring their perspectives, not to mention a cost-effective and efficient way of generating data, these are also commonly associated with low response rates (Nulty, 2008; Gerbase et al., 2015), which again would limit the applicability of any findings. Surveys were thus deemed unsuitable for collecting the type of in-depth data required to gain a detailed insight into attitudes and perceptions among academics, or why these might differ depending on institutional and disciplinary affiliation (Bell, 2005).

A qualitative approach was also considered more suitable for addressing methodological gaps in the literature, given that previous research on study abroad inequalities more generally has been either quantitative in nature (Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011) or adopted a mixed methods approach (Brux and Fry, 2010; Doyle et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2006; King et al., 2011). This has also been the case for more recent studies seeking to extend these findings by raising attention to the influence of university type on the likelihood of study abroad participation (Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol and Perez-Encinas, 2022). Similarly, very little qualitative research exists regarding the influence of these factors on academics' involvement with study abroad, particularly from a UK context. Other studies investigating this under-explored stakeholder viewpoint have again used mixed methods (Bridger, 2015), quantitative methods

(Danjean, 2017), or were too small in scope, even for a qualitative exploration, by recruiting from only one or two academic disciplines, or from one specific university (Hull, 2013; Ndandula, 2020; Raczkoski and Robinson, 2019), with an overly restrictive sample unlikely to be relatable or applicable to other contexts.

The only qualitative study to not contain these limitations was conducted by Savishinsky (2012), which was surprisingly ambitious for a piece of PhD level research. Similarities can also be observed between their thesis and this one, given Savishinsky's aim (2012) of comparing responses between academic staff members from both different types of universities and different disciplines to determine what influences their willingness to engage with study abroad, and although findings were hoped to be broadly transferable from one cultural context to another, some interesting differences were highlighted between the US – the setting of Savishinsky's research – and the UK, the setting of this study.

## 3.2 Data collection tools

### *3.2.1 Interview type*

Interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method for collecting the kind of detailed data associated with qualitative research, and were considered to be the most effective way of exploring academic staff understandings of study abroad barriers for WP, along with their experiences of facilitating study abroad uptake for this particular group (Kvale, 1996). A decision then had to be made regarding what type of interview would be more suited for this undertaking, which resulted in structured interviews being rejected as a possibility due to their closed question format. While these would have allowed for greater efficiency and easier comparison between a predetermined number of fixed responses (Bryman, 2012), they also prevent any unanticipated angles that may have emerged from a more free-flowing discussion from being expanded upon (Patton, 1980). Structured interviews can be useful for conducting research with young children in an early years or primary school setting, who may struggle to engage in longer, more nuanced conversations (Morrison, Moir and Kwansa, 2000), but would not have been as suitable for adult participants in an HE environment.

Unstructured interviews, in contrast, have no fixed questions, and might have been a better fit for this context had their greatest strength – the freedom for participants to guide

conversation towards what they consider to be most important – also not been their largest weakness. Unstructured interviews are also time-consuming, which makes them difficult to keep on topic, and unlike structured interviews, do not allow for easy response comparison between participant responses if these fail to contain answers to the exact same questions (Kvale, 2007). More importantly, while unstructured interviews can be a helpful way of capturing individual life stories and biographies, these would have been more suitable for learning about how different stakeholder groups – namely WP students – think about study abroad activities as a whole, and would not have achieved the aim of this research to explore the academic stakeholder perspective.

Ultimately, the decision was made to utilise semi-structured interviews, which offer greater balance than structured and unstructured interviews, by enabling the researcher to guide discussion with open-ended questions (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). This flexibility prevents the interview from going off-topic, while the use of prompts enables the interviewer to clarify a response or to probe for further information from a participant who might otherwise have been less forthcoming with their answers (Mason, 2002). Despite these benefits, semi-structured interviews can be just as challenging to conduct as their structured and unstructured counterparts, given the effort required to select and recruit participants, in addition to scheduling an interview time and place. This makes semi-structured interviews – and interviews in general – less efficient than other research methods, due to the time taken up by transcription and data analysis (Bell, 2005).

An alternative research method such as focus groups, where participants are brought together to discuss a chosen topic rather than responding to open-ended questions individually on a one-to-one basis, would have been a quicker and more effective way of generating data (Litoselliti, 2003). Focus groups are also considered to be a “more 'grounded', or 'naturally occurring'” way of discussing a certain issue than interviews, due to participants themselves controlling the conversation and not the researcher (Finch and Lewis, 2003, p. 181). Again, this method would have been more suitable for use on a student stakeholder group, due to academic staff members being recruited from various departments and who were operating on different time schedules. It was difficult enough to organise individual appointments for interviews, and would have been even more complicated to coordinate multiple people to match their convenience.

Pairing interviews with another qualitative research method such as semiotic analysis, which decodes the content of non-verbal communication – for example, images or videos – to interpret its underlying message (Chandler, 2007), may have overcome the challenges arising from participant recruitment. Semiotic analysis would have been a useful data collection tool for analysing how universities present study abroad opportunities to their students through the perspective of academic staff and the effect this might have on study abroad participation rates, which could have stimulated further discussion on the issue and encouraged greater participant involvement by having academics react to official promotional content (Cardno, Rosales-Anderson and McDonald, 2017). The combination of interviews with semiotic analysis would have further increased the novelty of this thesis by extending the handful of previous studies that analysed the visual elements of study abroad marketing material (Michelson and Valencia, 2016; Miller-Idriss, Friedman and Auerbach, 2019) by exploring how this might be interpreted by specific stakeholder groups.

Rather than attempting to balance the weaknesses of one research method with the strengths of another, it was eventually considered more important that the method of choice – semi-structured interviews – was "open, consistently applied and replicable by others" (Oakley, 1999, p. 252) ensured researcher trustworthiness and credibility. Effort was also made to establish the reliability of the study's chosen research instrument by utilising a protocol to help structure the interview, with questions arranged into a series of themes informed by the literature – perceived drivers and barriers to study abroad participation, motivations for and challenges of being a study abroad adviser – which were further divided into smaller subsections to explore strategies for increasing study abroad participation.

All questions were asked to participants in the same order as they appeared on the protocol to demonstrate transparency (Flick, 2007), with effort taken not to use "careless prompting" or "biased probes" so as not to potentially lead the interview or create any bias (Gray, 2004, p. 220). The interviews began by giving participants easy to answer questions to provide a general introduction about themselves and their backgrounds, for the purpose of easing them into the discussion and building rapport (Cridland et al., 2015; Rabionet, 2011). Adopting an informal approach to the interview style did help to encourage greater levels of responsiveness among reticent participants (Edwards and Holland, 2013) and to perceive the interviewer as being more approachable, both of which are useful for crossing the cultural

divide (Miller and Glassner, 2004) and for discussing sensitive issues (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

### *3.2.2 Interview platform*

Implications for data collection arose out of disruption caused by the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020, with universities – the target recruitment sites for this study – being closed down to all but non-essential staff in order to reduce transmission rates and prevent the spread of the virus (Harper et al., 2020; Lall and Singh, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Travel restrictions and social distancing protocols, meanwhile, resulted in plans for travelling to said institutions being cancelled, and adaptations for conducting research remotely were then considered. The pros and cons of these were weighed accordingly before making the final decision as to how interviews would instead take place.

The first choice made when determining the appropriate interview mode was whether these would occur through a synchronous format, which allows for questions to be given in real time and most closely replicates a face-to-face scenario (James and Busher, 2006), or conducted asynchronously, where participants reply their own leisure, without the pressure to offer an immediate response. Interviews that take place in non-real time are usually conducted through email correspondence, a manner of communication that most participants were likely to be familiar with and use in their daily lives, by answering questions on a Word document attachment. These are less "free-flowing" than the kind of discussion that synchronous interviews facilitate (Salmons, 2012, p. 21), but do enable more detailed and in-depth responses, which can be helpful for participants who struggle to react in a spur-of-the-moment situation (Salmons, 2015).

Some scholars, however, caution that giving participants time to reflect more deeply on their responses can result in social desirability bias where, rather than being honest and truthful, they instead tell the researcher what they think they want to hear (O'Connor et al., 2008). Others raise concerns over the potential for misinterpretation or miscommunication, as lack of spontaneity with this interview mode leaves researchers unable to clarify themselves or adapt their questions as quickly and easily as they would during real time interaction (James and Busher, 2016). The time lag between responses can likewise cause participants to lose

interest and drop out of the study, especially if they find form filling to be a tedious process, so risk of attrition was the main reason why email interviews were eventually excluded.

As such, synchronous interviews were deemed to be a more suitable way of capturing participant interest, and conducting these over the telephone initially seemed a reasonable alternative to email format. The relative anonymity of telephone interviews, where neither researcher nor participant can see each other's faces, may lessen inhibitions and make it easier for those taking part in the study to be more forthcoming with their opinions, particularly if they concern sensitive topics (Schneider et al., 2002). Although not having to reveal any personal biological characteristics, such as age, gender or ethnicity, can encourage participants to be less guarded or reserved (Fox, Morris and Rumsey, 2007), lack of transparency would not have been effective at building a sense of trustworthiness. Telephone interviews were therefore discarded, as it was considered more important to demonstrate that the research was being conducted legitimately at a well-regarded institution and hopefully, from the participant's viewpoint, lead to "increased feelings of safety, comfort and willingness to participate" (Upadhyay and Lipkovich, 2020, p. 7).

If participants were to feel comfortable partaking in a discussion with someone they could see and trust, then video conferencing was the most effective way of facilitating this. Interviews conducted in this manner take place in real-time, which enables an immediacy of responses and generates the same kind of spontaneous discussion occurring from their face-to-face counterparts (Salmons, 2012). While interviews conducted in-person are still considered to be the "gold standard" of qualitative research (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006, p. 389), other interview modes are just as credible and trustworthy as face-to-face ones, not to mention equally capable of generating rich, detailed data (Novick, 2008; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). Moreover, interviews conducted via video conferencing are shown to be as effective at establishing rapport with participants as their more traditional equivalents (Krouwel, Jolly and Greenfield, 2019). The visual elements of video conferencing play a large part in this by allowing researcher and participant to pick up on non-verbal cues like body language and facial expressions (Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016), and may explain why participants prefer video conferencing interviews over those conducted via telephone, given that voice only communication is less conducive to putting them at ease (Mabraganna et al., 2013).

Technical difficulties should still be accounted for in terms of how these might affect participant behaviour. The time lag between responses due to poor internet connections may result in the perception that conversation is not being held in a natural environment, for example, as accidentally talking over one another or waiting too long for each other to respond can make the conversation more awkward and disjointed (Murphy, 2020; Wiederhold, 2020). These issues are why Seitz (2016) argues that video conferencing actually makes it more difficult to build rapport, not easier, as "presenting an emotional barrier" through the screen of a laptop, monitor or smartphone can exacerbate the sense of distance between interviewer and interviewee (p. 232). This distance presents an unexpected advantage, however, given how online interviews can reduce participant anxiety of travelling to an unfamiliar location to meet an unfamiliar researcher, thus lessening the risk of 'no-shows' (Hanna, 2012). Increasing the level of security by having interviews take place over video link effectively addresses any concerns about personal safety associated with physical interaction, which in turn leads to greater sample diversity and inclusivity, as allowing people control over where and how they participate can make them more amenable to taking part (Nehls, Smith and Schneider, 2015). The versatility of online interviews also offers considerable benefits to researcher and participant alike by eliminating the time and costs required to meet at a predetermined destination (O'Connor et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2020).

Having decided on video conferencing as the most appropriate mode of interview, the next step was to choose a suitable platform. Some of these were rejected for their lack of accessibility such as FaceTime, which would limit the participant pool to only those who own an Apple device, their relative obscurity such as Slack, which has only a small user base compared to other well-known applications, and their steeper learning curve such as Discord, which is less intuitive and has a higher barrier to entry. Ease of use and familiarity was therefore prioritised, which led to the choice of Zoom, an application that rose to prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was also the most popular choice among participants when asked about their platform preference. Unlike other, more established options such as Skype and Microsoft Teams, Zoom does not require the user to download and install software, or even to set up an account. This, as Gray et al. (2020) point out, offers a simpler and stress-free experience for interviewees, who merely need to click on a link in their browser to join the meeting. Archibald et al. (2019) also recommend Zoom due to its user friendliness and for having better sound and video quality than other video conferencing platforms, which makes it a more reliable tool for data collection.

The exponential growth of Zoom, however, was soon accompanied by concerns over its security flaws, as cases of malicious users hijacking meetings, or 'Zoombombing', made headlines in the media (Paul, 2020). The platform subsequently addressed these vulnerabilities, and its users were also advised to follow basic protocols to keep themselves and others safe. Care was taken to ensure platform security by sharing password protected links only with those joining the meeting to prevent uninvited access and utilising Zoom's waiting room feature, which allows hosts to eject attendees out of the chat if needed (Aiken, 2020). No such problems emerged as a result of taking these safety precautions, and all online interviews took place without event. Further efforts were also taken to bypass any data harvesting activities by audio recording the interview from a secondary audio dictation device and saving the files onto a password protected hard drive, rather than allowing Zoom to automatically upload them into remote server storage.

## 3.3 Research sites

Boundaries had to be placed when selecting research sites for comparison, given the limited scope of this project as a piece of doctoral-level research, and the number of cases were appropriately restricted as a result. This also meant having to focus solely on one UK country as opposed to investigating universities on a nation-wide basis, as although this would have produced some interesting results in the context of devolution, comparing these would have been difficult largely due to demographics, since England is the largest and contains the greatest number of both students and HEIs. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were therefore excluded, resulting in England as the country of focus. This was further narrowed down when choosing a specific region from which to select universities from, where potential candidates were shortlisted by identifying the cities that contained both a pre-1992 and a post-1992 institution to enable comparison between two different types of universities within the same geographical location.

Universities were then targeted based on the amount of demographic data made publicly available on their intake to determine what type of student they would be most likely to recruit in relation to WP characteristics, such as SES, ethnicity and, more importantly, their residential status. Location choice was therefore significant, given the link between

willingness to relocate for university and increased likelihood of study abroad propensity (Beerkens et al., 2016; Daly, 2011; Hurst, 2019; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010). Students who are more 'rooted' to their local community are typically less adventurous and more risk averse in both their choice of university and their degree (Finn, 2017; Henderson, 2020; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009), but also regarding study abroad participation (Courtois, 2020; Cranston, Pimlott-Wilson and Bates, 2020; Stroud, 2010). In other words, if different types of universities attract different types of students, this could potentially translate into different understandings of the barriers to study abroad among academics, or even different types of strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake.

Differences were also observed in terms of how the chosen pre-1992 institution marketed and positioned itself from the post-1992 provider through mission statements provided on their respective official websites. These aim to distinguish themselves from other universities, along with other promotional materials reflecting their values, priorities and purpose (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). The sites to be studied were then given a pseudonym, with the pre-1992 HEI being identified as 'Old University' and the post-1992 HEI being identified as 'New University'.

**Site 1: Old University**

The first case study site is Old University, an academically selective institution mainly admitting students with the highest A Level grades (AAA-AAB), and a member of the Russell Group, a collection of 24 research-intensive universities. In terms of mission statements and priorities, Old University positions itself as a globally-oriented university, which aims to provide an international education and produce world-class research benefiting communities both locally and globally. Recent data reveals that just over 30,000 students were enrolled at Old University for the 2021-22 academic year, with around a third, or 10,000 of these consisting of internationals (non-EU and EU students). It also draws around 40% of their student intake from surrounding areas and low participation neighbourhoods (HESA, 2023). Opportunities for study abroad are varied, with the university benefiting from multiple partner links and offering numerous mobility programmes of differing durations, from summer schools to years abroad, for interested students.

**Site 2: New University**

The second case study university is New University, a non-selective post-1992 institution, whose entry requirements are flexible and admit students with a broader mix of qualifications. In terms of mission statements and priorities, New University positions itself as a locally-oriented university that focuses on supporting both the regional economy and the regional community. It also emphasises the practical application of learning outcomes for students in respect to skills and employability. While New University had a broadly similar number of students enrolled in the 2021-22 academic year as Old University of around 34,000, only 5,000 or so of these were internationals. Students from the local area, however, account for almost 70% of New University's intake (HESA, 2023). These numbers reflect the university's values of inclusivity and commitment to social justice and widening access, with a significant proportion of their intake being drawn from under-represented groups who met at least one WP criteria. Opportunities for study abroad are limited, with the university demonstrating fewer partner links compared to Old University, and student choice is more restricted, due to its preference for short-term programmes over long-term ones.

## 3.4 Participant recruitment

Purposive sampling was considered to be the most appropriate method of recruiting participants for this study, given its exploration of attitudes and understandings among a specific demographic – academic members of staff with the role of study abroad adviser – that was "especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 2). Another, more pertinent reason arose for targeting participants with lived experience of the social issue being researched, because as Matthews and Ross (2010) point out, "it would be difficult to interview someone in this way if they knew nothing about the research topic area" (p. 226). While it can be difficult to generalise findings through the small-scale application of purposive sampling, gaining a more in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation was deemed to be of greater significance (Marshall, 1996). Effort was still taken to achieve sample diversity by recruiting participants from different sociodemographic and international backgrounds to explore how perspectives might differ or compare on the same issue (King and Horrocks, 2010; Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003).

Despite their advantages, the small sample sizes associated with case study research can present a number of practical implications, such as inability to recruit sufficient numbers. This study faced similar difficulties during its initial conception, with plans originally being made to recruit three different stakeholder groups: undergraduate students from a WP background to determine their perceptions of the barriers to study abroad at an individual level, academic staff to discover what could be done to overcome these barriers at departmental level, and study abroad office staff to discern the strategies used for tackling study abroad under-representation at an institutional level. Recruiting stakeholders was made challenging for a variety of reasons, the first one being gatekeepers, or the official channel through which researchers must go through when accessing participants (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). Gatekeepers were particularly obstructive at New University, with Covid-19 restrictions forbidding access to human participants for external researchers. Even after these were lifted at the end of lockdown, follow up emails to circulate a request for the recruitment of student participants were repeatedly ignored.

Conversely, gatekeepers at Old University were more supportive, and although a small number of students were successfully recruited and interviewed, data was later discarded after being unable to recruit a comparison group at New University. Attempts to recruit study abroad office staff were similarly problematic, as while two staff members at Old University expressed interest in taking part in the research, multiple efforts to recruit from New University either resulted in outright rejection or the refusal to reply to any emails. Non-response is a commonly cited issue in the recruitment process, where lack of researcher credibility, or the extent to which the researcher is known and trusted by potential participants, may explain their reluctance to participate (Lysaghtet al., 2016).

Consequently, the decision was made to focus solely on academic staff members, which proved to be advantageous given that the amount of interview data generated from all three stakeholder groups would have been beyond the limited scope of a PhD study. Moreover, as discussed in the thesis introduction, this group's perspective on study abroad inequalities has been largely under-explored compared to student or study abroad staff stakeholders, particularly from a UK context, with much of the work conducted in a US setting (Danjean, 2017; Hull, 2013; Raczkoski and Robinson, 2019; Savishinsky, 2012). This study also had a higher success rate with recruiting academics who may have been more inclined to take part because they saw the value and worth of participation, given that research makes up a large

part of their own work, or because they viewed the study as being interesting and relevant to their role in facilitating the uptake of international opportunities (Bonisteel et al., 2021).

Even so, difficulties were still encountered with response rates, as staff at New University were less receptive to recruitment emails than those at Old University. This difference may be attributed to the nature of their institutions, with more demands being made on their time for student support as a teaching-focused provider. Non-response could also be explained by the timing of recruitment, as while attempts were made to be mindful of their schedules, these still coincided with some extent with periods of heavy workload, such as the beginning of autumn semester when academics are busiest introducing course content to newly enrolled students, or at the end of spring semester when their attention is taken up with making and assessments (Hesse-Biber, 2016).

Recruitment was also made more challenging by the current political context of the UK's long-running industrial action in HE, where many academics chose not to answer emails by withholding their labour or only working to contract. It should also be noted that interviews were conducted during a time of general upheaval from the recent changes to study abroad, with greater levels of involvement required from academics to navigate the new logistics of transitioning from Erasmus to the Turing Scheme. Greater need for advising their students on the legalities of international travel after Brexit may likewise have reduced their capacity to respond to email requests for participation.

Despite these challenges, sample diversity was achieved by recruiting participants from a variety of academic disciplines to ensure a good spread of responses, although some academic fields were still more over-represented than others. Ideally, the study would have recruited an even number of academics from the arts and humanities, social sciences, healthcare and allied professions, and the natural sciences to ensure proportional representation of each subject area. Failure to accomplish this aim due to response rates being lower in the arts and humanities than they were in the natural sciences does limit the sample to some extent. It does, however, provide an interesting contrast to other studies comparing the relation of different academic disciplines to study abroad participation, given how STEM subjects are typically more under-represented than the arts and humanities (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017).

While it would have been useful to compare the same subjects in each university, such as Architecture at Old University versus Architecture at New University, this was not made possible. Not all academics chose to respond to the invitation email and take part in the study, but difficulty to establish an even comparison group of disciplines could also be explained by the tendency for different types of universities to offer different types of degrees. Research-intensive institutions like Old University are more likely to emphasise academic subjects as part of their course catalogue, for example, while teaching-focused providers like New University are more vocational in nature. As such, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to establish a like-for-like comparison, due to how some subjects available at the former would not have been provided at the latter.

The creation of a matched sample, where participants are selected on the basis of shared variables (Rosenbaum and Rubin, 1985), may have strengthened the study's comparability, but its focus on enabling a deeper understanding of why attitudes towards study abroad and strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake might differ between different universities, regardless of institutional or disciplinary affiliation, meant that attempts to establish the kind of cause-and-effect relationship more commonly found in quantitative investigations would have been unsuitable. Furthermore, the sample's STEM over-representation ultimately turned out to be advantageous in providing unique insights as to what motivated academics in these disciplines to facilitate study abroad uptake. Previous studies have established that academics in the arts, humanities and social sciences are more likely to be supportive of study abroad due to how closely it aligns with their teaching content and teaching values (Leask et al., 2020; Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Rampold et al., 2018). Academics in STEM, on the other hand, are less favourable to study abroad and typically do not perceive it as being relevant to either their course content or their students' careers (Leask et al., 2020; Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Rampold et al., 2018). Rather than reiterating what is already known about STEM academics and study abroad – in other words, why they choose not to engage with study abroad – this thesis offers a valuable contribution to knowledge by revealing what is not known about why STEM academics might instead choose to become engaged with study abroad.

## 3.5 Participant demographics

Potential respondents at both universities were firstly identified through their institution's official website, which provided a list of current study abroad advisers, their departmental affiliation, and their contact details. An initial enquiry was then sent by email to each adviser containing a brief outline of the research project and requesting their participation in a one-to-one interview. Positive responses received from academics who expressed their interest in taking part were followed up with further details about the project in the form of a participant information document. A copy of the project's ethics approval form was also included to demonstrate legitimacy as an external researcher. Out of the 37 study abroad advisors listed on the website at Old University, 9 responded to the email inviting them to participate in the research (8 male participants and 1 female participant from 8 different departments). New University had fewer listed study abroad advisers in comparison – just 14 in total – and of these, 8 chose to respond (3 male participants and 5 female participants from 7 different departments).

All interviews were conducted between October 2021 and March 2022. Each of these lasted around 30-40 minutes in duration. In total, 17 academics from both universities agreed to take part in the study. This number was in line with recommendations made for recruiting in qualitative research, as case study inquiries that select participants using purposive sampling typically recruit between 8-18 participants for interview. Any more than this would have resulted in the study reaching interview saturation point, with further collection being unlikely to offer data of novelty or relevance (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). The following infographics show a breakdown of all participant details recruited from each university.

**Chart 1. Academic discipline breakdown at Old University**

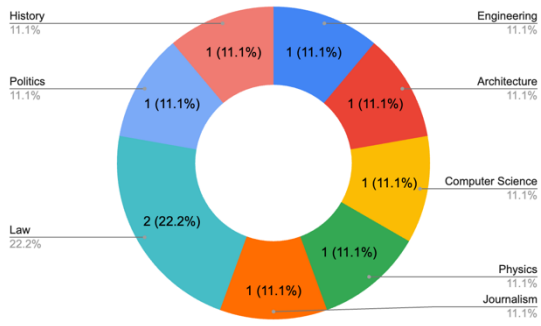



**Chart 2. Academic discipline breakdown at New University**

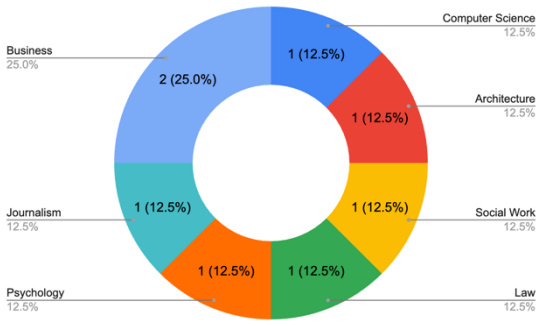


**Table 1. Participant demographic details**

| Demographics | Old University | New University | Total number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | | |
| Male | 9 | 2 | 11 | 64.7% |
| Female | 1 | 5 | 6 | 35.3% |
| **Department** | | | | |
| Humanities | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5.9% |
| STEM | 4 | 2 | 6 | 35.3% |
| Social Sciences | 4 | 6 | 8 | 58.8% |
| **Educational background** | | | | |
| Educated overseas | 3 | 3 | 6 | 35.3% |
| Educated in the UK | 6 | 5 | 11 | 64.7% |

As the above table demonstrates, more study abroad advisers chose to take part at Old University than they did at New University. This could align with previous findings suggesting that study abroad tends to be more of a priority for research-intensive universities who are more likely to dedicate financial and administrative resources towards international activities, unlike teaching-focused universities which are more focused on local recruitment and student support (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). The over-representation of academics at Old University could also be explained by the nature of its course availability, given the greater likelihood of research-intensive universities offering traditional academic subjects that are more aligned with study abroad (Ahn, 2014; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012). Teaching-focused institutions such as New University, in contrast, typically have a

stronger vocational focus, where courses are more aligned with work and industry experience than study abroad, so consequently have fewer study abroad advisers. This appeared to be the case given how participants at New University were drawn largely from subjects more strongly associated with study abroad, such as those in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

Interestingly, the response rate from Old University contained more male respondents than New University. This may be due to the study having a higher response rate among participants based in STEM subjects, which are commonly male-dominated (Greider et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2008), or because female representation tends to be lower in research-intensive universities, and could thus be considered reflective of the overall gender imbalance observed in academia (U-Multirank, 2021). This demographic observation was unexpected, and contradicts previous research findings that female academics are more likely to engage with pastoral support and outreach activities than their male counterparts (Guarino and Borden, 2017; Morley, 2013). Despite not being the focus of this research, it could potentially open up a new avenue for future studies to investigate whether there are gender differences in academic engagement with study abroad, in addition to capturing the influence of other demographic variables such as ethnicity, socioeconomic background and family history of higher education.

## 3.6 Data analysis

Findings from this study were interpreted through thematic analysis which, as the name suggests, "is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). This provides the researcher with a coding framework to condense the data transcribed from interviews (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), but also to identify certain patterns and similarities (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). Turning these into categories allows the researcher to connect their results to other findings made in empirical research to see how they compare or contrast, and to determine the themes that emerge from their theoretical framework (Alhojailan, 2012). Categorising findings can be a time-consuming process, but it is a useful one for distilling large amounts of information into key points and summaries, thus providing clarity and conciseness for the reader (King, 2004). Presenting data through the use of succinct excerpts or quotes also

makes it quicker and easier for them to draw their own conclusions from the data, when these are presented in an easily accessible format (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Guidance was followed by Braun and Clarke (2006) by considering whether an inductive approach should be taken to thematic analysis, in which themes are derived from the data and where a framework is consequently developed based upon their findings, or a deductive approach, where preconceived themes derived from existing knowledge gained from previous empirical studies are applied from the study's theoretical framework, would be most appropriate. Given how a basic structure of themes had already been identified from the literature review, this thesis adopted a deductive approach to the analysis of interview data.

This resulted in the first theme – understandings of the barriers to study abroad participation – where academics were asked questions on their perceptions of the Bourdieusian concepts of economic, social and cultural capital that typically prevent WP students from taking up study abroad opportunities. The second theme – strategies for overcoming the barriers to study abroad participation – consisted of questions developed from previous findings to determine which methods were being utilised by academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students, and to find out how these compared between different types of universities. The third theme – perceived challenges of facilitating study abroad participation – drew upon the Faculty Engagement Model by asking questions to explain what influences academic willingness to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students from an individual, professional and institutional level.

The second key decision for conducting thematic analysis required consideration over whether themes should be categorised on a semantic level by explaining participant responses through a descriptive summarisation of the interview data, or on a latent level by critically examining why participants might answer questions the way that they did (Campbell et al., 2021). The decision was consequently made to analyse themes at the latent level to explore which factors influence academics' understandings of and perceptions of study abroad participation, again by drawing upon the theoretical framework and findings from previous studies.

The third and final key decision related to the process of conducting thematic analysis by outlining to the reader how themes and patterns from the data collection had been identified.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this process consists of six different steps: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up themes. Familiarisation, to begin with, involved the use of data immersion, or rather, re-aquatinting oneself with the data collected during the interview transcription stage. This was done manually by listening to the recordings and typing out what was heard, rather than through dedicated transcription software such as otter.ai, or the inbuilt features of Microsoft Word or Google Docs. While transcribing by hand took longer than anticipated due to the number of interviews conducted (n=17), it did have the added benefit of enabling the incorporation of field notes taken during interviews to better aid understanding of the data. Upon completion, each interview transcript was labelled by each participant's chosen pseudonym, with a letter being given from A to O and divided into their respective universities – the pre-1992 and the post-1992 institution – to make them easily identifiable.

The second step of theme identification, meanwhile, involved coding the data. This was done by reading through each transcript and highlighting sentences of note from the interview texts in different colours, with codes being given to describe each one. Again, this was done manually, given that the interviews conducted were relatively small in number, which had already been guided by initial themes generated from the literature, with further analysis resulting in them being broken down into smaller sets of subthemes. While electronic tools such as NVivo, the most commonly used software for qualitative data analysis, can make the coding process more efficient (Hilal and Alabri, 2013), these were not required due to the manageability of the dataset.

Once this process had been completed, the third step involved generating themes. Some codes were combined into a larger overarching theme, while others were discarded for their irrelevance or were used to create an entirely new theme. For example, some themes originally included in the 'challenges to facilitating study abroad uptake' section, which revolved around how academics' perceptions were influenced by both their own experiences of international opportunities and their students' experience of international opportunities, were instead moved to the 'understandings of the barriers to study abroad' section to improve the overall flow of the findings.

The fourth step involved reviewing themes to ensure their accuracy. This was done by going back to the interview transcripts and comparing them with the themes that had been

generated to determine whether these were supported by the data, but also to check whether anything had been missed, whether there was any overlap between themes or whether anything from the previous step needed to be changed (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The fifth and final step involved naming each theme to fit with the research aims and questions. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), these were made to be succinct and to the point, and the themes identified in the findings and discussion chapter are as follows: barriers to study abroad – 'direct costs', 'indirect costs' and 'social costs'; overcoming barriers to study abroad – 'easing the way, 'support and encouragement' and 'being the conduit'; challenges of study abroad uptake – 'organisation of study abroad', 'competing priorities' and 'resources and support'.

## 3.7 Positionality

Positionality, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), is a disclosure process of the researcher's position in relation to their research topic, which involves reflecting on "how we see ourselves and others" (p. 306). While sociocultural identities such as class, ethnicity, and gender often play a key role in shaping research interests (Sikes, 2004, p. 19), one's own lived experience of a phenomenon can be equally important for influencing the motivation to explore a particular topic of interest, as was the case with this thesis. As someone who is both a study abroad beneficiary and who identifies as a WP student, the desire to pursue this area of research stemmed from my initial misconception of such activities as being unaffordable (Brux and Fry, 2010; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Salisbury et al., 2011) and unachievable for someone from a non-traditional background like myself (Bruce, 2012; Coldwell, 2013; Sweeney, 2013).

As other studies have previously found, WP students typically self-exclude themselves from international opportunities due to lack of information and support (Deakin, 2013; Doyle et al., 2012; Gray et al., 2018; Trilokekar and Rasmi, 2011), which would have been the case for me, had I not applied on a whim for a fully-funded summer school scholarship. This allowed me to spend four weeks studying in Japan, and while I benefited greatly from this opportunity, I also felt regret over not being able to take advantage of it as fully as I could have done if I had stayed there for the whole academic year, as opposed to just one month. Consequently, I became an outreach ambassador to encourage other WP students to pursue

study abroad, and to ensure that they, unlike me, were fully informed about the process so that they could make the most of their international experience. Again, similar to prior studies on this topic, WP students who have taken part in study abroad are often driven to help their peers by acting as a source of advice and a source of inspiration so that others like themselves can follow in their footsteps (Bridger, 2015; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010; UniversitiesUK, 2021). This later prompted further investigation into the causes of study abroad inequalities from an academic perspective, which was then developed into my research proposal on what could be done to redress the issue.

After determining the research gap in need of exploration – how study abroad uptake for WP students is facilitated from the under-represented stakeholder view of academic staff members – additional reflection was undertaken regarding my position in relation to the study's chosen research participants. This requires consideration not just of how the researcher views themselves, but also how participants view them, which could potentially affect how comfortable respondents may feel about disclosing information to. Researchers should therefore demonstrate awareness of how connected they are to the research topic itself, which ties in with how they might relate to the values and worldviews of the people being researched. Thomas (2013) refers to this as insider status, which can carry significant advantages, namely in that participants are more likely to be engaged with the research if they share similar backgrounds and beliefs to the researcher. These similarities can cause the researcher to appear more relatable for members of hard-to-reach-groups, for example, or if they are discussing sensitive topics, as participants may be less guarded if the two parties have something in common (Sultana, 2007).

However, while shared experiences can result in a more intimate and in-depth inquiry, it should not be assumed that commonalities alone are enough to foster an understanding between researcher and participant. Identities are multiple and intersecting, especially in the area of WP where social disadvantage can play out at many different levels, meaning that shared backgrounds might not automatically translate into the same shared experiences of a certain phenomenon (Bourke, 2014). It should also be noted that some aspects of positionality are fixed, such as how I, the researcher, occupy more than one of the categories applied to WP students by outreach and admissions departments, which include having come from a LSES background and being the first in my family to enter HE. Others are less fixed, such as one's educational identity and background, which did reduce the relatability element

of my marginalised identity through my affiliation with the University of Cambridge, an institution historically associated with wealth and privilege.

This did negate my insider status somewhat, although it was hoped that our shared interests would increase the likelihood of participants opening up to a fellow researcher. While all academics were eager to discuss their experiences and share information about what they were doing to facilitate study abroad participation, their attitudes and receptiveness towards me still differed depending on who I spoke to and where. Consequently, I had to consider not only how my sociocultural identity might affect the extent to which I could access information, but also how my educational identity might impact the way that participants perceive or engage with me (Muhammad et al., 2015), particularly when conducting research in less selective institutions. It also raises the issue of how power and privilege can impact the ability to collect data if there is a vast difference between one's insider and outsider status, as while I, the researcher, and the research participants were both working within an academic capacity in an HE setting, our institutional affiliations may have enabled or hindered any sense of relatability that might have otherwise been fostered between us.

Although I consider myself to be more socially disadvantaged than the average university student and have had to overcome many obstacles to enter HE, I did have a more privileged experience than others from a similar background. I have also made different choices from my peers by consciously choosing to attend prestigious universities due to their ranking and reputation when applying for both my bachelor's and my master's degrees. Unlike some WP students who base their university choices on shared cultural identities and the extent to which they feel like they fit in with or stand out from other students (Raffe and Croxford, 2015; Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Reay 1998, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), I purposely made the decision to aim high and attend two high-ranking institutions, despite the cultural disconnect.

This did, however, mean that while I was keen to stress my WP credentials and connect with participants at the post-1992 university through shared values and the desire to improve opportunities for other under-represented students, my relatability was still diminished by my privilege, with assumptions being made by some academics at this institution based upon the power of the Cambridge brand, who were more guarded during interview than their counterparts at the pre-1992 university. My decision to adopt a personable approach was

therefore of considerable benefit when conducting interviews by enabling me to establish rapport, and aligns with how previous research highlights this to be the main advantage of taking an informal stance to data collection (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Utilising a conversational style of interviewing also helped to make participants feel at ease, who were more forthcoming with information, and was an effective way of overcoming the social distance barrier by treating the interview as a discussion with one professional to another (Miller and Glassner, 2004).

## 3.6 Ethical considerations

This study underwent a review process from three different research ethics committees before commencing data collection – the researcher's own university at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and the two target universities – to demonstrate adherence to each institution's code of research conduct, and to gain permission to recruit participants as an external researcher (BERA, 2018). Ethics approval was received from all three universities, and an official academic email address was used at each communication stage to ensure the appropriate identification of the researcher's identity. Consideration was then given to the ethical implications of the study, which primarily revolved around timing issues when approaching potential respondents (Hesse-Biber, 2016). As academic staff members were being chosen for interview, the decision was made not to recruit during the beginning of autumn semester, which involves introducing new course content, and the end of spring semester, which is typically the busiest time of the year for marking and assessment. Participation was therefore requested during quieter workload periods to be mindful of their obligations and to minimise any disruption. This included industrial action, which has been ongoing in many UK universities since 2018, with effort being taken not to approach staff on strike dates.

Once an appropriate timeframe for contact was determined, ethical procedures were followed by attaching an information document in pdf format to the recruitment email to outline what the purpose of the research was and explain why, as named academics with the role of study abroad advisers, they had been invited to participate (May, 2011). Information was also given on how they had been selected for the study, by locating their details from department specific pages made publicly available on their respective university websites. Each academic

was made aware of what participation in the study would entail, with further clarification provided as to where the interview would take place, how long the interview would last and what kind of questions they could expect to be asked.

Given that interviews were being conducted online, informed consent was received and documented virtually by using a Google Form, rather than a traditional paper sheet for participants to read through prior to interview. This could then be signed and dated digitally by typing out their names in an open text box, and ticking a number of yes/no boxes to indicate their agreement to take part in the research (O'Connor et al., 2008). The consent form also explained that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research without having to give a reason why, with the aforementioned information being reiterated verbally during the interview stage to ensure full understanding (Grove, Burns and Gray, 2013). Additional consent was received to audio record each interview, with reassurance provided that this would be done through a physical dictation device to maintain privacy, confidentiality and security, rather than utilising any video conferencing inbuilt audio capture feature.

Participants were then informed about how the research data would be used, both for thesis submission and for future dissemination through publication of academic articles, and were made aware of how excerpts from the interviews would be taken to highlight any findings of interest (Lewis, 2003). These extracts were presented verbatim from transcription to ensure trustworthiness and transparency by using participant responses in their own words, exactly as they were recorded, to avoid any misstatements (BERA, 2018; Elo et al., 2014). All excerpts were anonymised to follow safeguarding protocols, with an alias given to ensure participant confidentiality and protect their identities (Litchman, 2012). Both case study sites were anonymised to prevent their identification. Data protection was ensured and it was explained by participants that audio recordings of the interviews would not be shared with any third parties, and that data would solely be accessible to the researcher (Flick, 2007). To eliminate any security concerns, none of this data was uploaded into remote server storage, but was instead kept on a password protected device held inside a personal desk drawer which was locked at all times when not in use, as advised by the 1998 Data Protection Act. Interview recordings were kept for data analysis and the thesis write up period before being destroyed upon its submission in 2024.

## Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the study's chosen research strategy, in addition to justifying its use of research methods. It explained why a qualitative research design was considered the most appropriate way of answering the study's research questions, and for addressing the methodological limitations of previous empirical research in the field of study abroad inequalities.

The chapter also describes why a case study comparing two different research sites – a pre-1992 university and a post-1992 university located the same city – was deemed to be the most suitable approach for understanding perspectives of the barriers to study abroad for WP students among academics in the role of study abroad adviser, and to identify strategies being used to facilitate study abroad uptake for this particular group.

Attention was then turned to the research methods utilised for this research – semi-structured interviews – in addition to what had influenced both the choice of interview format – undertaken remotely online – and the interview platform – the Zoom conferencing software – while discussing the strengths and weaknesses of both. The chapter then explained how the research sites were selected and how participants were recruited from each of these. Details were also provided of the sample's demographics, in addition to the challenges faced with gaining access to participants.

Discussion of how the research findings were analysed and interpreted were then presented, followed by a detailed reflection of positionality regarding not only the researcher's relationship with the research topic but also their relationship with the research participants. The chapter concluded with an exploration of the ethical considerations that were carried out before, during and after the research process, which included how issues of informed consent, participant safeguarding and data protection were addressed.

# Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

## Introduction

This chapter examines the factors that: (a) influence academic understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students, (b) influence strategies used by academics to overcome these barriers, and (c) influence academic perceptions of the challenges associated with helping students to overcome these barriers on a personal, professional and institutional level.

The first theme explores how institutional affiliation plays a key role in shaping attitudes towards study abroad among academics in terms of university characteristics and student intake. While participants at both research sites demonstrated strong awareness of *what* might cause WP students to self-exclude from study abroad, those at New University displayed a deeper understanding of *why* WP students might decide against accessing international opportunities. Disciplinary affiliation was found to be equally significant in shaping understandings of the barriers to study abroad, with STEM academics in particular acknowledging the implications of WP student cost maximising strategies on the likelihood of their study abroad participation.

The second theme again considers the role of institutional characteristics on the strategies utilised by academics for overcoming these barriers. Although participants at both universities were keenly committed to diversifying the study abroad demographic, very different approaches were taken for widening access. Emphasis at New University was placed on increasing the accessibility of study abroad through short-term flexible programmes, while emphasis at Old University was more on increasing the affordability of study abroad through low-cost destinations. In other words, duration versus location was the defining preference between institutions.

The third and final theme discusses what academics perceive to be most challenging in facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students on an individual, departmental and an institutional level. While institutional factors were found to enable or constrain an academic's capacity for engagement regarding the resources and support required for taking on the role of study abroad adviser, these were less notable than personal characteristics. It details the

influence of international experience and sociodemographic background on attitudes towards the choice to self-exclude from study abroad, and why some academics might find facilitating uptake for such students more difficult than others if their own values and beliefs do not align with those of WP students.

## 4.1 Perceptions of the barriers to study abroad for widening participation students

This phase of the research sought to explore what influences understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students from an academic stakeholder perspective by applying a combination of Bourdieu's Capital Theory (1986) and Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017). Findings demonstrate that while all aspects of the latter – the personal, professional and institutional dimension – played a role in shaping attitudes towards study abroad inequalities, field of study and university characteristics were among the most significant for informing awareness of what affects the likelihood of receiving an international experience.

Bourdieusian theory (1986) was also crucial for explaining what might cause WP students to self-exclude themselves from study abroad in terms of access to financial resources, access to experiences and activities, and access to 'those in the know'. Findings were as anticipated in some ways – for example, how limited stocks of economic capital pose the greatest deterrent to study abroad – but unexpected in others, such as how some WP subgroups possessed a surprising abundance of cultural capital, despite their socioeconomic disadvantage, which both challenge and support those from previous studies.

### *4.1.1 Resources required for study abroad*

Corresponding with Bourdieu's Capital Theory Framework (1986), economic capital was found to have a number of implications in terms of what enables or constrains study abroad uptake among WP students. Academics likewise demonstrated strong awareness of how this was affected by the wider HE decision-making process, and how it tied in more broadly with cost maximising and minimising strategies. This obstacle was observed on three different levels: the direct costs of study abroad and why WP students may perceive this as being unaffordable, the indirect costs of study abroad and why WP students are reluctant to forgo

lost income from part-time work or prolong their studies for an international experience, and the social costs of study abroad and why WP students view international opportunities as carrying not just greater financial risk, but also greater psychological risk.

#### *4.1.1.1 The direct costs of study abroad*

As anticipated, academics at both universities identified direct costs as being the main deterrent to study abroad for WP students. Findings were consistent with much of the previous research highlighting how the funds required for an international experience, such as accommodation, travel and subsistence, can be problematic for those with limited financial means (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010). The mention of background in the comment below is significant, and indicates a keen awareness of why an absence of economic capital might influence the decision to self-exclude from study abroad.

> *"They will do that cost-benefit analysis of, 'oh yeah, I really want to go abroad, I'm really enthusiastic about it,' but then when you move on to look at the money, I think sometimes it's a stark reality. Considering their background, these are significant sums of money."* (Academic G, New University, Business)

This decision was also observed to be more broadly rooted in patterns of HE participation, which is reflective of how WP students are more risk averse than their socioeconomically advantaged peers (Callender and Jackson, 2005, 2008), and make economically rational choices such as attending a local university to reduce their living expenses (Christie, 2007; Davies et al., 2008; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010). Findings likewise support those from other studies suggesting that such students have become increasingly debt averse since the 2012 tuition fee increase, and may view loans not as a graduate tax to be paid off over the duration of their working lifetimes, but as an immediate and pressing concern to be tackled or even avoided altogether (Callender and Mason, 2017). As highlighted by the following participant, the removal of non-repayable grants and subsequent increase of maintenance loans in 2016 has since made studying in England even more expensive for those from low-income families.

> *"There's a lot of interest in study abroad, but it never really translates into big numbers. Once you get into the actual nitty gritty of the whole application procedure, and mention that it's going to cost more on top of an already extortionate degree experience, there tends to be a big drop off."*
> (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Findings from this study largely support those of the Year 1 Evaluation of the Turing Scheme, published by the Department for Education, to evaluate its implementation for the 2021-22 academic year (IFF Research, 2024). The report was particularly illustrative regarding the experiences of HEIs, further education providers and secondary schools to examine their experiences of administering the application process from an institutional perspective, and for determining how effective Turing had been for enabling student participants to receive an international experience from an individual perspective. The Department for Education's report also helps to contextualise thesis findings, which focuses solely on the academic perspective, thus adding further weight to observations made by this particular stakeholder group. As outlined in the methodology chapter, while efforts were originally made to recruit WP students – which would have significantly strengthened the study's findings by comparing their views with those of academics – access was unfortunately not made possible due to Covid and gatekeeper restrictions.

Also of interest, although not included in the report itself, was the demographic breakdown of student data made available on the Turing Scheme's official website, which was used to determine the first-year launch's level of success at meeting its primary aim of widening access to study abroad. This appeared to have been met, for the most part, with almost 40% of HE participants (3,326) recorded as coming from a socially disadvantaged background. When examining participation rates by SES, 5,201 socioeconomically disadvantaged students were found to have taken part in the first year of the scheme compared with 8,125 participants from non-socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Participation rates by SEND (special education needs) status, meanwhile, revealed that 863 participants declared a disability compared to 12,463 with no known disability. Measurement of ethnicity status was less illustrative, as although the majority (6,481) identified as White compared to 530 Black, 1,235 Asian and 392 Mixed, a further 1,221 identified as Other and an additional 3,467 chose 'not known' (Turing Scheme, 2024).

Any further insights were thus unable to be drawn from the ethnicity imbalance, and while official figures from the Turing Scheme support previous findings in that study abroad participation rates can vary significantly between minority groups (Allinson, 2017), the latter two categories ('other' and 'not known') obscure what could have been important explanatory distinctions. This makes it difficult to obtain a truly accurate picture of who is participating in study abroad and who is not, at least from an ethnicity perspective, which indicates that more detailed data is required to tease out any nuances and explore what impact the Turing Scheme may have had on BAME participation rates.

**Chart 3. Participation in Year 1 of the Turing Scheme by socioeconomic status**

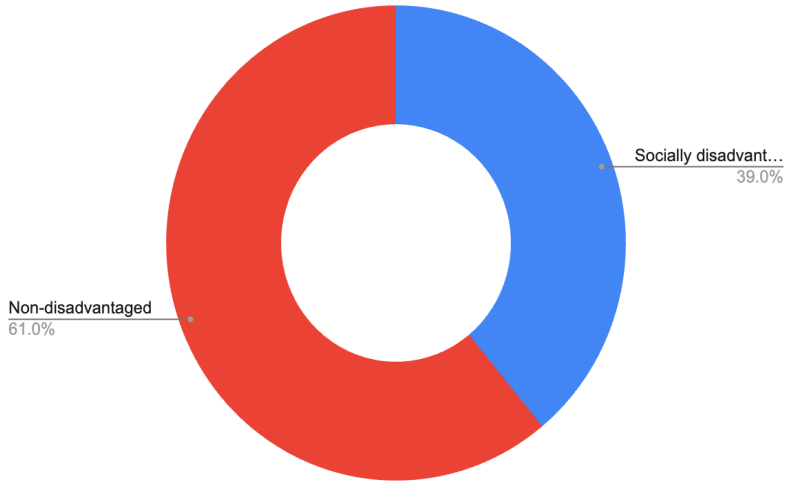



**Chart 4. Participation in Year 1 of the Turing Scheme by special educational needs and disabilities status**

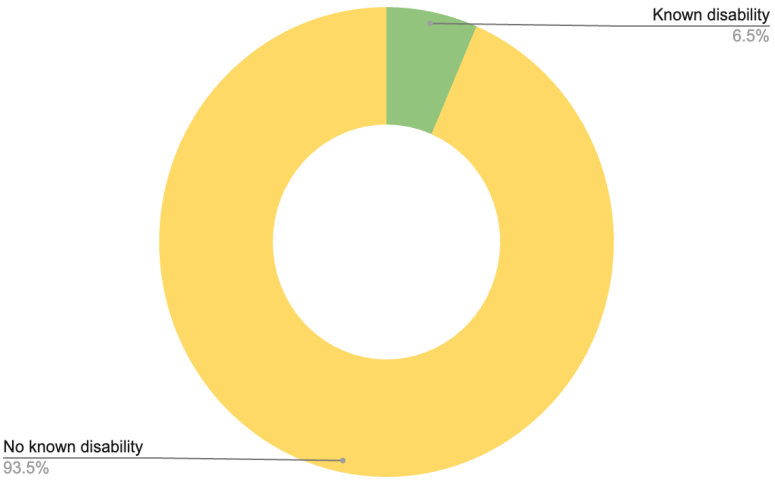
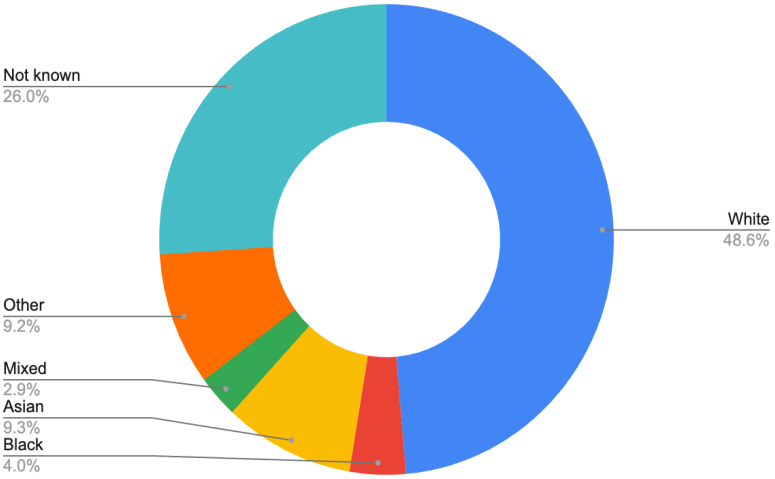



**Chart 5. Participation in Year 1 of the Turing Scheme by ethnicity status**




(Turing Scheme, 2024)

Figures should be treated with caution, however, since these were only captured from the first year of the Turing Scheme, meaning it is not known how participation rates have changed over time. These were also affected by the so-called 'Covid hangover', where lockdown measures significantly affected the ability to study abroad, and may not provide a fully accurate picture of participation rates as they otherwise might have been. Even so, demographic data still remains of interest, particularly considering how 63% of HE participants fell into the traditional 18-24 age range. This suggests that Turing had been somewhat effective at facilitating uptake of study abroad among an historically overlooked WP subgroup: mature students, or those aged 25 and over (Turing Scheme, 2024). Further

exploration is therefore recommended to examine their experience of Turing, and determine how this compares to that of their younger peers.

Another demographic that remains under-researched in the field of study abroad inequalities – at least from a UK context – is that of the school pupil. Interestingly, the Turing Scheme appeared to have been more successful at increasing study abroad uptake in sixth form schools and further education colleges, which also reported being more satisfied with their experience of administering the scheme than their HE counterparts (IFF Research, 2024). This stakeholder group was also more likely to perceive funding as being adequate for their pupils' needs, although this could be explained by them being more likely to participate in short-term stays of around 4 weeks, which the Turing Scheme more strongly supports. HE providers were less positive, given how universities typically focus on long-term stays such as a semester or year abroad, and thus perceived Turing funding as being insufficient for supporting their students to have an international experience (IFF Research, 2024).

Findings thus demonstrate the need to legitimise study abroad and convince WP students of its affordability (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015; Paus and Robinson, 2008), which is, more often than not, perceived as an unattainable luxury (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). This perception is not entirely unwarranted when scholarships and bursaries rarely cover the cost of an international experience in full (Bridger, 2015; Kehm, 2005), and instead expect the individual or their university to meet the financial shortfall (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013).

> *"Funding is a big issue. Even those students who got an Erasmus grant to go abroad for a semester were a bit skint when they were there."*
> (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

If funding is inadequate, then this will reduce the likelihood of receiving an international experience. Concerns were expressed by multiple participants over how the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus might negatively impact future participation rates, given that its replacement was even less financially generous. The early challenges of administering the Turing Scheme were documented in the form of payment delays, therefore excluding anyone without the ability to pay upfront first and be reimbursed later (Staton and Foster, 2023; IFF Research, 2024).

Adding more uncertainty presents another obstacle to study abroad for those with limited stocks of economic capital, who are already more likely to view said activity as a risk rather than an investment (Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Spiering and Erikson, 2006).

> *"The cost covered by Turing just isn't equivalent to what they would have been getting from Erasmus, and I think that for our students, that's going to be a real barrier. There's going to be a gap in funding there for them, which is probably going to make the difference between being able to go abroad or not."* (Academic F, New University, Business)

Brexit was similarly acknowledged as making study abroad more costly since the loss of free movement rights in 2020, with British students now requiring a visa or residence permit for long-term EU stays. This presents additional financial barriers in regards to application fees, health screening checks and evidence of sufficient funds, but also the travel fare for attending embassy appointments in London, Manchester or Edinburgh for anyone who does not live in or near the aforementioned cities (Adams and Hall, 2021).

> *"Obviously things have become a lot more complicated with Europe, like visa costs - they have to travel to Manchester, for example, or London to get visas - and that's costly. It does add up."* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

Simply getting to these places can be difficult for students in the most deprived and poorly served by public transit areas, and are also where a quarter of the population who do not own – and presumably cannot afford – a passport officially resides (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Unsurprisingly, the students least likely to possess this particular document tended to be found in post-1992 universities, which illustrates how the cost of obtaining a passport – £88.50, as of 2024 – may be minimal for some, but prohibitive to others.

> *"We're so used to the idea of everybody floating here, there and everywhere, but I have a lot of students who have never been abroad or even own a passport. I do have some very sad conversations where students*

> *have said, 'I would love to do it [study abroad] but I can't.'"* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

As emphasised by the above comment, there are many privileged assumptions made about study abroad that do not match the lived reality of financially vulnerable students, which can be seen in the growth of university-provided food bank usage during the recent cost-of-living crisis (Freeman, 2023). Similar provision of discretionary funding for international travel applications would potentially make a positive difference to those most in need, but whether universities could realistically afford this is another issue entirely.

Whether a university is able to provide this is another matter, as can be seen with institutional data from each case study university's website by examining their Access and Participation plan – a document outlining strategies and interventions for improving equality of opportunity for under-represented groups (OfS, 2023) – to compare their levels of funding. As expected, Old University had more support available for those in financial hardship to cover the cost of passport or visa applications than New University, which WP students – particularly those from LSES backgrounds – struggle with more (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). Findings were also supported by those of the Turing Scheme Year 1 Evaluation, which significantly helped to contextualise how this issue may have been exacerbated by the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus (IFF Research, 2024). As discussed earlier, Turing was perceived by academics as being less financially generous than its predecessor, and these claims appear to be supported in how study abroad office staff in the aforementioned report spoke at length about funding delays and the damaging impact these had had on WP students.

Findings from the report similarly support those of the thesis regarding the challenges of transitioning from Erasmus to Turing, where the timing and communication of application outcomes had caused considerable uncertainty to students and universities alike. The release of funding awards while placements were already underway was identified as being problematic, leaving many WP students unable to prepare for their sojourn in advance and thus dropping out of the scheme altogether (IFF Research, 2024). This aligns with previous studies in that WP students tend to be both financially and psychologically risk averse (Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Spiering and Erikson, 2006), so the more unpredictable study abroad becomes, the less likely they will be to participate. Even the WP

students who had managed to participate in the Turing Scheme's first year launch discussed the stress and anxiety of not knowing whether funding would be made available in time – or even at all – before they could commit to their placement. While some were able to cover upfront costs themselves by borrowing from parents or meeting the shortfall through savings from part-time work until their stipends came through, they also acknowledged that they would have otherwise dropped out without this (IFF Research, 2024).

Findings again align with those from other scholars highlighting the need for WP students to plan ahead logistically in terms of securing accommodation and booking travel arrangements in advance, so not having funding confirmed or even received before their placement begins can make study abroad significantly more challenging (Deakin, 2013), which is why some argue that funding Turing in this manner is "out of touch with the needs of disadvantaged students" (Highman, Marginson and Papatsiba, 2023, p. 222). This is echoed by recommendations made in the Year 1 Evaluation's report to resolve this issue by bringing forward the application outcome window by awarding funding earlier to providers, who can then release funding sooner to students (IFF Research, 2024). The report also identifies a need for universities to offer funding of their own to meet the shortfall, although this might not be feasible or realistic for all institutions, given how some providers may be more limited than others in terms of their capacity to ease financial hardship.

Findings are in line with other studies demonstrating how research-intensive institutions are more financially well-resourced than their teaching-focused counterparts, and thus better placed to offer additional funding (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004; Waters, 2009; Zhang, 2011). This can also be seen in how non-selective providers like New University are more reliant on the Turing Scheme to fund their international activities, as opposed to academically selective institutions, which had greater access to alternative sources of support (IFF Research, 2024). The publicly made available information on Old University's website supports this, which offered more internal funding in the form of alumni generated grants or bursaries, and could draw upon country specific scholarships, such as the Japan Student Services Organisation or the German Academic Exchange Service.

As pointed out previously, it has been argued that having to compete for Turing Scheme funding could potentially exacerbate existing inequalities between HEIs, which puts those

like New University – where WP students tend to be concentrated – at even more of a disadvantage (Ali, 2021; Guibert and Rayón, 2021; James, 2021). This can be seen in the breakdown of bid amounts awarded to determine which universities had been most – and least – successful at obtaining Turing funding. Of note is how the number of awards has decreased year on year, from 139 out of 131 bids from universities being secured in 2021-22 to just 124 out of 154 in 2023-24 (Lewis, 2023). Although further information detailing the amount received by individual institutions is only made available from the 2021-22 academic year, this does demonstrate how all 24 Russell Group members were successful – and continue to have been so every year since – in their applications, and more importantly, are awarded significantly larger funding bids. According to official figures, the three highest amounts went to University of Leeds (£1,635,737), University of Manchester (£1,357,045) and Cardiff University (£1,324,922), while the three lowest amounts went to Harper Adams University (£1,035), Anglia Ruskin University (£2,260) and London Metropolitan University (£2,287) (Turing Scheme, 2022).

While these figures are largely reflective of previous findings indicating that the more prestigious a university is, the more funding it tends to have available for study abroad (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Di Pietro, 2020; Lörz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022), the pre- and post-1992 binary might not be so straightforward for explaining the financial resource divide when examining bid amounts for the Turing Scheme in more detail. Many of these were taken up by specialist institutions that focus on performing arts such as the UK's various conservatoires, or on defense and security such as Cranfield, both of which have smaller intakes and more unique courses. Consequently, although the pre- and post-1992 distinction was appropriate for this particular study, future research should consider a more nuanced comparative analysis to determine the impact of the Turing Scheme on enabling access to study abroad.

#### *4.1.1.2 The indirect costs of study abroad*

Greater concern with basic economic necessities could explain why students from low-income backgrounds were found to be deterred more by the indirect costs of study abroad than the upfront costs and, as echoed by previous studies, why so many were reluctant to give up part-time jobs (Allinson, 2017; Brux and Fry, 2010; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard,

2008). Study abroad unsurprisingly carried a higher financial burden for those enrolled at New University, given its sizeable WP intake, who were more likely to work alongside their studies (Callender, 2003; Christie, 2007; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

> *"I see so many students who work to stay alive that the idea of something like study abroad is such a luxury. They're not able to imagine themselves doing it, because the idea of giving up that work and having to get back into those things is just…"* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Immediate financial security was thus perceived by WP students as being more desirable than an international experience, and was also noted by academics to have been exacerbated by Covid-19. This appeared to be making students even more financially risk averse, given the difficulties of finding – and keeping – a job in an economically unstable climate. Although institutional data was not made publicly available on either of the case study websites, which would have been useful for supporting some of the claims and observations made by participants in this study, a website audit of 140 UK universities by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) does appear to back these up. This report demonstrates how more students than ever are taking up part-time work as a result of the current cost of living crisis, which had hit the UK particularly hard as a combined result of the pandemic, Brexit, and the war in Ukraine (Freeman, 2023).

> *"I also think they're more conscious of keeping their jobs, what with all the Covid disruption, to keep their student loans as low as possible."*
> (Academic G, New University, Business)

Students are also working more hours to fund their studies, and while most universities recommend no more than 15 hours of this during term time, many are unable to adhere to said guidance, as seen in a recent report by the National Union of Students (NUS) where food bank usage has doubled since 2022, and with demand being greatest at post-1992 providers (NUS, 2024). In addition, the more hours worked, the higher a student's risk becomes of dropping out as a result of having to manage the dual pressures of study and employment (Jerrim, 2014; Quinn, 2004; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2009; Yorke and Thomas, 2003), thus contributing to a two-tier society in

which those from socially advantaged backgrounds can focus solely on their studies and on extracurriculars, while their disadvantaged peers focus on surviving both financially and academically.

The prioritisation of financial security over an international experience also explains why such students were more concerned with time-to-degree, who were similarly unwilling to prolong their studies and delay their entry into the labour market (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017; Spiering and Erikson, 2006). The prioritisation of financial returns was likewise reflected in their motivations for going to university, and indicates that career development is typically perceived as being more important than personal development for WP students (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005).

> *"Quite often, they want to get through the degree quicker and get into work than previously."* (Academic F, New University, Business)

> *"They can be quite employability-minded. One of the reasons why they choose to do Physics is because they've been told that STEM is a good fit in terms of a career."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Findings also lend support to those from other studies in terms of degree choice being based on economic payoff, which explains the preference among WP students for courses that are more visibly linked with employment, such as Nursing and Allied Healthcare (Callender and Melis, 2022), or perceived as being more generally employable, such as STEM (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Giedt et al, 2015; Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Ramakrishna, Sarkar and Vijayaraman, 2016) and enterprise-related subjects such as Business and Finance (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019). Study abroad is consequently viewed as being neither relevant nor beneficial for their future plans (Stuber, 2011), unlike placements or internships, for which WP students are more likely to demonstrate a preference (Allinson, 2017; Twombly et al., 2012).

As with academics, however, the choice to engage with study abroad among students may not be purely personal, but rather one that can either be enabled or constrained by external forces: in this instance, concerns with employability. These have been well documented in the UK, where an oversupply of graduates, coupled with a precarious domestic labour

market, has led to increased competition for high paid, high skilled jobs (Allen et al., 2013; Andrews and Higson, 2008; Budd, 2017; Mavromaras et al. 2013; Tomlinson, 2007; Verhaest and Van der Velden 2013). They could also explain the drive to distinguish themselves to prospective employers through added value activities such as work placements or internships (Brooks and Everett, 2009). Disciplinary differences again came into play, as while some WP students were more driven to undertake these in their home country, others were drawn by the potential career benefits of an international experience.

> *"Law is uber competitive so I think it's drummed into them really probably at school, let alone when they get to university, that just getting a 2:1 is not gonna be enough. You've got something which makes you shine on your CV that, you know, will get you picked out, and having the capacity to talk about this year that you spent in Riga or wherever it was… I think that that's a really unique point. The bigger firms do actually have outposts in different countries and they might actually be looking specifically for people who would be confident in living and working in other cultures."*
> (Academic O, Old University, Law)

Findings thus align with those from other studies indicating that study abroad can be perceived by some students as offering "something scarcer and therefore more valuable than the 'norm'" (Waters and Brooks, 2010, p. 219) for securing competitive advantage over their peers (Bilecen and Van Mol, 2017; Findlay et al., 2012; Papatsiba, 2009; Perkins and Neumayer, 2014; Teichler, 2017). This advantage is not universal, though, and may depend on whether employers value the transferable skills gained from an international experience, like intercultural competence and global corporate awareness (Black and Duhon, 2006; Carlson and Widaman, 1988; Clarke et al., 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Edmonds, 2010; Maharaja, 2018), which some – like legal companies – view as being more relevant than others.

While the majority of academics were positive about the employability related outcomes of study abroad, others were more cautious. Findings therefore suggest a need to create greater awareness of its benefits, and how these can translate into future career success. This issue has previously been acknowledged by the literature, as while study abroad can enhance employability (Bilecen and Van Mol, 2017; Budd, 2017; Cairns, 2015; Di Pietro, 2015;

Perkins and Neumayer, 2014), students often struggle to reflect on what they have gained from an international experience and how this can be applied to a workplace setting (Hall et al., 2016). Recommendations are therefore made for more collaboration, not just between individual academics and their departments with the central study abroad office, but also between the university's careers service to better communicate the benefits of study abroad from a professional development perspective (Tran et al., 2021).

> *"If you want to develop something like this, then you have to make them aware that they're learning it. It doesn't just doesn't happen on its own. You have to actually educate them on how to use the experience. I don't think it really clicks unless you tell them. They have a hard time seeing how studying abroad is going to help them get a job in the UK. I have to actually sit down and have a discussion with them about how they can use the experience."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

Institutional affiliation – and priorities – could explain why some academics were more receptive towards the employability related outcomes of study abroad than others, which may have stemmed from their perceptions of what the purpose of an international experience should be. In line with previous studies, while academics at New University were focused more on student support and success, and thus prioritised professional development (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), academics at Old University were more aligned with their institution's liberal arts ethos, and thus prioritised personal development (Giedt, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2008). While post-1992 institutions such as New University may have been successful at addressing unequal access by increasing the number of non-traditional students participating in HE, issues are now arising over unequal outcomes in terms of academic attainment and postgraduate progression (Bolton and Lewis, 2024).

> *"When you pull it down to the stats, we see that the students who have these international experiences and get out of their comfort zone are the ones that go off and get a great job, and they do this quicker. That's going to open doors for you, we know it leads people to better jobs."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

> *"I think it's the best thing that a young person can do. It feeds into their self-development, their professional development. International networking is key to the future for many of our students."* (Academic G, New University, Business)

This makes New University's tendency to recruit from its immediate community significant (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009), given that being tied to their local university also results in a WP student being tied to their local labour market, which may offer limited employment opportunities and lower salaries through what Courtois (2020) refers to as "an 'immobility penalty' in the form of downgraded conditions at home" (p. 251). In other words, the more mobile a graduate is, the more successful they will be at securing a highly skilled, highly paid graduate job. It also highlights regional inequalities within the UK in terms of how job opportunities are unevenly concentrated in London and the South East, which are also the most expensive parts of the country to live (Xu, 2023).

Research suggests that outcomes may be more nuanced, however, in terms of the choices students make both pre- and post-university, where migration patterns – and restrictions – might not necessarily shape the likelihood of securing quality employment. So-called 'regional loyals', or those who remain local both for university and for work, may be no less disadvantaged than 'regional returners', or those who relocate for university and then move back into the family home, given the shrinking opportunities for recent graduates (UniversitiesUK, 2022). If study abroad is perceived by WP students as being less financially attractive than boosting their CVs through paid work experience (Callender and Melis, 2022; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) or a year in industry by pausing their studies to take up an employed position at a company of their choosing (Bridger, 2015), then making it more career relevant by enabling them to develop work specific skills and professional networks may successfully improve both access and outcomes (Conran, 2019).

> *"A year in industry has its attractions, meaning they can earn, you know, £17-20,000 working for a company, and it vastly increases the students' employment potential. Many of them get offered graduate jobs by the companies that offered them placements, so it's a good route into*

> *employment. Study abroad doesn't have that advantage, unless they manage to combine the two."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

> *"Our focus has been more on exposure to the world of work, so employability, work experience, sandwich placements. It has been a bit more difficult to engage students with other things. I think they'd rather have guaranteed work experience, as opposed to study abroad."* (Academic G, New University, Business)

The ability to earn as well as learn was important to such students, which led to the solution of making an international experience more appealing – and relevant to their interests – by offering study abroad in the form of an international work placement (IWP). This approach was, however, predominantly undertaken at New University, and corresponds with the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) in that different types of universities tend to have different types of aims and values. While IWPs are one way of "combining the ability to demonstrate a 'global mindset' and the acquisition of practical work experience" by enabling students to gain something rarer and more prestigious than domestic work placements (Cranston, Pimlott-Wilson and Bates, 2020, p. 146), they were also, as the following participant admits, the only way they could 'sell' study abroad to their students.

> *"Our students tend to go abroad on a placement year. That was the only way we could sell it, as a sandwich degree course."* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

Adding a vocational element to study abroad, as opposed to a purely academic focus, was therefore found to be a more effective solution for facilitating uptake among those from under-represented backgrounds, and demonstrates a strong understanding of the type of student that both their university and their courses tended to attract. This highlights the need for further research to examine the impact of combining work experience with international experience on study abroad uptake, which has been largely overlooked by scholars in the field (Cranston, Pimlott-Wilson and Bates, 2020). If programme duration makes a positive difference to participation rates (Bridger, 2015; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021;

Gwost et al., 2021; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014; UniversitiesUK, 2021), then programme type could potentially have the same effect.

> *"We found people with good work and connections, like, we had a guy who has a really big international reputation and works for firms across the globe. He could get placements for students, but he could also get firms to sponsor these placements so that students got paid. That's the platinum level of what we do."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

A seminal multi-method 2014 study by Deakin, for example, argues that IWPs can be an effective enabler for overcoming both the direct cost barriers to study abroad through reduced tuition fees and non-repayable grants or bursaries, and the indirect cost barriers by allowing students to earn and learn, thus increasing participation among students in under-represented disciplines and those from under-represented backgrounds. While the study is somewhat dated due to its specific focus on Erasmus, which the UK is no longer a part of, findings remain relevant in that IWPs – where students spend a semester or year abroad in industry, enterprise, training or research centre – appeared to have achieved considerable success at addressing the country's historically low participation rates. Further research on the popularity of such programmes is therefore recommended to determine whether the UK's current economic downturn – influenced by Covid, Brexit and the war in Ukraine – remains largely reflective of the previous economic context – the 2008 financial crisis – in which Deakin conducted their study (2014). Their research suggests that IWPs become more attractive to students when opportunities for employability enhancement at home are in decline, so whether this remains the case a decade later, when companies are increasingly shrinking both work experience and their graduate intake (High Fliers, 2024), is worthy of further exploration.

When asked about the other ways in which finance might deter WP students from taking up international opportunities, accommodation costs were identified as being a significant factor in preventing them from going abroad. While this was to be expected for participants at Old University, whose students are more likely to participate in the residential model of HE and find themselves already tied into signing contracts for shared housing before they can apply for study abroad (Daly, 2011; Deakin, 2013), those participating in the localised model of HE at New University were similarly affected by said issue. This was an unexpected finding, and

one that contradicts other studies indicating that WP students tend to be more geographically and financially constrained than their relocator peers (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009).

While those from under-represented backgrounds typically do prefer to live at home and commute for their studies to a nearby university, findings could be explained by the type of course in which participants who noticed this phenomenon were affiliated with. These were overwhelmingly found in the arts, humanities and social sciences, or faculties that are all traditionally more aligned with study abroad than STEM (Ahn, 2014; Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Loh et al., 2011; Salisbury et al., 2009; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; Stroud, 2010). Findings consequently challenge the consensus over WP student decision-making, and suggest that, as with perceptions and experiences, motivations for attending university are not universal. Not all WP students take a mercenary approach when choosing a degree, and may simply opt to follow their interests rather than a pre-defined career path.

> *"Housing is a really awkward issue. Trying to get the information to people needs to come at a point before they've committed themselves to a contact. Sometimes we get the timing right, sometimes we don't." (Academic D, New University, Law)*

That accommodation was found to be just as much of a concern for students at New University, whose intake tends to be drawn from the local region, as it was for those at Old University, which attracts applicants from the UK as a whole, does raise some interesting questions as to what type of student chooses to relocate for the former rather than the latter. While post-1992 universities attract their fair share of international students, albeit on a smaller scale than their pre-1992 counterparts, findings still appear to correspond with those from other scholars indicating that the more inclined one is to move away for university, the more willing they will be to study abroad (Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Stroud, 2010). Given that the stakeholder group of interest for this thesis was academics, not students, further exploration of the study abroad participant demographic breakdown at New University was unfortunately prevented. Future research is therefore recommended to investigate the extent to which residential status and disciplinary characteristics determine the likelihood of study abroad participation at teaching-focused HEIs, and whether said activity will always be

attractive to those from more affluent backgrounds, regardless of the type of university attended.

This also highlights a key limitation of the study in that academics may have limited or incomplete information from which to draw upon when discussing the barriers to study abroad for WP students, and thus prevents enablers or deterrents from being fully understood. Institutional data and regional housing market conditions in the city where both case study universities were located may, however, provide some explanation for accommodation concerns, along with the choice of non-WP students for relocating to less academically selective universities. As discussed earlier, students in the UK have been hit hard by the current cost of living crisis, and even those from socially advantaged backgrounds are beginning to struggle with their finances. The housing crisis is being acutely felt by students, with growing competition for – and insufficient provision of – room rentals in cities such as Edinburgh, Bristol and Manchester, where prices range between £200 to £300 a week, or in the case of London, from £300 to £400 a week (HEPI, 2023; Jones and Rushall, 2024).

Rents have risen less steeply in the case study city over recent years, which possesses a surplus of beds, as opposed to a shortage, that make it a budget-friendly option in comparison. According to the websites of each case study institution, an ensuite room at Old University cost on average £170 per week in the 2024-25 academic year, while a room with a shared bathroom cost £130 per week. An ensuite room at New University was even more affordable at around £98 per week, while a room with a shared bathroom cost £86 per week. Other purpose-built accommodation via well-known private providers such as Unite Students and IQ Students was also plentiful, while the private rental sector was cheaper still, with rooms in a shared house advertised on RightMove for as little as £70 per week.

This study therefore contradicts previous findings that students who relocate for university are more likely to study abroad (Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Stroud, 2010) and, despite being more domestically mobile, may be prevented from becoming internationally mobile when tied down by accommodation contracts rather than work commitments or caring obligations. As such, the distinction between ‘movers’ and ‘stayers’ might not be so useful from a UK context, as while commuter students may have become ‘rooted’ over time (Henderson, 2020), those who relocate can be just as firmly embedded in their home and social environments. The UK context is also relevant, given growing concerns over how student maintenance

loans have not kept pace with inflation over the past decade, and are no longer sufficient to cover the rising costs of accommodation and subsistence. As such, it could even be argued that WP students in England are better off in terms of government financial assistance, as those with a parental household income of £25,000 a year or less can receive up to £9,978 per year outside of London, while those with a parental household income of £70,098 a year or more receive only £4,767 (Gov.uk, 2024).

Although the expectation is for parents to meet any financial shortfall, the cost-of-living crisis makes it more difficult for some to contribute towards their child's living expenses, particularly if they have more than one offspring attending university, which has led to growing criticism over perceived fairness of the student loan system (Stephenson, 2023). This consequently calls attention to how WP students might not be the only ones facing financial pressure, suggesting that both the direct and indirect costs of study abroad are becoming increasingly applicable to those from non-WP backgrounds. More up to date research is therefore recommended to determine what impact the UK's cost-of-living crisis is having on the decision to study abroad, and whether even socially advantaged students are beginning to think twice about taking up an international experience.

Social selectivity aside, findings highlight how accommodation at home as a barrier remains overlooked compared to accommodation abroad. Much is known already about the difficulties students face when sourcing a place to live overseas, particularly in Europe where purpose-built student accommodation is less common than the UK (Beech, 2015; Bell, 2016), and in knowing how to avoid being scammed or overcharged, for which limited support may be provided at an institutional level (Kinsella, Bossers and Ferreira, 2008; UniversitiesUK, 2021). This makes the UK an interesting context to examine how residential status can either enable or constrain study abroad participation, depending on whether or not students have already been tied into an accommodation contract.

> *"When I start talking to them about study abroad – usually around the end of November – landlords are already pressuring them, so they get themselves locked into these contracts. They might want to study abroad, but they can't get out of these contracts. You have to get in early enough to make them aware before they get tied into a contract."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

While accommodation at home has been previously acknowledged as preventing British students from receiving an international experience (Deakin, 2013; Pope et al., 2014), this issue is becoming more acute as a result of the UK's cost-of-living crisis. Pressure to secure shared housing, where students move out of purpose-built accommodation after their first year and into the private rental sector for their second and third, has always existed, but appears to have been exacerbated by the growing shortage of available properties (NUS, 2023). Housing scarcity could also factor into why some students are now signing up for contracts earlier than ever, before applications open for study abroad, and explains why the timing of this is crucial to ensure that information reaches them on said activity before landlords and letting agents do. Findings thus present a timely contribution to knowledge, and one that requires further research on how the current student housing deficit might negatively impact future study abroad participation.

#### *4.1.1.3 The social costs of study abroad*

In line with findings from other studies, academics at both universities observed that while there tends to be a lot of initial interest in study abroad, this does not commonly result in actual uptake (Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010; Thirolf, 2014). The gap between intent and participation could be explained by the timing of study abroad promotion, which usually begins soon after students enroll at university in late September/early October, when many are still integrating into their new learning environment (Daly, 2011; Holton, 2018).

> *"The campaign starts in September and applications open in November, so they've only had two months at university. The deadline is in January, and a lot can happen before then. Not all of them are confident, they're still settling into a new environment, so they can't even think about what they're going to do in their second year. That could discourage some students from applying."* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

As demonstrated by the following comments, this issue is arguably more severe in the UK, given its emphasis on the student experience and how this can significantly influence one's choice of university (Whyte, 2019), and the more concerned students are with making friends

and fitting in, the more reluctant they become to leave their social networks once these have been established (Beerkens et al., 2016; Bridger, 2015; Netz, 2015). Interestingly, friendship groups were found to be as much of an impediment to study abroad participation at New University as they were at Old University, which was unexpected due to how those attending teaching-focused providers generally prioritise their studies and other obligations over networking and socialising (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Holdsworth, 2006; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). Unwillingness to study abroad at the expense of departing from their friends may, however, be attributed to the need for social and emotional support, both of which are crucial for preventing isolation, disengagement and, ultimately, discontinuation of their studies (Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003; Wilcox et al., 2005).

> *"The problem is - and this echoes from what I've heard from colleagues elsewhere - is that they come into the system, they make their friends, they get their housing, and then they don't want to be separated from their mates. The whole system is designed around not having study abroad in it."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

> *"Some students just don't want to leave their friends. They're comfortable, they like where they are. University is stressful enough, so imagine having to do that somewhere else. With the ones who drop out, it's a case of once it gets closer to the reality, they become too afraid to go."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

Also of note was that although participants at Old University recognised how friendship groups prevented their students from taking up international opportunities, they also struggled to understand why this would be the case. One academic found the rejection of what they perceived as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, in which students would never again be able to travel overseas so cheaply and easily, particularly frustrating. This view, however, fails to acknowledge that while university may be the optimal time for some students to study abroad during the period of their life where they are likely to have fewer constraints, this is not the case for all students. Those from under-represented backgrounds often balance their studies alongside work commitments or caring obligations, for example (Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010), which can make study abroad more difficult.

> *"I just find it really small-minded. I find it quite frustrating that they're missing out on this opportunity. It's much more difficult to spend a year abroad once you've finished university. It'll never be this easy for them to just go and live in a different country."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Findings likewise indicate that study abroad carries a higher social cost for some students than others, and reflect what is already known about how the wider HE decision-making process can be just as influenced by psychological reasoning as it is by pragmatic reasoning (Christie, 2007; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). As established previously, different types of universities attract different types of students, who either base their choices on ranking and reputation for research-intensive institutions, or on diversity and inclusion in the case of teaching-focused providers. This ties in more broadly with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and demonstrates how perceived compatibility towards a social group plays an instrumental role in shaping the preference among WP students for attending universities consisting of 'people like me' (Ball et al., 2002; Munro, 2011; Raffe and Croxford, 2015; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001).

It should be remembered, however, that not all WP students are deterred or driven by the same things (Netz, 2015), and that while some prioritise feeling of fit when choosing a university, others may instead aim high and apply to elite institutions, irrespective of perceived belonging (Baker and Brown, 2007; Thiele et al. 2017). Fear of being othered by the wider student community might not result in all WP students "setting their sights lower" (Sutton Trust, 2004, p. 4), but it could explain why the prospect of separation from friends may be a greater deterrent to study abroad for those who do choose to attend an academically selective university. Findings suggest that the more difficult it is to form connections with one's peers in an environment that marks them out as 'different' in terms of their accent, appearance or material possessions (Oakes and Andrade, 2017), the more inclined they will be to maintain these as a buffer against being socially excluded (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

> *"There are students who don't think they can reconcile the fact that they've added an extra year on to the degree, and when they come back, they're*

> *studying with the students in the year below. Psychologically, some people think, 'I don't really like the idea of that because all my friends will have moved on.'"* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Developing a base knowledge of what shapes attitudes and behaviours in the wider WP context is therefore crucial for enabling a better understanding of study abroad inequalities. The extent to which stakeholder preferences align or not is also significant, and has a number of implications for study abroad uptake, depending on what type of opportunities are made available. Academics at Old University largely favoured long-term stays, which were, as noted by the above participant, considerably less popular among students concerned about graduating without their friends. This was somewhat ironic, given that the extended year abroad model had been introduced to redress historically low study abroad uptake levels, although as pointed out in the following comment, prolonging their studies did give students more time in which to become aware of study abroad and, more importantly, decide whether it was feasible and appropriate for their future plans.

> *"If you want to go abroad in your second year, you have to effectively decide after being at university for only two months, so that only catches the ones that have already decided, and the ones that have the time to think about it. It casts a very narrow net."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

This solution does make sense logistically, considering that time taken to complete a bachelor's degree in the UK – three years on average – is shorter than most other countries, but while the gap between study abroad intent and study abroad participation could be explained by cultural context, it does not fully account for differences between the four nations. HE is a devolved issue, and Scotland is something of an outlier in terms of how their honour's degrees, unlike those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, are completed in four years. Difference in degree duration could potentially result in difference in decision-making, and presents a unique angle of investigation for future scholars to explore whether the emotional risks of study abroad – and separation from friendship groups – are more minimised for Scottish-domiciled students than they are for other UK nationals.

Once again, though, this highlights the limitations of focusing solely on the academic perspective to understand the barriers to study abroad for WP students, and demonstrates how

drawing upon the lived experience of this stakeholder group would perhaps have offered greater insight. While the general consensus remains of relocation as "an indicator of adventurousness" (Hurst, 2019, p. 1248), with students who have already experienced detachment from existing social networks by moving away for university being less deterred by the prospect of separating from new ones for the prospect of an international experience (Beerkens et al., 2016; Bridger, 2015; Cairns, 2017; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010), the university experience – at least in the UK – has changed significantly over recent years.

A more critical discussion of social costs as an explanatory factor is thus required to explain why some students choose not to participate in study abroad, and why 'movers' can be just as unwilling to leave their comfort zones as 'stayers'. Going beyond the distinction between pre-1992 and post-1992 universities, it could be argued that the social cost of study abroad is higher for some disciplines than others, such as Nursing (Kent-Wilkinson et al., 2015) and Social Work (Wonson, Boetto and Moorhead, 2021). Admittedly, these degrees tend to attract mature students who are less tied down by friendship groups and more bound by family obligations, but this does demonstrate the role played by intersecting elements of social disadvantage. While previous studies largely agree that females are more likely to participate in study abroad than males (Cordua and Netz, 2021; Hurst, 2019; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010; Thirolf, 2014), this could depend more on parental status and age than gender differentials, as noted by Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta (2016) in another traditionally female dominated subject – Education – where young women were more emotionally reliant upon their parents than males of a similar age range, and thus less willing to study abroad.

It could be argued that the more dependent students are on family and friends, the less likely they will be to study abroad, regardless of whether they choose to relocate for university or not. Psychological immaturity, then, may be more influential than residential or even socioeconomic status, and raises questions over whether greater levels of parental involvement in both their child's university decision-making and their university experience leaves them less prepared for the challenges of independent living (Coughlan, 2008). Such students become more driven to develop replacement emotional and social support structures via their peers when parents are less immediately accessible (Lewis et al., 2015), from which they then become reluctant to detach for study abroad (Doyle et al., 2010; Huják, 2015).

> *"We have loads of interest initially, but when it gets to decision time, they're like, oh, you know what, I want to stay. Students are generally very happy where they are, they're like, I'm enjoying this, I want to stay with my mates. The friendship thing is definitely a factor."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

> *"I will point out the proximity of our European partners to the students who are more reluctant to leave their friends, like, 'you don't have to go to far-flung places, you can go to Europe.' I don't think that's ever really persuaded them."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Other studies agree that the rise of so-called 'helicopter parenting' may have had a negative impact on the transition to university, which appears to be more challenging for current students than it was for previous generations, as seen with the increased demand for mental health and wellbeing services (Thompson, Pawson and Evans, 2021). From this perspective, 'stayers' – particularly those classed as first-generation students – could be considered more resilient than their 'mover' counterparts, given the adversities many will have overcome just to be at university (Chung, Turnbull and Chur-Hansen, 2017; Murray and Klinger, 2012), and drives home that the social costs of study abroad are not solely experienced by those from WP backgrounds, but may be equally applicable to their more socially advantaged peers.

### 4.1.2 Familiarity required for study abroad

In line with Bourdieu's Capital Theory Framework (1986), cultural capital was found to have significant implications for the likelihood of study abroad uptake for WP students. This tied in with the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model in relation to how university characteristics were shown to influence academic understandings of the barriers to study abroad. These perceptions were shaped by a keen understanding of their intake in terms of who their institution tended to attract – those from under-represented backgrounds – and from where – the local community, as opposed to the UK as a whole. While said demographic was, as expected, less likely to have accumulated international exposure through educational add-ons or through overseas family holidays during their formative years, this was not the case for all students. The extent to which study abroad aligned with pre-existing cultural norms and cultural acceptance did, however, reveal some

interesting findings, and demonstrate that some WP subgroups may be more predisposed to study abroad than others. This calls attention to the intersecting elements of social disadvantage, and how those from BAME backgrounds in particular possess an abundance of cultural capital that actually increases their likelihood of study abroad participation by compensating for the absence of economic capital.

#### *4.1.2.1 Proclivity for relocation*

Just as willingness to leave one's social network determines the likelihood of study abroad participation, so too does willingness to detach from one's social environment. This typically increases among those who choose to relocate for university, but decreases for those who choose to live at home and commute (Beerkens et al., 2016; Netz, 2015). Preference to remain embedded in familiar surroundings and existing support structures was found to be a major contributing factor towards New University's low level of study abroad uptake, where students were particularly reluctant to venture out of their comfort zones and try something new. This was unsurprising, given the institution's intake, and demonstrates how encouraging the pursuit of international opportunities can be difficult among those from under-represented backgrounds, for whom even "20 miles is a long way away and a real challenge" (Bridger, 2015, p. 47).

> *"Our students tend to come from lower socioeconomic participation backgrounds, they tend to be the first in their family to go to university, and study abroad is a big step for them."* (Academic F, New University, Business)

> *"Half of our students are first generation. There's no reference point, and I think just getting to university is an achievement for them, so I'd say there's a confidence thing going on there."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

Previous studies suggest that students with little or no experience of domestic mobility, or movement within their country of origin, tend to have limited desire for international mobility (Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Stroud, 2010), and this appeared to resonate with participants. Many of their students had never left their hometown before, let alone the

country, and as such, were unlikely to realise that study abroad was an option. This could be explained by what Henderson refers to as "possible selves" (2020, p. 4), where students living an area with low HE progression rates are already going against their cultural norms by simply getting into university, and may struggle to picture themselves in any form of movement, be it within the UK or beyond.

> *"It's not a natural route for them; there is a confidence issue with envisioning themselves being able to do certain things. I call it confidence, and that captures some of it, but it's just that ability to visualise and realise something."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Findings correspond with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), which shapes beliefs about what is appropriate and achievable for 'people like us' (Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall, 2007; Nash, 1990; Swartz, 2002), and results in the perception of study abroad as an unattainable luxury (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012). How international opportunities are distributed during one's formative years through educational add-ons, such as language learning and school trips abroad, can influence whether study abroad is viewed as natural and desirable (Carlson, 2013; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), or whether it is seen as "only a dream or not even that" (King et al. in a 2011, p. 177). How international opportunities are presented when one arrives at university may further reinforce the perception of study abroad as something done by other people, not them, if they are not depicted in official promotional material (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012).

Only one academic remarked on how the visual portrayal of study abroad can result in the decision to self-exclude from said activity, however. In agreement with the professional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), this understanding of the barriers to study abroad may have been influenced by their disciplinary affiliation, as this participant would have been well-versed in the analysis of storytelling through photography. While study abroad marketing has become more representative since Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella published their seminal 2011 paper, when the dominant demographic consisted largely of white, wealthy women – thus deterring those from BAME backgrounds through lack of diversity and inclusion – the following comment illustrates how participation rates continue to remain unequal, despite the growth in cultural sensitivities.

> *"When you look at study abroad promotional material now, there's definitely more representation of people from minority backgrounds, but also of men and women both, so I think the university is a lot more aware of that now."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Attention should therefore not only be paid as to *who* is portrayed in study abroad, but also to *what* is portrayed, and how this could be interpreted as leisure and tourism activity, rather than a legitimate academic undertaking. Michelson and Valencia (2016) were one of the first to view study abroad through the perspective of a communications lens, and suggest that the images most commonly used to promote international exchange on university websites – famous monuments and evocative landscapes such as beaches or mountains – only drives home the perception of study abroad as an opportunity not for learning, but for sightseeing and relaxation. Miller-Idriss, Friedman and Auerbach (2019) reached similar conclusions about the commodification of study abroad in their analysis of university mandated marketing material, where the depiction of "fun, adventure, contemplation, transformation, cosmopolitanism, and openness" (p. 1105) might appeal to some, but alienate others.

> *"When I get sent these promotional materials from the university, straightaway I think, 'you're clearly trying to sell these exotic destinations.' You only have to look at visual representations, where all the pictures are of big skyscrapers, the kind of stereotypical Australasian and North American portrayal. When I actually start to interrogate students, they've not really done that much research on the programme or the course content. They're more interested in the lifestyle, they're more interested in topping up their tans."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

A valuable gap for future research to explore in terms of how study abroad is communicated visually, and what kind of message this might convey to a potential audience, is thus presented for various stakeholder groups – be they academics, students or parents – to react to. Consideration should also be given to how study abroad is communicated textually for determining the extent to which this might attract or deter prospective applicants. Emphasis on cultural immersion or life changing experiences may be viewed as irrelevant to those who are more concerned with the concrete outcomes of an extracurricular activity such as

employability enhancement, who tend to identify as being WP (Callender and Melis, 2022; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) and demonstrate greater preference for STEM subjects (Allinson, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Stuber, 2011; Thirolf, 2014; Twombly et al., 2012). This suggests that written descriptions of study abroad can be equally influential for shaping perceptions as visual depictions, which may provide some useful recommendations as to how universities could further diversify their marketing material and increase the attractiveness of study abroad for under-represented students.

It should be noted, however, that while there remains a consensus that WP students are more concerned with time-to-graduation and thus reluctant to prolong their studies for the sake of an international experience (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017; Findlay et al., 2006; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Spiering and Erikson, 2006), not all of those from under-represented backgrounds are deterred from experiencing the same things (Netz, 2015). The use of WP students as a category of analysis therefore limits this study and may have obscured important intra-group differences, as pointed out by other scholars who suggest that, rather than being discouraged by the fun and excitement aspect of study abroad, some may instead be attracted by this (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020). This limitation highlights the need for future research to explore whether different WP students interpret study abroad marketing in different ways to determine the full extent to which they may perceive this as appealing or off-putting. In short, it would be important to consider not just *who* universities depict in study abroad promotional materials, but also *what* they depict.

The relevance of this comes into view when considering that there may be a gendered element in terms of what shapes attitudes towards study abroad, and not solely a WP or even social disadvantage aspect. For example, previous studies suggest that males can find emphasis on the transformative benefits of an international opportunity to be more of a deterrent than females, and may perceive study as frivolous at worst and less valuable at best compared with the more concrete outcomes associated with career development activities (Hurst, 2019). The gender imbalance in study abroad likewise brings up interesting avenues for future research, as IWPs could increase study abroad attractiveness by combining work experience with an international experience (Cranston, Pimlott-Wilson and Bates, 2020; Deakin, 2014). Previous research by Thirolf (2014), however, suggests that even when universities develop programmes specifically to make study abroad more appealing to both under-represented students and under-represented disciplines, males still demonstrate

preference for traditional paid placements. This raises the question of whether males experience greater pressure than females to secure well-paid graduate jobs, which would explain preoccupation with employability, and whether they would be willing to consider the prospect of pursuing these abroad if IWPs potentially open up more opportunities.

Cultural acceptance also plays a role in determining the likelihood of study abroad participation for those from under-represented backgrounds, and ties in with the ease or difficulty one has in detaching from their home environment. Findings thus align with those of other studies indicating how parents of WP students often discourage the desire to study abroad due to concerns over its expense (Paus and Robinson, 2008; Robertson, 2019) or their children's personal safety (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013). Parental resistance could likewise be explained by how BAME communities tend to be more family-oriented, and place higher expectations on their children to contribute financially or take on shared household responsibilities (McClure et al., 2010). The latter is more commonly shouldered by female students, which suggests that even among ethnic minorities, gendered differentials can again be observed in terms of whether parents support or oppose study abroad intent (Hurst, 2019). Religious identity may likewise explain why male BAME students are more likely to participate in study abroad than females, even when both live at home and commute to a nearby university (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018), and illustrates how intersecting elements of disadvantage can restrict some WP subgroups more than others. Findings therefore demonstrate the need to convince not just students to consider the pursuit of study abroad, but also their parents to facilitate uptake and make international opportunities more accessible.

> *"I've even come across families who are like, 'nope, you can't go abroad.' There are a lot of students who face these obstacles."* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

Findings are appropriately limited, however, because as with WP students themselves, it should be noted that not all parents of those from non-traditional backgrounds are discouraging of study abroad. Previous research demonstrates that while some BAME families prefer their children to prioritise financial security over personal development (McClure et al., 2010), others may be more supportive of the desire to pursue an international experience, particularly when it involves getting in touch with their ancestral roots

(Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014; Perkins, 2020). This again raises issues over the utility of WP students as a single category of analysis, whilst simultaneously highlighting the shortcomings of this thesis in terms of its choice to focus only on the academic stakeholder perspective. It would have been more useful – and helped to mitigate any confirmation bias – by comparing academic perceptions with those of students. As discussed previously, although attempts were made to include the latter group, these had to be abandoned due to recruitment challenges. Future research is therefore recommended not just for exploring the WP student perspective to better understand barriers and enablers to study abroad in their own words, but also for exploring the parental perspective, a stakeholder which remains even more overlooked in the literature than academics (Amani and Kim, 2017; Gerhards and Hans, 2013), to examine what shapes acceptance of – or opposition to – study abroad.

Further implications arose from residential status in terms of how this shapes an individual's ability to accumulate social capital – and by extension, information on study abroad – which can be challenging when students live off campus (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Holton, 2018; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). This is significant, given that limited awareness is considered to be the second most common barrier to study abroad after cost (Brux and Fry, 2010; Carroll, 1996; Coldwell, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Netz and Finger, 2015; Waters and Brooks, 2010), and indicates how social networks are crucial for enabling participation, as the more interaction students have with 'those in the know', the more informed they will be about international activities (Carlson, 2013; Finger, 2011).

> *"You need to put it on the radar of all of your undergraduate students, just to give it some visibility."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

> *"When I asked some of my students if they were aware of this information, they said no, so clearly it wasn't reaching them. So, I decided to take the resources the central study abroad office was sending out to create a short presentation for our department. This seemed to pay off, because this year we had a lot more expressions of interest."* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

Increasing access to information about study abroad is consequently recommended for WP students, and those who commute in particular, who receive fewer opportunities for

socialising and networking than their relocator peers (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010), and are more challenging to target overall through awareness raising campaigns (Trilokekar and Rasmi, 2011). This issue was commented on by a number of academics, and will be explored at greater length in chapter two of the findings section, which details strategies for overcoming the barriers to participation, and in chapter three, which considers the challenges associated with employing such methods.

#### *4.1.2.2 Exposure to international travel*

Academics at New University were conscious of how students at their institution were less likely to have accumulated the cultural capital derived from prior international experience, such as school trips or family holidays. This is crucial for normalising the travel process (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Green et al., 2015; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), and for developing the skills and confidence to cope in a foreign environment (Findlay et al., 2006; Pope et al., 2014). Findings were somewhat unexpected, however, and demonstrate that while it can be difficult for some students to step outside their comfort zones and consider the pursuit of study abroad (Bridger, 2015), others are motivated to do so precisely because they have never been given the opportunity to have an international experience. As already established, these are not equally distributed both among schools in the form of educational add-ons (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018) or among households in general through overseas vacations (Brooks and Waters, 2010; Lehmann and Trower, 2018).

> *"The ones who need a bit more support and encouragement tend to be the ones who've not travelled. They want to, but they haven't had the opportunity. They're a bit uncertain. I think they are definitely the more local students; they're rarely away from home. Sometimes this can be part of the drive to do it, because it's a challenge."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

In contrast to previous studies that characterise WP students as a whole as risk averse in terms of attitudes towards study abroad (Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Spiering and Erikson, 2006), findings lend more support to those of Netz (2015), who argues that such students may share similar backgrounds and experiences, but

have very different perspectives on the same phenomenon. In other words, findings highlight how Capital Theory can be overly deterministic in explaining study abroad inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986), given that not all students perceive – or are impacted by – barriers in the same way, which can be just as much of a driver as they are a deterrent. Other scholars agree that an absence of cultural capital does not automatically result in the decision to self-exclude from study abroad, and can actually motivate WP students to take advantage of what could be their one and only chance to travel before being tied down by the traditional markers of adulthood (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020).

More importantly, findings challenge the normative assumption that all WP students are equally disadvantaged, and as the following participant points out, suggest that some may be more predisposed towards study abroad than others. The ethnicity imbalance in study abroad has received much attention over recent years, with BAME students being under-represented (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013), and Caucasian students being over-represented (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011). What should be noted, however, is that the latter group also tends to be financially privileged (Havergal, 2016; Salisbury et al., 2010; Waters, 2009; Waters and Brooks, 2010) and female (Cordua and Netz, 2021; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010), which fails to acknowledge a particular demographic that remains overlooked not only in study abroad, but also in patterns of HE participation more generally: socioeconomically deprived white males (Baars et al., 2016; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Lewis and Demie, 2015). While scholars are increasingly beginning to acknowledge the gender gap in study abroad (Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014), attention should likewise be given to the income overlap, and to what this subgroup lacks that other WP students might possess.

> *"It's not always correlated on income, you know. There are some students from a BAME background who are affluent, and other students - white British - who are obviously not so affluent. There is no exact correlation, but I do think it's still important."* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

Findings shed light on the influence of migration background, and how those with foreign-born parents or grandparents may be more predisposed towards study abroad than native-born Brits, even when they both share the same LSES status. Second or third-generation immigrants have a history of international travel – undertaken to visit family members still

living in their country of origin – and often speak more than one language as a result, both of which increases the likelihood of study abroad participation (Nguyen, 2014; Perkins, 2020). Findings also highlight the need for future research to adopt an intersectional lens when considering the link between prior international experience and study abroad uptake in terms of how BAME students may have an abundance of cultural capital compared to their socioeconomically disadvantaged Caucasian peers.

Migration background carries additional significance for study abroad propensity in terms of parental acceptance, as families of students from BAME backgrounds can be more encouraging of their child's desire to have an international experience, particularly when this involves heritage-seeking, or going overseas to reconnect with their ancestral roots (Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014). This context could, however, be country and culturally dependent, given that studies have largely been conducted in the US and focus only on one or two specific ethnic groups – those of Korean and Hispanic descent – which suggests that findings could be very different if replicated in the UK. Parental resistance towards study abroad tends to be stronger among those of South Asian descent, although religious identity could admittedly play more of a role than ethnic origin regarding the level of freedom and autonomy in which their daughters are afforded (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018).

This study's general focus on WP students as a category of analysis thus obscures important intra-group differences, particularly in terms of ethnicity, for explaining which groups participate in study abroad and which groups do not. Although not relevant to the thesis due to its emphasis on identifying strategies for – and challenges of – facilitating study abroad uptake from the academic perspective, it would still be useful for future studies to explore the nuances of the ethnicity imbalance in more detail, given that participation may be influenced as much by religious identity as it is by ethnic background. A qualitative exploration would therefore offer greater insight into demographic differences observed from earlier quantitative data (Allinson, 2017; Turing Scheme, 2024) through BAME students' own words and lived experiences.

Either way, this demonstrates how findings were more nuanced than originally anticipated, and while the thesis was not designed to target any WP subgroup in isolation, future research would benefit from conducting a US-UK comparison to explore the difference in diasporas between the two, and the extent to which this influences study abroad propensity. Unlike the

US, whose largest immigrant group is drawn from Latin America, those in the UK can be traced mostly to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh which, incidentally, also have the lowest levels of study abroad participation of any ethnic minority (Allinson, 2017). Further demographic breakdown is therefore warranted to investigate the extent to which historical ties influences placement preference, and whether migration background drives or deters these groups from engaging with study abroad overall.

Findings are also of interest in terms of how these align with the professional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), given that the aforementioned participant's disciplinary affiliation may have influenced their observations on study abroad participation. This academic was a member of the humanities faculty which, along with the arts and social sciences, tends to value subjective analysis and the diversity of perspectives (Giedt, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015; Leask et al., 2020; Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Their comment thus suggests that degree characteristics can be just as influential for shaping academic understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students as institutional affiliation, and how these might not be as straightforward as is usually assumed.

## 4.2 Strategies for overcoming the barriers to study abroad for widening participation students

The applicability of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) becomes somewhat limited from a WP perspective, due to it being conducted in a very specific context – a land grant college in the US – and exploring only one particular field of study – Agricultural Science. Although it does acknowledge the need for study abroad uptake to be increased in under-represented disciplines, concrete recommendations as to what would be useful for facilitating take up among students from under-represented backgrounds were not provided. This section addresses the gap by identifying strategies for overcoming the barriers to participation for said stakeholder group, and begins by examining how different types of programmes can encourage different types of students to pursue international opportunities.

**Contextualising the support provided by academics**

Before proceeding, it would be helpful to provide insights into the overall commitment to study abroad among each respective university by discussing their provision of international opportunities. However, details on the percentage of study abroad participants – and more importantly, their demographic breakdown – was not made publicly available on either of the case study university websites, which would have required the submission of a freedom of information request. Broader information was available on the type of study abroad programmes on offer, in addition to the choice of partner links, although again, data on the specific number of placements or the number of exchange universities was not made easily obtainable.

First of all, regarding programme type, New University was, as anticipated, focused more on short-term mobility through its provision of semesters abroad, summer schools and overseas field trips or work placements. Programme type at Old University was, predictably, focused more on long-term mobility through their integrated and extended year abroad model, and although short-term offerings did exist, these were primarily in the form of summer schools or international research internships. In line with previous studies, financial aid for study abroad was more abundant at the latter, a highly selective research-intensive institution, than the former, a less selective teaching-focused provider (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004; Waters, 2009), which secured almost five times the amount of Turing funding than its post-1992 competitor for the 2022-23 academic year (Turing Scheme, 2022).

Old University was also able to draw upon both external scholarships and internal funding awards, many of which were targeted specifically at WP students, while New University offered comparatively little in the way of additional university-specific financial support. This could be seen in their most recently published Access and Participation Plans, where Old University had more funding set aside to meet overall financial concerns both in general and specific to study abroad. This not only covered unforeseeable costs through non-repayable hardship grants and bursaries, but also enabled under-represented students to participate in extracurricular activities and international opportunities alike. Financial support at New University, in contrast, was aimed more at easing immediate financial hardship for students struggling with the cost of living, and award amounts were much lower in comparison. This suggests that Old University was better placed to offer discretionary funding for additional costs such as buying a passport and obtaining a visa, which might have

otherwise deterred WP students – particularly those from low-income backgrounds – from considering study abroad (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010).

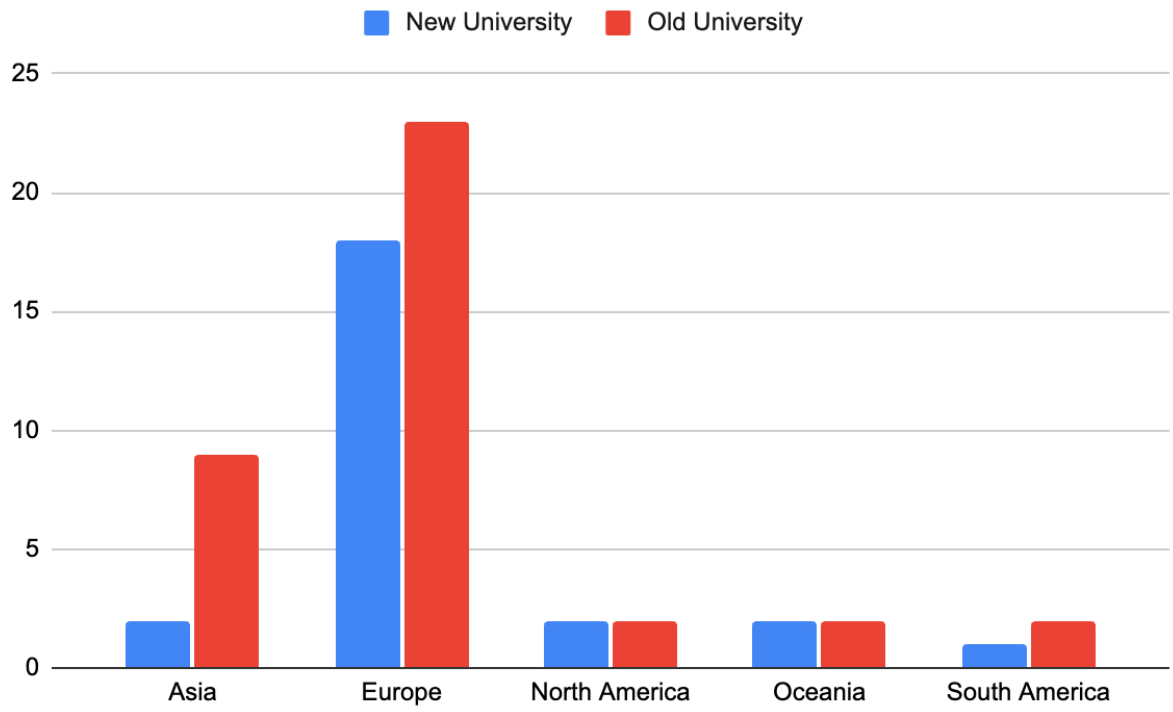
Findings were considerably more surprising in terms of exchange links, as although the literature agrees that academically selective universities are more internationally connected than their non-selective counterparts (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Di Pietro, 2020; Lörz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022), the diversity of destinations at New University was unexpected. While Old University did have more links with some of the world's oldest and highest-ranking institutions such as Sciences Po (France), Charles University (Czech Republic) and University of Tokyo (Japan), New University was partnered with fewer, but similarly prestigious providers, despite its vocational and applied focus. Destination choice at both universities was equally diverse, and although Old University had a wider variety of placements in Asia, New University's European placements were broadly similar.

They each had an interesting mix between high cost of living countries such as Ireland and Luxembourg (New University) or Norway and Switzerland (Old University), with low cost of living countries such as Greece and Romania (New University) or Cyprus and Lithuania (Old University). This deviation, where some countries were partnered with at Old University but not at New University – and vice versa – could be explained by the difference in their course offerings, where modern foreign language degrees were more widely available at the latter than the former, not just in commonly studied Romance and Germanic subjects (UniversitiesUK, 2022), but also in lesser found ones such as Slavic and Uralic.

When narrowing down placement availability by faculty, however, options for STEM at both universities were found to be limited, with links concentrated largely among Anglophone countries such as the US and Australia, while options for the arts, humanities and social sciences were more varied. This could be explained by what Courtois (2018) refers to as the elite programme model, which requires greater academic involvement to ensure a close match between home and host university. It also has ramifications for widening participation, given how the number of placements available are limited by design, which not only requires academics to be selective based on the level of curriculum integration, but also on the level of a student's past performance, and thus "only send 'elite' students" to study abroad in an "'elite' destination" (p. 107). This likewise has important implications for determining which

students are able to access study abroad – and which ones are not – which will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Chart 6. Partner link availability**




### *4.2.1 Easing the way*

While academics at both universities were equally committed to making access more equitable, their approaches to increasing participation rates were very different. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of their intake, academics at New University were more likely to understand the importance of offering flexible options to students constrained by finances, course intensity, work commitments or family obligations, and chose to communicate the attainability of study abroad through short-term stays to better suit their needs.

> *"We found that semester abroad participation was small in numbers, and it was the more affluent students who did it, so we found ways to do summer schools and summer internships. This is what I'm most passionate about,*

*you know. If we create more things that are different, then more people will go."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

*"We get a lot of Black and Minority Ethnic students, mainly Asian girls. We do have some mature students as well, quite a few parents, women with kids. It's a very widening participation course. We were really aware that these students just weren't applying for study abroad opportunities, which is why we wanted to introduce different options to suit their needs."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

Both of these comments suggest a perception that the traditional Erasmus model might not be appropriate or even desirable for everyone, and that providing alternative options to accommodate personal circumstances and schedules would help to study abroad more inclusive. They also support previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of short-term stays for overcoming the cost barrier for WP students (Gwost et al., 2021; UniversitiesUK, 2021), and indicate that increased accessibility, rather than a one-size-fits-all-approach, is more impactful for expanding uptake for under-represented groups (Bridger, 2015; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021). Findings further align with those of other scholars in that short-term stays were found to be less disruptive, and thus easier to overcome the curriculum constraints associated with STEM subjects (Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014).

*"Our exchange isn't your typical Erasmus model. It's approaching a very different set of students and encouraging them to take risks and chances."* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

More importantly, short-term stays were found to be less intimidating, and therefore successful for overcoming the confidence barrier by enabling WP students to study abroad in a supportive and structured environment (Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Lewis and Niesenbaum, 2005). Programmes such as summer schools are well organised by the host university, and provide "a clearer sense of exactly what will happen, where they will stay, and what they will do while abroad", unlike the traditional year or semester abroad, which tends to be more abstract (UniversitiesUK, 2021, p. 47). Greater

clarity, then, can be useful for breaking down the process of study abroad, and for making said activity more feasible and realistic (Henderson, 2020; Munro, 2011).

#### *4.2.1.1 Increased accessibility of study abroad programmes*

In keeping with the institutional domain of the Faculty Engagement Model (Danjean, 2017), university characteristics were found to play a crucial role in shaping outreach interventions at New University. Of all their mobility options, ILPs were considered to be most successful at breaking down the barriers to study abroad for WP students. Rather tellingly, this option was only available at New University, and reflects how, similar to the US, such programmes are often utilised in the type of institutions where WP students are most typically concentrated – in other words, community colleges – whose demographic more closely resembles those of the UK's post-1992 universities (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Whatley and Raby, 2020). This method of facilitating uptake effectively alleviated the concerns among those with less pronounced stocks of economic capital, who tend to be more risk and debt averse (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010), by reframing their perceptions of study abroad as prohibitively expensive. The cost-effectiveness of ILPs made study abroad more affordable both for students, many of whom were required to contribute little, if anything, towards their stay, and for universities in terms of arranging the trip (Keese and O'Brien, 2011).

> *"It's very popular. 90% of our students are like, 'yep, I wanna go.' We'll go out on a Monday and come back on Friday. The university contributes quite a lot towards this, and if you can get a quote from a travel company as a staff member within the allocated budget, the students don't have to pay anything at all."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

While ILPs were primarily well-received by academics as a means of overcoming the cost barrier, these programmes were also found to be effective at addressing the limited stocks of cultural capital that commonly deter WP students from study abroad. Participants were well aware that many of these might not have travelled overseas before, be it on foreign family holidays (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010) or on school trips (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; King et al., 2011), and would likely find the prospect of 'going it alone' for a year or a semester abroad too overwhelming (Trilokekar and Rasmi, 2011). Travelling as part

of a group, accompanied by a trusted authority figure, was therefore viewed as a practical alternative for enabling such students to gain international experience and develop their confidence.

ILPs have, however, been criticised for "dumbing down study abroad", as Keese and O'Brien (2011, p. 6) put it, by denying students of their freedom and independence, and although this is a valid complaint, it is also an elitist one that neglects to consider why these programmes were created in the first place. Unlike those for whom travelling has become normalised and taken for granted (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Pope et al., 2014), WP students often have no frame of reference, and can find navigating the travel process anxiety-inducing, so the more supported they are, the more likely they will be to take a risk and venture out into the unknown (Amani and Kim, 2018; Meier and Smith, 2016; Niehaus and Wegener, 2019). This was keenly understood by academics at New University, whose ILPs had been designed to give their students a transformative learning experience, and for enabling them to step outside their comfort zones, which can be difficult for some to overcome (Barbour, 2021; Bridger, 2015).

> *"The idea was that we sort of help them to get there, so they could see that it wasn't particularly scary. We were aware that a lot of these students had never been abroad by themselves, or if they have, they've been on package holidays. I think it is a confidence thing for the widening participation students, and I think they wouldn't have gone if we hadn't gone with them."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

> *"It's partly because the students feel safer, and they'll take more risks if academics are involved. We've seen that the more support they have, the more likely people are to go."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Group travel also opens up international opportunities to students who would otherwise have been prevented from participating for religious reasons or personal safety concerns, as is frequently the case for those from BAME backgrounds (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013), which suggests that parental acceptance is crucial for tackling the ethnicity imbalance in study abroad (Amani and Kim, 2018; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021). Findings consequently support those from the Turing

Scheme Year 1 evaluation (IFF Research, 2024) regarding the positive outcomes of short-term programmes, including the transformative effect that these can have on WP students. Also in line with other studies, these are considered effective for enabling said group to gain experience of independent living by allowing them to leave their comfort zone, albeit in a structured and supported environment (Allinson, 2017; Dean and Kelly, 2020). This leaves them better prepared to handle unexpected and challenging situations (Courtois, 2017; Martinez, Ranjeet and Marx, 2009; Norris and Dwyer, 2005; Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra, 2014), and the more self-sufficient they become, the more likely they are to complete their studies (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004). Retention has become increasingly important to universities and governments alike, given how WP students are at higher risk of non-continuation (Jerrim, 2014; Quinn, 2004; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2009; Yorke and Thomas, 2003), so study abroad could significantly improve their outcomes, thus meeting a key objective of the Turing Scheme.

Findings similarly align with those of the Turing Scheme Year 1 evaluation report (IFF Research, 2024) and of previous studies (Bridger, 2015; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Lewis and Niesenbaum, 2005) in that ILPs – and short-term programmes as a whole – can act as a stepping stone for future mobility, where WP students are often driven to study abroad again on a more long-term basis. This indicates that STM is an effective way of enabling students without prior international experience to develop the skills and confidence needed to travel independently (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Pope et al., 2014), whether this be for further study or employment (UniversitiesUK, 2021), which again aligns strongly with Turing's emphasis on enhancing social mobility. STM thus opens up opportunities from an international labour market rather than restricting students to the domestic one, which may be less advantageous (Deakin, 2014), and also potentially offers additional benefits such as higher earnings (Di Pietro, 2015; Gaskell and Lingwood, 2019; Greenbank, 2007; Kidd, O'Leary and Sloane, 2017; Stiwne and Alves, 2010) and more stable employment (Cairns, 2017; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003).

Meanwhile, peer acceptance was found to be equally important for influencing programme design, and highlights how academics who engage with ILPs often have to defend their worthiness and authenticity from colleague critique (Dewey and Duff, 2009). This could explain why participants were so keen to emphasise the capability of such programmes for

delivering relevant learning outcomes, which can be poorly understood by those who dismiss ILPs as little more than a touristic indulgence.

> *"We're not sending them on holiday. Everything is very linked to practice and to the curriculum. It was all very pragmatic in terms of where are we going to go, what are we going to do."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

> *"We really tried to weave some of these trips into the curriculum, you know, about criminal justice, human rights and resource development."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Findings thus highlight a need to make the benefits of ILPs more readily apparent by increasing their acceptability level among potential detractors, which participants did here by demonstrating their effectiveness for enabling experiential learning. While the practical real-world application of theory gained in a lecture-based setting is more widely associated with vocational and STEM subjects (Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019; Tran et al., 2021), actively engaging with other cultures to reflect on and develop pre-existing knowledge can be just as beneficial for students in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Conran, 2019).

Given this discussion, it would be useful to highlight similarities between ILPs and the kind of IFTs more commonly associated with subjects such as Geography, Biology and Archaeology, which all lend themselves well to gaining hands-on experience in an overseas professional working environment through curriculum-relevant learning and cultural enrichment (Deakin, 2013). As with ILPs, there are numerous benefits associated with IFTs, which offer a more active and authentic form of learning by associating specific places with the application of abstract theory to practical knowledge in a 'real life' context (Houser et al., 2011). IFTs also offer a more collaborative and group-oriented form of learning – as opposed to the more autonomous and self-directed approach favoured in a traditional HE environment – which is less socially isolating and more inclusive for WP students (Jones and Washko, 2022). This fosters greater interaction, not just among their peers but also with their tutors, and reduces the sense of distance between them, unlike in a regular university setting where WP students might not feel comfortable approaching academics for guidance and advice (Read, Archer, and Leathwood, 2003; Semper and Blasco, 2018; Simon and Ainsworth,

2012). Both IFTs and ILPs are therefore effective enablers for overcoming the confidence and communication barriers that may have otherwise deterred WP students from taking up an international opportunity, but also for networking and opening up possibilities for further study or work as a result of mentorship and shared experiences (Berger and Paul, 2017).

This aligns with the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) in that colleague acceptance is vital for enabling involvement with ILPs, because as the following comment demonstrates, academics are frequently unprepared for the amount of work associated with leading such programmes. Sourcing a suitable location can be time-consuming, and requires a certain level of familiarity with the host language or culture (Oh and Arthur-Banning, 2021), yet academics involved with ILPs often receive little in the way of guidance and advice during the process of developing these (Savishinsky, 2012).

> *"What has helped is having a head who's very supportive of our endeavours. They're like, 'oh, I'll find you money to go away with,' so me and a colleague were able to travel out first to France, Germany, Greece, before we went with the students. We had to make sure things were okay from a safeguarding point of view. We had to know that the students were going to be looked after."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

While academics were positive overall about the effectiveness of ILPs at increasing participation rates, they also spoke frankly about how demanding these could be in terms of pastoral support provision. A high level of responsibility therefore had to be assumed for the programme's target demographic – WP students – along with a high level of care to buffer them against homesickness and culture shock (Hull, 2013; Meier and Smith, 2016). Reducing the risk of study abroad for students, however, increases the workload for academics, along with the need to juggle multiple responsibilities – mentor, supervisor, and guide – all in the name of broadening their horizons (Keese and O'Brien, 2011). This illustrates how the main advantage of ILPs – their ability to make study abroad more inclusive – can simultaneously be a major drawback, as some students have to be excluded by necessity to ensure that those who do participate are appropriately supported. Access to study abroad is therefore still restricted, even on programmes that are specifically developed to open up international

opportunities, and requires multiple members of staff to take part in these if larger numbers are to be made possible (Henthorne and Panko, 2017).

This also raises the question of which academics are willing or able to take part in ILPs which, in line with both the professional and the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017), highlights the influence that rank can have on their capacity to engage. The participant below suggests that such programmes are more suitable for younger academics or those without family obligations, and would not appeal to those who were older and more established in their careers (Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019).

> *"It's a 24/7 job on those trips, so it's often the staff who maybe haven't got family or have kids who've grown up already, you know."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Junior academics are constrained by other factors, however, such as institutional promotion policies and reward systems, so study abroad engagement can actually be detrimental to career progression if their universities incentivise publications or presentations over outreach interventions (Courtois, 2017; Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Green and Olson, 2003; Jessani et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012). As the comment below suggests, this may be less of an issue for academics at post-1992 institutions, where emphasis is based on making a difference to society and their students rather than on research output. Service work in academia, or activities that are unrelated to teaching and research, tends to be more recognised in teaching-focused providers, whose preoccupation with student satisfaction and support could explain why staff were so keen at this particular university to promote the positive impact of study abroad (Hull, 2013). Findings therefore suggest that institutional affiliation, rather than rank and tenure status, plays more of a role in capacity for engagement, as the more pressure academics face to deliver quantifiable outputs, the less likely they will be to get involved in study abroad.

> *"It took a lot of effort, but it was rewarding, you know, going on this trip. It also got mentioned by the Vice Chancellor at graduation, and then we made a video about it where one of my colleagues interviewed the students*

*when they came back, to show how much their confidence had developed."*
(Academic C, New University, Social Work)

Other factors relating to the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017), meanwhile, shed light on another key challenge linked with ILPs. Leading such programmes can be difficult, but much has also been written on the demands of developing these. Findings align with other studies indicating how ILPs have a high barrier to entry in that pre-existing structures or established templates are rarely available, and neither is guidance or advice for creating these from scratch (Dewey and Duff, 2009). Academics are consequently unprepared for how much work goes into this design, such as choosing a potential destination, organising travel, accommodation, and promoting the programme, all alongside their existing duties, which can lead to future burnout and refusal to re-engage (Barbour, 2021). This issue was discussed extensively by Savishinsky (2012), who recommends the need for appropriate preparation to enable sustained engagement, and to ensure that expertise is passed on when an academic chooses to step down from their role. This could be done by allocating funding for training and development to advise academics not only on how to develop ILPs, but also on the logistics and practicalities associated with leading these programmes. The sharing of best practice examples and other related resources through dedicated workshops would also prevent knowledge from being lost.

Nevertheless, the general conclusion by participants was that ILPs were a challenging but rewarding method of making study abroad more accessible, and one that had achieved considerable success at expanding uptake for WP students. Further exploration is therefore recommended to determine how experiences of leading such programmes compare with the US, where much of the previous research on FLPs was conducted (Amani and Kim, 2018; Barbour, 2021; Conran, 2019; Henthorne and Panko, 2017; Keese and O'Brien, 2011; Meier and Smith, 2016; Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Oh and Arthur-Banning, 2021). Their future in the UK may be in doubt, however, where the tuition fee freeze, rising operating costs and falling international student recruitment numbers has resulted in job cuts and voluntary redundancies for academics, most of which are being felt in post-1992 universities (Williams, 2024). Alarm has already been raised over how these financial pressures could negatively impact student choice and opportunities (Foster and Gross, 2024), and brings attention to how this could potentially restrict access to study abroad further still for WP students, who are

most likely to be enrolled in such institutions. This context makes the need for future research more urgent than ever to prevent exacerbation of existing inequalities by an HE sector in crisis.

#### *4.2.1.2 Increased affordability of study abroad programmes*

Emphasis at Old University, meanwhile, was on demonstrating the affordability of international opportunities through their extended year abroad model. This was perceived as being more cost-effective than a traditional three-year bachelor's degree, given the reduction in tuition fees and the increased availability of non-repayable grants and scholarships (Collinson, 2015; Gray et al., 2018; Lulle and Buzinska, 2017), and participants were well aware of the need to communicate this knowledge by making the study abroad process more transparent. This aligns with how knowledge of funding is often patchy among WP students, many of whom assume that study abroad is too expensive, so closing the information gap is crucial for tackling these misconceptions (Bridger, 2015; Gray et al., 2018). Finance is a key concern for those from low-income backgrounds, who are often deterred by both the direct costs of study abroad, such as accommodation, travel and subsistence (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010), and the indirect costs of study abroad, or forgone income from having to give up part-time jobs (Allinson, 2017; Brux and Fry, 2010). These students are typically preoccupied with the immediate practicalities of study abroad, and thus require more reassurance about its feasibility.

> *"I get a lot of questions, like, 'how much does it cost?' The financial aspects usually pop up quite early, so I tend to say, 'look, you pay a fraction of the fees here, and you don't pay any fees over there.'"*
> (Academic I, Old University, Aerospace Engineering)

> *"I myself am from a working-class background and I'm aware of how finance can be a barrier, so I was really keen to make this point. We want to attract more widening participation students because we know that study abroad uptake is negatively correlated with income level. That's why we try to stress the fact that they'll pay less in their year abroad than they would in the UK. When on earth would they get the chance again to visit a place*

*like the US for such a small amount of money?"* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

Although participants demonstrated a general understanding of funding availability, such as Erasmus and its replacement, the Turing Scheme, few were well-versed on university-specific level grants and scholarship, many of which are targeted at those from under-represented backgrounds. Findings are therefore consistent with the personal dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) in that first-hand experience of the study abroad process does not automatically equate to in-depth knowledge of study abroad funding. In other words, simply being a study beneficiary is not enough to make an academic well-informed on finance options, or on where to signpost students for further advice (Deakin, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010). This indicates a need for increased visibility of funding opportunities not just for students, but also academics, which can be a struggle to locate without sufficient guidance (Criswell and Zhu, 2015).

While this issue could be resolved through greater collaboration between individual academics and centralised study abroad departments, it does, however, bring into debate just what the role of study abroad adviser should entail, and to what extent an academic should – or is even able to – engage with international opportunities. Castro et al. (2016) recommend adopting a more collaborative approach between these two stakeholder groups, with academics generating initial interest in study abroad and centralised departments advising on the intricacies of finance. Said solution would benefit students by turning study abroad intent – which most tend not to follow through on (Pope et al., 2014) – into study abroad participation, and academics alike, who generally work alone and unsupported in their efforts to increase programme enrolment, by sharing the workload more effectively (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016).

This choice of strategy could be explained by the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), and how the existence of an extended year abroad model was made possible in the first place. The more well-resourced and internationally connected an HEI is, the more likely it will be to offer this type of study abroad programme (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004; Waters, 2009), which was notable in its absence at New University. Even semesters abroad were found to be relatively uncommon, which may

be attributed to how teaching-focused providers receive comparatively less in the way of endowments and alumni donations, thus translating into limited opportunities for international travel (Zhang, 2011). One resourceful participant overcame this institutional barrier by raising money through crowdfunding, an innovative approach that also increased the relevancy of study abroad by equipping their students with valuable skills and experience for future employment, and thus the interest of those from under-represented backgrounds (Allinson, 2017; Twombly et al., 2012). Enabling non-traditional students to study abroad through non-traditional methods of fundraising was something of a trailblazing solution, and one that would be worthy of further exploration to determine whether similar initiatives are being used in other universities to widen access.

> *"We work with a charity and we built fundraising as a strategy into one of our modules, so the students did the fundraising themselves to go away over the summer. Fundraising is a skill that people learn but with a direct purpose of broadening their horizons, but also contributing to other communities to use their skills to support people, so putting what they'd learned into practice."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Whether academics at other universities would even be open to employing such strategies is debatable, because as the following comment demonstrates, increasing the flexibility of study abroad – be it via funding or via options for mobility – was perceived as being less beneficial. The preference instead among participants at Old University was for students to receive the maximum possible impact from an international experience, which they believed could only be delivered through an add-on year abroad.

> *"We have summer schools, too. It's a very different thing, it's a much shorter commitment, but I don't think it's an immersive thing. Even a semester is not long enough, because that would be roughly three months. If it takes a month or two to get adjusted to anything, what's the point?"* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

This attitude is not uncommon, and reflects the tendency for some critics to view short-term programmes as being 'lesser than' their long-term equivalents (Keese and O'Brien, 2011), although it does stand in stark contrast to how any type of mobility, no matter how short, was

regarded as a worthwhile endeavour by those at New University. Academics at Old University, however, favoured a more conservative approach to tackling the cost barrier, and chose to make study abroad more appealing not by offering alternative options for study abroad, but by offering alternative destinations. Increasing the availability of placements in low-cost countries such as Central and Eastern Europe was therefore done to suit student budgets and reframe perceptions of study abroad as an unaffordable luxury, or something that is 'not for the likes of us' (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; King et al., 2011; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012).

> *"The cost of living can be significant for some students. Some of them say, 'I want to go abroad but I'm worried about money,' so then I direct them to places that I know that are more affordable."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

> *"We have so many places they can choose from where the cost of living is cheaper, if they have caring responsibilities, or they have a medical condition that doesn't allow them to travel halfway around the world. We try to push the more affordable places, like Hungary and the Czech Republic."* (Academic N, Old University, Law)

This method does appear to have some merit, and findings echo those of Courtois (2017) in that students from high cost of living countries such as Ireland or the UK can make their money stretch much further by studying abroad in a low cost of living country. More interesting was a recognition of how the social costs of study abroad can be just as much of a deterrent for WP students as the direct costs, who participants directed towards more conveniently located destinations. The rationale informing this strategy stemmed from how WP students prioritise proximity when choosing a university (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Henderson, 2020; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), so studying abroad in a neighbouring country would enable them to return home more easily if the need arose (Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016).

> *"There are some students who might have caring responsibilities or, you know, they're just a bit more of a home bird and want to stay closer to*

*home, so places like the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, they're really popular."* (Academic N, Old University, Law)

*"That's the nice thing about going to Europe. You're still on the doorstep of the UK, so that makes it really easy to come back. If you go to North America or Australia, it's not so easy to come back, it's quite a big cost."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Not all WP students are deterred by the prospect of far-flung destinations, however, or share the same priorities, despite their scarcity of economic capital. Those at New University were less concerned with distance from home institution than had been anticipated, which was an unexpected finding, but one that could be explained, as Netz (2015) puts it, by how "students in objectively similar situations might subjectively perceive mobility obstacles differently" (p. 155). While some focus more on the immediate costs incurred from study abroad, such as forgone income from part-time work, others take a long-term view of how study abroad could be their first and only chance for an international experience before being weighed down by the milestones of adulthood (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020).

*"I think Europe is too close to home, to be honest. For UK students, Europe is a place where they can go anytime they want, it's not that exotic. It's a case of, if I'm going to go, then I wanna go big.*" (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

Proximity is an interesting factor, and one that should be considered when determining what influences WP students to be more adventurous in their choice of destination. Although findings do align with those from a recent UK paper demonstrating how the perception of study abroad as a once in a lifetime opportunity is not uncommon among those from under-represented backgrounds (UniversitiesUK, 2021), it could be argued that their 'go big or go home' mindset was shaped more by having taken part in a short-term, fully-funded programme. Attitudes towards long-term programmes may have been very different, and raises the question of whether students would have been equally willing to venture further afield for a year or semester abroad. Further research is therefore recommended for conducting a demographic breakdown of destination preference as well as programme duration to establish the extent to which programme type influences study abroad decision-

making for WP students, and whether this increases or decreases the attractiveness of nearby countries. Such a comparison has yet to be explored, and would yield some interesting results for future scholars.

Placement preference is an interesting angle to explore, if only because of the questions it raises over the varying degrees to which WP students demonstrate financial and psychological risk aversion. It also raises questions about the utility of WP students as a single analytical category, which may have had a homogenising effect on findings by this study, given that while they might share similar backgrounds and experiences, they may have very different perspectives on the same phenomenon (Netz, 2015). For example, some WP students prioritise the concrete outcomes of career development (Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014), but others are more motivated by the fun and excitement of an international experience and view study abroad as a once a lifetime chance to travel overseas before traditional adult milestones get in the way (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020). Placement preference also remains overlooked in the literature on study abroad inequalities (Netz et al., 2024), with the focus on destination choice being largely on mobility from east to west, or the global south to the global north, where whole-degree mobility is undertaken to derive reputational prestige and financial returns (Brooks and Waters, 2022; Perkins and Neumayer, 2014). Drivers of destination choice for within-degree mobility, particularly among under-represented students, continue to be under-researched. Some studies suggest that pop culture and modern media could play a role in shaping interest in other countries and cultures (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015), which again presents a unique angle of investigation for future studies to exploit.

Meanwhile, further reasoning was made for the extended year abroad model as a way of minimising not only cost for students, but also disruption to their studies. This was perceived by academics in STEM to be a more effective way of overcoming curriculum constraints, where course content is hierarchical in nature and has to be closely matched between the home and host institution (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012).

> *"We typically just promote the year abroad for the reason that our degrees are built up. We have to make sure modules match between our university and the overseas university. That's normally quite easy to do if they're*

> *going abroad for a full year, whereas if they're only going abroad for a semester, it gets much more difficult. You've got to make sure that they'd be covering the kind of stuff they would be doing at home in the other semester."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Findings conform with the professional dimension of the modified Faculty Engagement Model (Danjean, 2017) in that degree characteristics were found to significantly influence strategic interventions used for opening up international opportunities to WP students. The extended year abroad was viewed as being easier to organise logistically than a short-term stay, and also offered the added benefit of enabling students to follow their interests by learning something different. Assessing their time spent overseas on a pass/fail basis, rather than counting it towards their final grades – as is traditionally the case with a built-in year abroad – likewise helped to reduce risk and increase interest.

> *"That will solve all the problems related to accreditation and make it much easier for people to go abroad and pick whichever modules they like, just for the experience of going abroad."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

Wider institutional policy and practice could explain the differences between disciplines in terms of how study abroad opportunities are integrated into the curriculum, at least from the perspective of academics in STEM. As pointed out by Courtois (2018), study abroad organisation can differ significantly for students participating in the elite programme model, which involves a mandatory year abroad built in by design and requires a close fit between home and host course content. It also adopts a traditional academic focus towards study abroad, and while this model is more commonly found among modern foreign language degrees, it has become increasingly relevant to the STEM context where partner link fit carries the most importance. In contrast, the gap year model, or extended year abroad, involves participation on a voluntary basis, and marks "a move away from an academic/cultural focus, and a greater emphasis on lifestyle and employability" (Courtois, 2018, p. 105), which could explain why efforts to diversify the study abroad demographic at Old University were focused more on increasing the length of a traditional three-year degree to four.

Rather than academic performance counting towards a student's final degree classification, as is the case with the elite programme, the gap year model is graded only on a pass/fail basis, which allows for greater curriculum flexibility. The need for academic involvement with module matching is either reduced or removed entirely, and makes programme fit less of an issue for those in STEM or other subjects with professional accreditation requirements than may have otherwise deterred students from study abroad (Ahn, 2014; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). As such, preference for the elite programme model provides important insights into how a specific institutional environment might impact study abroad advisers. It also explains why STEM academics may be less willing to engage with study abroad due to the perception of it being a high effort, low reward activity, given the level of curriculum integration required for their discipline (Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Courtois, 2018; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012) – an issue to be discussed in further detail later in the thesis.

Although the extended year abroad was observed to have been relatively successful at redressing the disciplinary imbalance, academics did acknowledge that making study abroad easier to engage with might not necessarily make study abroad more attractive to take part in. It was therefore perceived as being something of a problematic solution for students in terms of how prolonging their degree would thus delay their entry into the labour market.

> *"They also know that they'll have to invest one more year in their studies, which won't appeal to everyone."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

This is a prime example of how the opportunity costs associated with an international experience can be higher for some students than others, with time-to-graduation, or how long it takes to complete one's studies, being one of the less well-documented study abroad deterrents (Findlay et al., 2006; Spiering and Erikson, 2006). STEM students are more career-oriented (Giedt et al, 2015; Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014), meaning the prospect of extending their studies – potentially at the expense of securing a well-paying graduate job – could make this method a non-starter (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017). As touched upon earlier, however, not all WP students are equally risk averse, or are motivated by the same things (Netz, 2015), so while some prioritise short-term goals, such as transitioning to full-time employment immediately after completing their studies, others

prefer to maximise the student experience and study abroad while they still can, regardless of the opportunity costs incurred (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020).

### 4.2.2 Legitimising the possibility

Methods of encouraging the pursuit of study abroad for WP students were also found to differ significantly, where those utilised at New University corresponded with both the institutional and the personal dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017). Affinity characteristics – in other words, shared backgrounds and experiences – could explain why academics at this institution demonstrated greater understanding of how confidence might cause WP students to self-exclude from study abroad, and what would be most effective in helping to increase this.

Awareness raising strategies, on the other hand, were found to be broadly similar, and raise some interesting questions around the who, how and when of information targeting. Academics at both universities acknowledged the need for knowledge transfer to enable the provision of practical guidance and emotional support not just from themselves, but also by student peers. Agreement was also observed regarding the perceived effectiveness of centralised study abroad marketing campaigns, and the importance of increasing visibility to ensure that information actually reached students. Approaches did diverge, however, in terms of timing, with some academics promoting study abroad much earlier than others by acknowledging the need to increase buy-in not just with students, but also among another crucial – and overlooked – stakeholder group: their parents.

#### 4.2.2.1 Increased feasibility of study abroad participation

Academics at both universities appeared to share similar perceptions about how a large part of their role was to offer both practical advice on demystifying the study abroad process and emotional support by encouraging students to make an application in the first place. This indicates the importance of instilling confidence among those from under-represented backgrounds to reassure them that study abroad is feasible and realistic (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015; Paus and Robinson, 2008), and demonstrates how WP students are more likely to take up international opportunities when encouraged to do so by academics (Amani and Kim,

2018; Doyle et al., 2010; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010).

> *"It's just a case of trying to affirm that it is something that they can do, you know. If somebody came to me and was unsure due to lack of confidence, I'd try and influence them so that they get the experience that they really do want, to try and get over their nerves." (Academic B, New University, Architecture)*

WP students tend to have little, if any, prior international experience, which is crucial for normalising both the travel process (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Green et al., 2015; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) and for developing the confidence needed to navigate foreign cultures (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Findlay et al., 2006; King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; King et al., 2011). Limited stocks of cultural capital also explain why WP students approach study abroad with a sense of caution, who thus require more support to allay their concerns about exposing themselves to something new and different (Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). Although findings were similar to those of Bridger (2015) in that academics at both universities acknowledged the difficulty of getting WP students to step out of their comfort zones, approaches for enabling them to look beyond the familiar were once again different.

Interventions at New University were significantly influenced by an understanding of their student intake, and how their institution tended to attract those from the local area who might never have left their hometown before, let alone the country. Student horizons were broadened as part of a gradual process by accompanying them on a field trip to London, which aimed to build up their confidence and enable them to gain travel experience, albeit on a domestic level rather than an international one. Both of these were perceived as a valuable first step towards improving student self-efficacy and planting the seed for future study abroad participation, although the need to 'get them out of their bubble', as described by the following participant, carries additional significance in relation to how fear of the unknown can influence destination choice.

> *"I've worked with quite a few students who have never even been to London before, and they're like, 'wow,' you know? It gets them out of their bubble.*

> *It opens their mind a little bit and helps them realise there's a whole world out there beyond their hometown."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

When asked about placement popularity, academics at both universities commented on the overwhelming preference for English-speaking countries, with the US, Australia and Canada being the most oversubscribed. Findings align with those from other scholars indicating how monolingualism can restrict choices for students in the Anglosphere, and illustrates the effects of how language learning during one's formative years increases both interest in and confidence for travelling to countries that are culturally and linguistically dissimilar to their own (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Tran, 2016).

> *"Everybody wants to go to Australia, wants to go to Canada, wants to go to the US, but we do have limited places there."* (Academic N, Old University, Law)

Success levels at steering such students towards other placements with English as an official language, such as Hong Kong or Singapore, were limited, while Scandinavia and the Netherlands were perceived as being a less intimidating prospect. These findings raise an interesting angle in regards to study abroad inequalities, and one that remains relatively underexplored from a UK context. While language proficiency, or lack thereof, has long been documented as a barrier to study abroad (Doyle et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2006), comparatively few scholars have acknowledged the obstacle of uneven access to language learning opportunities. These are generally determined by the type of school attended, with those in the most socioeconomically deprived areas being least likely to offer modern foreign language provision (King et al., 2011; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018), particularly since this ceased to be compulsory at GCSE level in 2004 (Brooks and Waters, 2015; Jeffreys, 2019). Access at university level is similarly unequal, with modern foreign language degree enrolment concentrated in academically selective universities (UniversitiesUK, 2022). While so-called 'languages for all' programmes are more widely available, albeit on a casual basis, these can be expensive, with costs ranging from £200 to £500, and therefore inaccessible to WP students (Bridger, 2015).

> *"Students tend to opt for safer destinations, which are ex-colonies that speak English. That's why Australia and the US seem to be more attractive. We have links in Hong Kong and Singapore, but even though the universities are English speaking, there's a lesser uptick because I think students are afraid. Perhaps Asia sounds a bit more foreign than Australia or the US."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

> *"Utrecht is one of our most popular European destinations. I think language has a lot to do with that. Students are aware that most Dutch people are fluent in English. When it comes to destinations like Germany, it's okay, but with France, it's a bit more difficult. Sweden is also quite popular, again because students assume everyone speaks English there."* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

Only one participant acknowledged this deterrent, or attempted to overcome it by subsidising language learning for students with limited financial means. Their efforts not only made language provision more accessible, but also allowed students to develop the confidence needed for navigating a non-English speaking country. This demonstrates the importance of pre-departure preparation, both for language survival skills and for familiarising students with the host culture, which consequently reduced fear of the unknown by making students aware of what to expect from an international experience (Conran, 2019; Leask et al., 2020). Findings should therefore be viewed as a best practice example of how to effectively facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students in general by tackling the cost barrier as well as the confidence barrier, and for increasing take up of less popular study abroad destinations more specifically.

> *"I managed to persuade the university to give us some money so that some of them could do language classes, so we got the fees paid that way. Some of them had taken a language at school, some of them just had no idea, but it really helped in terms of developing their confidence."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

The personal dimension of Wade and Demb's original Faculty Engagement Model (2009) offers greater insight into what might have motivated this particular participant to develop

such an intervention which, unlike Danjean's modified version (2017), considers the influence of background characteristics such as gender and ethnicity on study abroad involvement. Affinity characteristics could explain what shaped this choice of method, and how coming from a WP background themselves, as the above participant openly self-identified, may be an effective enabler for understanding – and more importantly, addressing – WP student concerns. Findings therefore align with those of other studies demonstrating the importance of shared backgrounds and experiences in the provision of constructive solutions on how to overcome the barriers to study abroad (Leask et al., 2020; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). This suggests that the more an academic is able to identify with WP students, the more likely they will be to know what practical advice and emotional support would be useful for encouraging those from under-represented backgrounds to pursue international opportunities (MacKay et al., 2021). Such academics not only offer valuable insight into what might cause WP students to self-exclude from study abroad, but can also recommend valuable solutions that can prevent them from doing so.

#### *4.2.2.2 Increased visibility of study abroad opportunities*

Unlike methods of facilitating placement uptake, methods of promoting and managing study abroad were found to be largely similar. When asked about how students received information about international opportunities, participants observed how both universities had begun shifting away from a subject specific approach managed by academic staff towards a centrally managed approach led by a dedicated study abroad office. Some commented on the positives of this change in how it had increased the consistency of support for students, thus enabling study abroad to be advertised more constructively.

> *"Individual departments had very different approaches, so the university moved the coordination of mobility to its central study abroad office. The idea was that there would be a more efficient and supportive approach for developing mobility for students, so you get more consistent information, more consistent access to funding support, etc. My sense is that the situation is much better for the students, with a centrally coordinated system supported by individuals in the department."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

The increasing centralisation of study abroad management, where study abroad offices take on more responsibility for the organisation of international activities, is broadly reflective of the overall shift towards centralisation of student and professional services – such as careers, marketing and recruitment – as universities have grown in size over the years (Poole, 2001). A coordinated approach to study abroad promotion appears to be rare, although a significant overlap was found in terms of awareness raising activities and information communication. Differences were also observed, however, regarding the degree of specialist advice on offer for assisting students with navigating the study abroad process, with study abroad office staff being better placed to advise on issues like travel arrangements, visa requirements and funding options than academics. Findings thus suggest that a centralised approach is more effective at making information more accessible, as although academics may have lived experience of this activity, their knowledge on logistics and practicalities is typically more limited compared to study abroad office staff (Bridger, 2015; Castro et al., 2016; Doyle et al., 2010).

Moreover, unlike academics who manage study abroad independently and without support at a departmental level (Courtois, 2017; Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Green and Olson, 2003; Jessani et al., 2020), responsibilities for managing study abroad are shared between the same team on an institutional level, which is generally more efficient. Findings indicate that the existence of established policies and procedures ensures that "core knowledge necessary to run an institution does not vanish with each departure", and makes it easier for a new staff member to take over their predecessors' role when they leave (Wolf and Jenkins, 2020, p. 21). This was not the case for academics, for whom existing guidance or templates for the role of study abroad advisor is rarely available (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Dewey and Duff, 2009), meaning that knowledge is often built up from scratch and consequently lost when staff members retire or move on to another institution (Savishinsky, 2012). From this perspective, then, good institutional practice may be more successful at study abroad promotion than individual academics adopting a trial-and-error approach to determine what works and what does not.

It could also be argued, however, that a centrally managed approach for raising awareness of study abroad is less effective than a targeted approach. While the former was able to advertise said activity on a wider scale among the student body as a whole, information made available was considered too generic to capture interest. This rarely reached students,

however, who participants noted had a tendency to ignore centralised emails and only pay attention to those from their department. Findings echo those by Ha et al. (2018), who attribute lack of regard for official communication channels to email overload, where the more messages students receive on a daily basis, the less likely they will be to engage with these.

> *"I recently discovered after talking to some of my students at one of our local events that they don't really see the centralised emails, so I send out a targeted one to all our first years now."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

This indicates that simply broadening exposure to study abroad is not enough to raise awareness, and that a more tailored approach is required to make information more visible. One academic noted how moving this to a platform that students would frequent to access course content and submit assessment, such as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), significantly increased the likelihood of them noticing its existence. Information was also made more appealing by adapting its original format derived from 'faceless' emails, in the words of another participant, to creative presentations. Findings therefore suggest that some modes of communication may be more effective than others at gaining student interest in study abroad, with visual content viewed as preferable to written exchange.

> *"When I asked some of my students if they'd seen the centralised emails, they said no, so clearly this wasn't reaching them. If it looks generic, then the students might ignore it, so I decided to take all the information from the resources they were sending to create a short presentation for our department. If you at least put the information on something they actually use, like VLE, then they're more likely to engage."* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

The above comment highlights the need to make details about study abroad as accessible as possible, particularly for WP students, who can find seeking these out alone to be overwhelming if universities expect them to be as self-directed with the information-seeking process as they are with their studies in general (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015). Receiving information about study abroad from a trusted source, whether that be an individual academic

who taught them for a certain module or from their department as a whole, was similarly identified as a more impactful enabler of engagement. This could be explained by how academics are a known entity that students interact with regularly through lectures and seminars, who they then feel more comfortable approaching than a random stranger from the study abroad office (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010).

> *"Me telling them about study abroad is better than a completely faceless marketing campaign, but organising something where students can speak to those who are currently studying abroad in a more informal way is even better."* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

Findings are therefore nuanced, as while a decentralised approach to study abroad promotion may enable academics to be more connected with – and aware of – student needs, it also disconnects them from what their colleagues in other departments might be doing, and thus prevents the sharing of both knowledge and best practice (Childress, 2010; Savishinsky, 2012). Findings also demonstrate the importance of developing positive staff-student relationships, and for the former to be proactive in conveying information about study abroad instead of waiting for the latter to take the initiative. Not all students have the confidence to do this, which is an issue rarely recognised in the literature (Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012), with only one participant acknowledging a reticence among WP students to make use of their time, despite being the named contact for study abroad. This could once again be explained by the concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and how those from under-represented backgrounds can find negotiating relationships with authority figures to be more challenging than their socially advantaged peers (Reay, Crozier and James, 2013).

> *"The students who come from quite affluent social backgrounds know they have a stake in this kind of game, so they're much more driven about approaching me because they don't have the kind of cultural barriers that other students would have. They don't think twice about getting in touch with me and using my time, but I think other students are a little bit more reluctant."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

This relates to how students without a family history of HE attendance also find it more difficult to navigate the unfamiliar social norms of university, such as being aware of office hours and what purpose these serve (Semper and Blasco, 2018). Institutional culture likewise affects their ability to form relationships with staff, particularly at academically selective universities where academics face more pressure to manage multiple demands such as research, teaching and administration, which can make them appear distant and unavailable (Breeze, Johnson and Uytman, 2020; Read, Archer, and Leathwood, 2003). If academics are perceived as being unapproachable, then students will be less inclined to reach out to them for guidance and advice on international opportunities (Lehmann and Trower, 2018; Umbach and Wawrynzki, 2005), which negatively impacts their likelihood of receiving a study abroad experience (Finger, 2014).

Who information about study abroad comes from should therefore be accounted for when considering the most effective platforms and approaches in which to deliver this. The majority of academics at both universities did precisely that by connecting current students with returnee students – those who had already spent time overseas – via networking sessions to talk about their sojourn. Peer endorsement is widely regarded as a cost-effective way of promoting study abroad (Bridger, 2015; Deakin, 2013; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), and gives those with an absence of social capital the opportunity to acquire this through information-sharing events (Wohn et al., 2013).

> *"I can talk about what I did during my student placement in the Netherlands, but that was 20 years ago, so not very relatable for the students. It kind of helps to talk to someone similar to their own age, you know, and hear about their experience."* (Academic G, New University, Business)

This comment highlights how academics might not be the most relatable source of information for WP students, despite being cited as a key influence in the decision to study abroad for this group (Amani and Kim, 2018; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Doyle et al., 2010; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). It also demonstrates the limitations of focusing solely on the academic perspective when considering what might be most effective at facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students. Confirmation bias could thus have been reduced by including

the WP student voice to determine the full extent to which academics shaped their interest in study abroad, or whether their peers played more of an influence. As discussed previously, however, a comparison between academics and WP students was beyond the scope of this thesis, given that gatekeeper and Covid restrictions prevented access to – and recruitment of – the latter stakeholder, although it would have significantly enhanced the validity of the study. Academics were at least aware of how their perspectives on study abroad could effectively be balanced out by utilising peer endorsement, which was viewed as being more credible and authentic (Beech, 2015) and a means of offering valuable insights that can only be drawn upon through lived experience of a certain phenomenon (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

> *"People can see that students like themselves have been engaging with this opportunity and have gained a really rich experience from it. I think that can sway opinion."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

> *"I think this is very effective because they talk about what really happens, like the difficulties of ordering food in a foreign language or how they found a place to live, but also about how they went skiing or where they went travelling. It's much more tangible, but it also makes it much more fun. Their enthusiasm is contagious."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

Knowledge transfer plays a key role in terms of the emotional support it offers for those who need the most encouragement to study abroad – namely students that have yet to detach from a familiar home environment (Beerkens et al., 2016; Daly, 2011; Netz, 2015) – who tend to be more apprehensive about separation from existing support networks (Bell, 2016; Deakin, 2013; Kinsella, Bossers and Ferreira, 2008). It also functions as a useful form of practical guidance for reducing anxieties over sourcing accommodation overseas or on navigating the application process (Brooks and Waters, 2010). Moreover, positive word-of-mouth recommendations have been shown to increase the popularity of undersubscribed placement destinations (Leask et al., 2020). Participants once again touched upon the challenge of convincing prospective applicants to consider non-English speaking countries, with demand for places in the US and Australia far outstripping supply, so student returnees were viewed as a valuable resource for increasing the attractiveness of places that would have otherwise been overlooked. Findings also indicate how pioneering a pathway to more atypical

destinations, such as Central and Eastern Europe, can enable WP students to try something unconventional if they see that someone like themselves has done this too (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015).

> *"It depends as well who the ambassadors are and where they went because they'll talk about 'oh, I went to Uppsala and it was amazing, it was really great,' or 'I went to Utrecht and it was amazing and it's great to live in the Netherlands,' blah, blah, blah. And then those destinations are really popular because they're the places the students pick up on and think, 'oh, a student went there and they had a great time.'"* (Academic N, Old University, Law)

> *"I had a huge uptake of interest in Estonia after one student came back and talked about it and said how cheap it was, which suddenly made it seem much more attractive. I had the same thing happen with Finland. It's really good for driving interest in some of the less obvious exchanges."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

Findings suggest that increasing the accessibility of certain locations is just as important as increasing the accessibility of study abroad itself, particularly for BAME students, who are more concerned with fear of racism or personal safety or, for those with religious needs, whether other countries will accommodate their dietary requirements (Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2009; Sweeney, 2013). They also align with those of other studies identifying the importance of student success stories for instilling the confidence to follow in their footsteps (Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016; UniversitiesUK, 2021), which participants identified as being pivotal for increasing study abroad uptake among those from under-represented backgrounds.

> *"We had a disabled student who went abroad and he came back to share his experience, which was really good for some of our other disabled students who never thought that it was something they could do. I even had a mature student a few years ago who studied abroad in the US with his daughter, you know, it's not an impossibility."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

> *"We've got a couple of students from under-represented backgrounds going abroad this year who would make excellent ambassadors for talking to that kind of community of people. I'm hoping they'll use their experiences to say, 'this is something I never would have envisaged or considered in the past, but I've gone and done it and had a really positive experience.' Just having the kind of people who can relate to those students is what we really need."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

This illustrates the importance of affinity characteristics for helping WP students to "reframe their perceptions" about what 'people like us' can accomplish (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015, p. 30) when a relatable role model dispels the myths and misconceptions that might have otherwise resulted in the decision to self-exclude themselves from study abroad (Bruce, 2012; Coldwell, 2013; Sweeney, 2013). Findings also demonstrate how, in line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), perceived similarity and compatibility plays a critical role in shaping an individual's choices and beliefs. There are a number of reasons why BAME students may need more encouragement to consider studying abroad in some destinations more than others. Findings by Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella (2011), for example, indicate that such students already struggle with feelings of marginalisation and the perception of being out of place as a minority at their own university, and often worry that their 'fish out of water' status would be even more exacerbated as a cultural outsider in another country. Ethnically homogeneous places such as East Asia or Eastern Europe are therefore viewed as an overwhelming and intimidating prospect.

While their study was conducted in the US, similar reservations may also be expressed among British students, as seen in how those from BAME backgrounds often base their application choices on the diversity of a university's intake. Fear of being 'othered' by the wider student population could explain why those from multicultural areas like London are reluctant to consider predominantly white university cities such as Durham or Exeter (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). If these students are apprehensive about moving to another city due to concerns of discrimination or racism, then they will likely be even more hesitant at the prospect of moving to another country. Giving students a positive example of someone like themselves who has already blazed a trail therefore increases the visibility of minority

participation in study abroad, and opens up an activity that might otherwise have been regarded as closed-off (Brux and Fry, 2010).

Meanwhile, other approaches to information provision included departmental talks and classroom presentations, both of which provided valuable opportunities for students to engage more actively by asking questions about what might interest or concern them the most (Deakin, 2013; Gray et al., 2018). Findings once again indicate the effectiveness of word-of-mouth promotion in raising awareness of study abroad, and for overcoming the information overload barrier that newly enrolled students typically experience upon arrival at university (Di Pietro, 2020; Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016; Leask et al., 2020).

> *"The primary thing is to make them aware of study abroad and kind of emphasise what a great opportunity it is to get them interested. I always do this during intro week, where I give a talk to the incoming first years, because many of them have no idea it exists. They receive a lot of information during that first week, so you know, some get it, some don't."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

Mode of delivery was found to carry additional significance for ensuring that information actually reached students in the context of Covid-19, with in-person interaction perceived by some participants as being more successful at generating interest in study abroad than remote promotion. Others valued the latter for its accessibility, and recognised that not all students would be willing or able to attend face-to-face events. Findings demonstrate the need to be mindful of how WP students are often less embedded in campus life due to work or family obligations (Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2018; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010), which makes them more likely to prioritise these commitments other socialising and extracurricular activities (Christie, 2007; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003), and thus impedes their access to information about study abroad (Carlson, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010).

> *"The past couple of years haven't helped either, as we've been doing a lot of promotion remotely. That's not as good as doing it face-to-face, where students could approach me after lectures instead. That's lost in a virtual environment."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

> *"The idea is to run different things at different times to suit different people. If you don't try to work out what the student body wants - to try and create a menu of options that are run by enthusiastic staff across the department - then nothing will change."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Treating information sessions as an optional extra that students can drop in and out of, or something that requires special effort to attend, will have limited appeal to those from under-represented backgrounds, so scheduling these before or after lectures may be more conducive to engagement (Van Mol and Perez-Encinas, 2022). Findings also suggest that academics should ideally utilise a suite of promotional methods to ensure that information is made available to all students, regardless of their personal circumstances (Trilokekar and Rasmi, 2011). This could be offered in blog post format, for example, in which study abroad ambassadors write about their time abroad (Bell, 2016), or on social media through Q&A (question and answer) discussion (Beech, 2015). Either way, this demonstrates the need for greater flexibility, and for consideration of whether non-traditional students benefit more from non-traditional outreach interventions.

The need to communicate information early was once again brought up by academics at both universities when asked about the timing of study abroad promotional campaigns. These typically take place in October, with applications opening in November and closing in January, and although participants did observe a lot of initial interest during these awareness raising events, they also noted that this tended to wane shortly afterwards. The gap between study abroad intent and study abroad uptake is widely documented in the literature, which could be explained by how placement deadlines coincide with end of semester assessment, and how most students prioritise the latter over the former (Deakin, 2013; Pope et al., 2014; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010). Study abroad promotion likewise takes place during a period of great upheaval when students are still navigating the transition from school or college to university, and thus more preoccupied with establishing friendship groups and support networks (Daly, 2011; Holton, 2018), which many later become reluctant to leave (Beerkens et al., 2016; Bridger, 2015; Netz, 2015).

*"You can see the difference when we do the initial briefing and you get quite a lot of students turn up, as opposed to the briefing to make the application."* (Academic G, New University, Business)

*"The campaign starts in September and applications open in November, so they've only had two months at university. The deadline is in January, and a lot can happen before then. Not all of them are confident, they're still settling into a new environment, so they can't even think about what they're going to do in their second year. I think that could discourage some students from applying."* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

Surprisingly few academics chose to overcome this hurdle by raising awareness of study abroad as early as possible, and before students even arrive at university. Open days were identified as the ideal opportunity not only to communicate information at the pre-application stage for prospective students, but also to engage with other key stakeholder groups such as parents and guardians. Increasing buy-in among parents was found to be critical, as those without experience of international travel, or of HE in general, may be more discouraging of study abroad, either due to concerns about their child's personal safety (Lee and Green, 2016; Lu et al., 2015; Penn and Tanner, 2008; Sweeney, 2013), the cost of a study abroad experience (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2015; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Robertson, 2019), or the availability of healthcare services abroad if they have disabilities (Kutsche, 2012; Link, 2016; Shames and Alden, 2005). The more informed and reassured they are, the more likely they will be to accept their child's desire to study abroad (De Jong, Schnusenberg and Goel, 2010; McClure et al., 2010; Whatley and Canché, 2022).

*"The first touch point would be before the students have even enrolled here, so on open days we talk about what our course offers in terms of outbound exchange, and we do get a lot of interesting questions around the international experience and the possibility of going abroad."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

*"If you get parents on board as well when the students are going home at Christmas saying, 'these are where I can go for my destinations,' the parents are aware. It's like a good all-round form of support for the*

> *students in making their decisions, which makes them more likely to go ahead if they've got the back up from their parents."* (Academic N, Old University, Law)

Findings suggest that gaining parental acceptance and support can make a difference to facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students, and while participants at Old University demonstrated good practice of this by engaging with them at information events, there are other ways of enabling this stakeholder group to be involved in the decision-making process. Robertson (2019), for example, recommends providing information targeted specifically at parents in both print and digital format, and ideally translated to accommodate those without English as their native language. Other scholars advocate for awareness raising events to take place earlier still, preferably while pupils are still in school, to expose them to the prospect of study abroad (Entrich, Netz and Matsuoka, 2024). These could resemble the type of outreach interventions used for encouraging young people in so-called cold spot communities to continue their studies and apply to university. Academics should therefore consider collaborating not only with the central study abroad office, but also their university's access service to partner with local schools to advocate for international exchange. Few, if any, HEIs have attempted to utilise this solution in the UK, which presents a valuable gap for future research and evaluation to assess what kind of impact such an activity might have for making study abroad more inclusive.

## 4.3 Perceived challenges of facilitating study abroad uptake for widening participation students

In accordance with the professional and institutional dimensions of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), attitudes towards study abroad were found to be largely determined by the level of ease or difficulty in which involvement with said activity was made possible by an academic's disciplinary and institutional affiliation. The personal dimension was also made apparent, with perceptions being influenced not only by an academic's own personal experience, but also by that of their students in terms of whether study abroad was perceived as having a positive or a negative impact on learning outcomes.

This section begins by exploring what drives academics to encourage – or discourage – their students to pursue international opportunities, along with the extent to which an international or non-traditional background influences understanding of the barriers to study abroad. It then considers the extent to which departmental and institutional priorities align with an academic's individual priorities, and how this influences not only willingness but also capacity to engage with study abroad. Finally, it considers how beliefs may be similarly shaped by the management and organisation of study abroad which, depending on curriculum flexibility and the selection process, can be more challenging for some academics than others.

### *4.3.3 Attitudes towards study abroad*

As anticipated, the personal dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) was found to significantly influence academic willingness to engage with study abroad, given that the vast majority of participants had lived, worked or travelled abroad, and were thus more likely to view study abroad in a positive light (Bridger, 2015; Green and Olsen, 2003; Hulstrand, 2009; Paus and Robinson, 2008). Many of them mentioned how they had either volunteered themselves or been volunteered to take on the role of study abroad adviser as a result of this.

> *"The former study abroad adviser is now the head of the department. She knew I'd studied abroad previously, so when they were looking for a replacement, she recommended me, and I was like, yeah, I'd be more than happy to do it and I would have volunteered for it anyway."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

> *"I was volunteered for the job, but there was a rationale behind it. It was mostly due to my European background and research interests. It means I put more enthusiasm into the role than just treating it as a job. It's important to me. I'm committed to the role from an academic and political perspective."* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

While findings align with those from other studies suggesting that academics who have experienced the benefits of an international experience themselves are more likely to encourage study abroad uptake among their students (Bridger, 2015; Green and Olsen, 2003;

Paus and Robinson, 2008), motivations for doing this differed depending on institutional affiliation and individual sociodemographics.

#### *4.3.1.1 Cultural connections*

International background was found to shape these among academics at Old University, where being born and educated overseas before relocating to the UK for employment appeared to shape their preoccupation with delivering the benefits of study abroad on a national level in the name of intercultural development. The need for broadening student horizons was perceived as being greater than ever in the context of Brexit, who unlike academics in Courtois and Veiga's study (2020), chose not to abandon the UK, despite it becoming a more hostile environment for EU citizens, but rather to strengthen ties with mainland Europe through the spirit of international exchange.

> *"I think a lot of the students already have quite an international outlook to begin with. Your average kind of shire born Brit is a little more parochial, to be honest."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

> *"I also think the current climate, with Brexit and everything, it's very important to make sure that Britain doesn't become too parochial. Interestingly, my colleagues in Europe see it this way as well. When I talk to them, they say, it's very important to keep these contacts to make sure the country doesn't turn too completely inward."* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

> *"The UK can be somewhat insular, you know? It's an island, and tends to be quite isolated. The typical problem we have with our students is that predominantly, they think about local examples. It's very difficult for them to see the world through the lens of a non-British example, so when they're exposed to other countries, the way they think about things can change completely, and that really strengthens them."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

This endorsement for greater global engagement is largely supported by the literature, which illustrates how exposure to other cultures can result in greater tolerance and increased openness to diversity (Black and Duhon, 2006; Clarke et al., 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Edmonds, 2010). Study abroad has been shown to be similarly effective in combating prejudice and reframing negative stereotypes (Anderson et al., 2006; Douglas and Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Kelleher, 2013; Maharaja, 2018), and for enabling students to better understand their own culture through comparison to others (Carlson and Widaman, 1988; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Janes, 2008). Unsurprisingly, but also in line with the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), attitudes among these participants were strongly aligned with the kind of liberal arts ethos promoted by academically selective universities that value critical thinking and a well-rounded education (Giedt, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Attitudes could also be explained by the professional dimension of this conceptual model in terms of disciplinary characteristics, and it was somewhat telling that all of the above participants, apart from one, were affiliated with the arts, humanities and social sciences, which are more likely to value the cultural outcomes associated with receiving a study abroad experience (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010).

Findings therefore offer an interesting comparison with those by Calikoglu, Lee and Arslan (2022), where foreign-born academics working in the US were equally driven to counter the negative impact of its geographical and cultural isolation by creating and maintaining links with other countries for their students. While insularity in the US could be attributed to its size and superpower status, the UK's inward-looking tendency is more commonly explained by a combination of exceptionalism and Euroscepticism, where right wing leaning politicians have long resisted European integration, and many British citizens are open about their lack of European identity (Leith et al., 2019). Applied from this perspective, Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) offers valuable insight as to what might influence the perceived challenges of facilitating study abroad participation among such academics. There was a sense of frustration over how difficult it could be to encourage the pursuit of international opportunities, and the language used to describe student attitudes towards study abroad, such as 'parochial' and 'insular', was clearly critical.

This demonstrates that while their motives for increasing take up may have been laudable, their understandings of the barriers that deter WP students from accessing study abroad were

limited by the scale of their outlook, which was global in nature, and left them struggling to comprehend a worldview focused solely on the local or regional level. A number of assumptions – many of them negative – were consequently made not only about their students, but also about study abroad outcomes. Adopting a more critical stance towards the latter rather than the former is called for, considering the growing number of studies that are beginning to question the general consensus of study abroad being purely beneficial.

Some scholars argue that, rather than becoming more understanding of different cultures, ethnocentric beliefs can actually become entrenched, not challenged (Chao, Kung, and Yao, 2015; Cots et al., 2016), if students refuse to interact with the host community and instead prefer to 'stick with their own kind' in an international bubble (Beech, 2017; Bell, 2016; Nada and Legutko, 2022). Destination choice may also impede intercultural development, particularly among students in the Anglosphere, given their preference for countries that are linguistically and culturally similar to their own (Doyle et al., 2010; King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Tran, 2016), which could explain why academics were so keen to encourage uptake of non-English speaking placements.

> *"Students prefer going to the safe bets of North America and Australia but I think they lose out on that cultural experience, so I always try to push European destinations."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Findings suggest that the act of study abroad itself is not enough to facilitate intercultural development, as where students go and what they do during the experience can either be conducive or unfavourable towards accepting and respecting other cultures. Findings likewise indicate the need for academics to further their understanding of what shapes the decision to self-exclude from study abroad – and how this relates to inequalities in HE more broadly – without passing judgement on why some students may be more reluctant to leave their comfort zones than others. Studies show that the students most likely to study abroad are those that have already been exposed to – and gained an interest in – different cultures during their formative years, either through school trips abroad of foreign family holidays (Carlson, 2013; Pope et al., 2014; Smith, Rérat and Sage, 2014). Those who have not partaken in similar experiences would therefore benefit from opportunities to connect them with international students, such as movie nights or global cafes, to foster socialisation and cross-cultural interaction (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015). Enabling all students to have an

international experience, regardless of whether they choose to become mobile or not, has become increasingly important to universities, hence the emergence of the internationalisation at home movement, or "developing global citizens without travel" (UniversitiesUK International, 2021, p. 7).

This also ties in with the professional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), and highlights the need not only to increase buy-in among students for realising the benefits of intercultural exchange, but also among academics. STEM affiliated staff are typically more sceptical of these than their counterparts in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Ahn, 2014; Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Giedt, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Green and Olson, 2003; McBurnie, 2000), but opinions can be swayed by helping them to see the value of international exchange by experiencing this for themselves (Childress, 2010). This could be done by encouraging them to take sabbaticals, attend overseas conferences or enhancing research collaboration with global partners (Klahr and Ratti, 2000; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012), and has arguably become more important than ever since the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus.

Its replacement – the Turing Scheme – is less financially generous in comparison, but while critique has focused largely on what impact this might have on student mobility, implications for academic mobility remain overlooked. Unlike its predecessor, Turing does not offer funding for staff placements, and while the scheme could potentially restrict international movement for students, it removes this altogether for academics. A unique gap thus becomes apparent for future scholars to explore, given that academic mobility is a relatively under-researched aspect of mobility in general. Academic mobility is also inextricably linked with student mobility, as the more interested and invested academics become in study abroad, the more likely they are to encourage their students to pursue international opportunities (Bridger, 2015; Green and Olsen, 2003; Paus and Robinson, 2008).

#### *4.3.1.2 Shared backgrounds*

Motivations for giving students an international experience at New University, on the other hand, were driven mainly to deliver the benefits of study abroad on an individual level, with emphasis on personal development over intercultural development. The transformative

aspects of an international experience were highly valued, and study abroad was viewed as a life changing opportunity for those from under-represented backgrounds. Findings demonstrate how study abroad enables such students to become more independent and self-sufficient, and equips them with the skills to cope with unfamiliarity and challenging situations (Courtois, 2017; Martinez, Ranjeet and Marx, 2009; Norris and Dwyer, 2005; Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra, 2014). These have been shown to increase retention rates and the likelihood of completing their degrees (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004), both of which are issues for concern, since WP students are at greater risk of non-continuation (Jerrim, 2014; Quinn, 2004; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2009; Yorke and Thomas, 2003), and suggests that those least likely to participate in study abroad stand to gain the most from this activity (Allinson, 2017; Universities UK, 2017).

> *"For some of them, the transformation can be amazing. You see them come back with a new perspective, and you can see it in their ability to handle things. Something will have gone wrong, but they've handled it. They've come out the other side, and this is even more obvious with the students who've never travelled before."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

> *"I went out to visit two of our students when they did a semester abroad in Berlin, and it was one of the best working days of my life. It was absolutely amazing, the things that they were saying. Neither of these girls had moved away from home for uni, they hadn't even lived in halls or anything, and then at graduation, the parents came up to me and said how much it had changed them. It was so lovely."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

When considering what might have shaped these attitudes, the personal dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) was found to be less insightful when applied to academics at New University, which unlike Wade and Demb's original framework (2009), does not consider the influence of sociodemographic characteristics on academic engagement with study abroad. Incorporating elements of gender, ethnicity and even parental education status would therefore allow a crucial light to be shed on why non-traditional

academics are more likely to facilitate the uptake of international opportunities for non-traditional students. Such academics tend to be more concerned with inequalities and social justice (Hull, 2013; Niehaus et al., 2018), and are also well placed to tackle student apprehensions regarding study abroad (Leask et al., 2020; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010). Shared backgrounds and identities could therefore explain why academics at New University demonstrated greater understanding of these, and why those at Old University struggled to develop this.

> *"I'm from a very working-class background myself. I'm the first in my family to go to university, so I really wanted to give these opportunities to students who are under-represented. You know, they're not from middle class families, they haven't got extra money, they've got caring responsibilities and all of that. I'm really quite passionate about giving the students as many opportunities as I can."* (Academic C, New University, Social Work)

> *"There is strength that I'm from an ethnic minority background and from a non-academic standard background myself, so I can relate to these students."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Findings also align with existing research highlighting the importance of affinity characteristics in reframing the perception of study abroad as something that is 'not for the likes of us' (Nguyen, 2014), and for convincing those from under-represented backgrounds to pursue international activities. Such students typically receive little encouragement to do this, either because of the assumption that they will be uninterested in – or unable to – study abroad (Ablaeva, 2012), or because their interaction with academics is limited to begin with (Read, Archer, and Leathwood, 2003). The latter point is especially pertinent, as the more students interact with academics, the more informed they will be about study abroad, and the more likely they will be to participate in said activity (Finger, 2014). This indicates a need to build not only relationships, but also trust and understanding. It can be difficult for WP students to approach an authority figure who they perceive as having little in common with, however (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and if they do not make use of tutor time through office hours or other information sessions, then they will be unlikely to learn more about

study abroad opportunities (Lehmann and Trower, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Umbach and Wawrynzki, 2005).

Findings suggest that the more relatable an academic is, the more approachable they will seem to WP students, and while this has been shown to increase connectivity – and by extension, study abroad participation rates (Brux and Fry, 2010; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012) – institutional culture could potentially diminish the element of affinity. While research-intensive universities are more internationally oriented and connected (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Di Pietro, 2020; Lörz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022), academics employed at these institutions also face more pressure to be scholarly productive (Courtois, 2017; Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Jessani et al., 2020; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012), which can be detrimental to establishing relationships with students. The study's chosen conceptual model therefore provides some unexpected insights into what might influence the perceived challenges of facilitating study abroad for academics, and how their capacity to become involved with this activity can either be enabled or constrained depending on their institutional affiliation.

Although academics at Old University were highly motivated to provide students with an international learning experience, they were also found to be more inhibited by institutional priorities. Those at New University, in contrast, were better placed to connect with students (Breeze, Johnson and Uytman, 2020), despite not having the financial and administrative clout required for facilitating study abroad uptake (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010; Zhang, 2011). Their university's emphasis on pastoral support and positive outcomes was surprisingly well suited for overcoming the barriers to study abroad, which suggests that understanding the student intake is pivotal for understanding – and tackling – what shapes the decision to self-exclude from international opportunities.

Shared backgrounds and identities carry additional significance when accounting for institutional characteristics, and how these may relate to study abroad outcomes. Social integration becomes relevant in this context, given what is known about why WP students prefer to attend universities that are culturally and ethnically diverse, and why fitting in with their fellow learners is so important to them (Ball et al., 2002; Clayton, Crozier and Reay,

2009; Munro, 2011; Raffe and Croxford, 2015). A critical view of previous papers extolling the benefits of study abroad should once again be taken, however, firstly by calling into question their representativeness. Findings by Young (2008), for example, conform with broader integration theory (Tinto, 1977) that links social belonging and persistence, and suggests that commuter students – those who are least integrated in the campus community and at the highest risk of dropping out – are more likely to complete their degrees when they have an international experience. Study abroad, they conclude, enables those who live at home to develop their social networks by offering greater opportunities for interaction among their peers and academics – albeit in an international setting, rather than a domestic one – both of which are positively correlated with retention.

The study's methodological limitations soon become apparent when accounting for how data was drawn only from one type of HEI – a private liberal arts university – and how this may have skewed the sample, given the type of student these typically attract. Findings may have been very different, had the author recruited from a community college, and casts some doubt over whether study abroad would have such a beneficial impact on those who are already socially and academically well integrated. This suggests that the greater a student's feeling of fit, the less isolated they will feel from the university as a whole, and thus the more likely they become to complete their studies. It also arguably creates a whole new barrier to study abroad, as the more social support a student has, the less willing they become to leave behind their friendship group for the prospect of an overseas sojourn (Beerkens et al., 2016; Daly, 2011; Hurst, 2019; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Netz, 2015).

> *"Often, they've lived at home all their lives. They've not even moved into student accommodation, so study abroad can be a big deal."* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

Questions should also be raised around other papers that associate study abroad with greater retention and persistence (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004) in terms of whether these benefits are experienced universally, or whether these vary depending on the type of programme participated in. WP students tend to prefer short-term stays, which are less expensive and less disruptive to their schedules and commitments (Gwost et al., 2021; Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014; UniversitiesUK, 2021), but may be less impactful than their long-term counterparts. WP

students are more likely to struggle with these in terms of homesickness and culture shock, though, which could potentially turn what should have been a positive experience into a negative one (Hull, 2013; Meier and Smith, 2016), and thus diminish the aforementioned outcome's effectiveness.

> *"I think they are definitely the more local students; they're rarely away from home. Sometimes this can be part of the drive to study abroad, because it's a challenge, but they're also the ones who suddenly have a crisis of confidence and drop out."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

While academics at both universities were similarly keen to push WP students out of their comfort zones, albeit for different reasons, comparatively little consideration was given to the need for those from under-represented backgrounds to be sufficiently supported during their time abroad (Bridger, 2015). This is reflective of the shift in broader WP policy from its original focus solely on widening opportunities to a more holistic approach encompassing all stages of the student lifecycle, from access, retention, attainment, and progression. Applying the same approach to study abroad is therefore recommended to ensure that WP students gain the maximum possible benefits from an international experience. As discussed previously, these are often assumed and thus in need of greater scrutiny, both to question the validity of claims made by existing research, and to equip students with the skills to succeed rather than expecting them to gain these automatically. In other words, this demonstrates the importance not only of understanding WP student needs, but also for providing encouragement, support, and guidance to facilitate study abroad uptake among this group.

However, support is still needed for academics to engage with study abroad just as much as students, which highlights one of the key limitations of this study – its self-selecting sample – in terms of how findings may not be entirely representative or generalisable of all study abroad advisors. It should thus be noted that not all academics who share a background with their students will be equally willing – or even able – to champion the cause of mobility, or that their commitment to social justice will automatically equate to encouraging the uptake of international opportunities over those closer to home. They may instead focus on other outcomes, such as facilitating WP students to develop their employability or become involved with other extracurricular activities. Findings consequently align with the literature

in that the choice to engage with study abroad is not purely personal, but rather one that can either be enabled or constrained by institutional priorities (Bridger, 2015; Hull, 2013; Niehaus et al., 2018). In short, their individual interests might not necessarily align with their professional responsibilities, particularly at post-1992 universities, which tend to emphasise career development (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010) over personal development (Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Stier, 2004).

Another limitation of focusing solely on the academic perspective, as this thesis did, is that barriers to study abroad are viewed only from their point of view, and not from that of WP students, although their claims are largely supported by institutional data. From this angle, academic perceptions at New University were found to be largely reflective of its most recent Access and Participation Plan – a publicly available document that details an HEI's outreach and intervention strategies (Office for Students, 2023) – where emphasis was placed firmly on ensuring student support and success. This document becomes even more relevant for explaining New University's commitment to continuation and progression over study abroad, given that over half of their intake was made up of commuter students.

This again raises questions over the validity of WP students as a measurement of analysis, which may have been broad enough to enable valuable recommendations to be made in this particular study in terms of how to effectively increase their study abroad uptake. It does, however, ignore the benefits of examining one specific subgroup in isolation, specifically commuter students, who remain overlooked in the field of study abroad inequalities (Young, 2008). Furthermore, if a university has a large percentage of commuter students, then it is entirely rational that they will also be more concerned with improving retention rates among this demographic, which is most at risk of non-continuation (Jerrim, 2014; Quinn, 2004; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2009; Yorke and Thomas, 2003), and which universities are increasingly being held accountable for addressing (Kinzie et al., 2008). While study abroad has been positively linked with greater persistence and would thus be of considerable benefit to this WP subgroup (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004), universities may prefer to prioritise wellbeing support and community building, while placing pressure – inadvertently or otherwise – on academics to improve overall success for their students, not on delivering a well-rounded education (Whatley and Raby, 2020).

### 4.3.2 Capacity to engage with study abroad

It should be noted that attitudes towards study abroad do not always fit neatly into clearly defined typologies like those of Childress (2010), where academics are either separated into the advocates camp or the sceptics camp. These tend to be more nuanced, and as Wade and Demb point out in their original Faculty Engagement Model (2009), highlight the need to consider not only what influences an academic's willingness to get involved with study abroad, but also what shapes their capacity or their opportunities to engage with said activity. What individual academics value and what their universities or departments value are not necessarily the same, suggesting that it may be more insightful to view the choice to engage with study abroad – or not – as being enabled or constrained by external factors, rather than a purely personal one.

#### 4.3.2.1 Resources and support

When considering how the professional factors of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) influence perceived challenges of facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students, departmental backing was identified as being a significant factor in enhancing opportunities. This was achieved at both universities through the introduction of targets to increase participation rates, which included creating new partner links and expanding the number of overseas placements. As expected, the more willing an academic is to champion the cause of mobility, the more likely students will be to study abroad (Deakin, 2013; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008). Findings also add further weight to scholarly work by demonstrating that supportive colleagues who encourage such endeavours can likewise make a positive difference to study abroad uptake (Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Dewey and Duff, 2009; Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019).

> *"We had a member of staff who was really enthusiastic about developing new partnership arrangements and keeping the goodwill going."*
> (Academic O, Old University, Law)

> *"I'm really lucky that my boss was a former diplomat from the British Council. He came into our department and said, 'this is a really nationally - maybe even a really regionally - focused department, we've got to change*

> *it.' That means we now have a staff base who have done study abroad, and I can see there's a huge difference now in terms of the number of students wanting to do it."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Things were somewhat different at a university-wide level, and in line with the institutional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), capacity for supporting students to have an international experience was largely determined by the availability of administrative infrastructure. Unsurprisingly, this was found to be more abundant at Old University, and highlights how less intensive tasks, such as running marketing campaigns and information sessions, can lighten the workload burden when this is shared between colleagues (Barbour, 2021; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010).

> *"I have a professional member of staff who supports me with the admin side of things. She's been fantastic, she's very familiar with all the procedures. The two of us work together really well."* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

This was not the case for everyone, however, as some academics found the role of study abroad adviser to be more challenging than others. While these participants did acknowledge that their workload ebbed and flowed, as opposed to being constantly demanding, they still admitted to feeling overwhelmed at times and in need of greater support in order to fulfil their duties. These findings are consistent with existing research that sheds light on how many academics are often left to engage with study abroad alone and without sufficient support or resources, which can make the role more demanding and time-intensive (Castro et al., 2016; Criswell and Zhu, 2015). This indicates the need to consider not only how academics can support study abroad participation for under-represented students, but also how academics themselves can be supported in facilitating the uptake of international opportunities to prevent the risk of burnout and ensure sustained engagement (Savishinsky, 2012).

> *"I did find it quite time-consuming. I also have to combine this with my other duties, like dealing with admissions or handling open days, so I end up with a lot of administrative duties. My time for research is eaten into as a result of that."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

> *"It can get challenging at times, but then it slows down again. As always, there never seem to be enough hours. I'm hoping that this can be increased. I've tried to ask for that. You tend to manage, you know?"* (Academic H, New University, Journalism)

Rather than expecting departmental colleagues to share the workload, assistance from a dedicated study abroad team for the promotion of international opportunities could potentially free academics up to focus on sourcing or vetting potential partner locations, approving applications and providing guidance and support to students (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Leask et al., 2020). Once again, however, institutional differences come into play when accounting for how research-intensive universities typically have larger study abroad offices than teaching-focused providers, which consequently restricts their ability to market and organise study abroad (Courtois, 2017). Differences in ranking and status likewise determine the availability of financial resources, as the more money a university brings in from endowments and alumni donations, the more people they can employ to centrally manage study abroad (Zhang, 2011).

The factor included by Wade and Demb in their original Faculty Engagement Model (2009) – the influence of institutional status – which Danjean removed from their modified version (2017) is therefore significant for explaining why scholars are increasingly beginning to acknowledge the role of university characteristics in enabling or restricting study abroad opportunities (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Di Pietro, 2020; Lörz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022). Attention should likewise be given to what determines the level of ease or difficulty in which academics can engage with study abroad, which again ties back to support. A key risk of working in isolation was identified by participants at both universities in terms of how this prevents knowledge from being lost, and increases the difficulty of incorporating new strategies or evaluating existing ones for further improvement.

> *"I'd be really interested to see what everyone else is doing. You hear about stuff anecdotally and I attend events, but you don't get to sit down and look at the data."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

> *"I don't know what other departments are doing, whether they're more proactive and have a more positive messaging strategy."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

This issue was especially pressing for academics who had built up knowledge from scratch, often through trial and error over what works best and what does not, and corresponds with findings from other scholars highlighting the barrier to entry for study abroad advisers, with guidance and templates being limited or absent entirely (Savishinsky, 2012). It also demonstrates the need for sustained engagement, where knowledge, once gained, is then passed onto the next academic who takes on the role of study abroad adviser when the current one steps down to prevent this from becoming lost.

> *"When I first came here, there was nothing. It quickly became clear that this wasn't working, because there were many students that could actually benefit from it, so I started doing different things. Over time, I've developed things that I know work, but it wasn't it wasn't instantaneous, obviously. I've created a very good platform for our department, so I hope that whoever takes over carries on, but you have to find the right people that are willing to put the time and the effort to make this happen. I don't have a feeling that most departments appreciate this, so I think it falls under the radar."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

Findings therefore recommend sharing best practice examples through workshops and resources (Childress, 2010), as creating opportunities for academics and other study abroad professionals to learn from each other would not only help to break down the discipline divide, but also barriers to international opportunities for under-represented students. Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup (2016) similarly advise rotating the role of study abroad adviser throughout the whole department to minimise knowledge loss from departure or retirement, and ensure the survival of any programmes or partner links their predecessors helped to establish.

#### *4.3.2.2 Competing priorities*

The mismatch between an academic's personal priorities and those of their department, meanwhile, was found to actively impede study abroad engagement for a number of participants. Many of these were under pressure to raise their departmental profile – often at the expense of study abroad – and instead focus on targets and metrics. In line with the institutional factors of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), pressure to raise their individual profile was also acknowledged, with the competing demands of research, teaching and administration leaving little time for extracurricular activities such as study abroad (Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet 2020; Jameson et al. 2012). Findings likewise lend support to those from other scholars demonstrating how study abroad engagement carries little in the way of incentives or professional benefits, particularly if this takes time away from what is rewarded such as publications and presentations (Courtois, 2017; Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Jameson et al. 2012; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012).

> *"The problem with so many of these things is tutor time. We're under huge amounts of pressure financially and so it's one of those things that would be nice to have, but who's got time to do it? In terms of our core programme, what we do works. If we had more money, more staff time, it'd be fantastic to do, you know, really nice summer schools."* (Academic J, Old University, Architecture)

> *"I think I'm supposed to dedicate about 50 hours per year. That includes the marketing, the guest lectures, and liaising with the students, so that 50 hours quickly is quickly reduced to not much. In addition to these admin-related roles, I've also got research time, I've got my teaching commitments, so it is a balance."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

While Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) offers a useful explanation of how institutional promotion policies can diminish willingness to become involved with study abroad, it might not be entirely applicable to other cultural contexts. Among the professional domain, rank and tenure status is more likely to constrain study abroad engagement among academics in the US, where Danjean's research was conducted, whose positions have grown increasingly casualised and precarious (Batterbury, 2008; Dnes and Seaton, 1998). Early career status may also play a role in this context, and indicates how

study abroad engagement can be counterproductive for junior academics if this is not acknowledged by their universities (Green and Olson, 2003; Moseley, 2009).

Although the influence of rank was not explored in this thesis, its chosen conceptual model still provides valuable insight into what might shape the perceived challenges of facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students from a UK perspective. Tenure may have been abolished in 1988, but job security has since become more tenuous, with fixed-term or zero hours contracts being viewed as the norm in academia (Wolf and Jenkins, 2020). Future exploration would therefore benefit from comparing both countries to determine whether study abroad engagement is as unattractive to early career researchers in the UK as it is in the US, or whether the situation may be more nuanced than initially theorised.

This would also reflect how findings for the influence of tenure status on study abroad engagement remain mixed, such as those by Niehaus et al. (2018), who argue that the likelihood of involvement is higher among early career researchers than those who are already established, as these may face higher teaching loads and greater pressure to publish, but are also less burnt out by years of scholarly productivity demands. Other scholars (Raczkoski and Robinson, 2019) counter that senior academics can simply delegate certain responsibilities and thus devote more time to their own interests, such as study abroad. Willingness to engage with study abroad may, however, be influenced more by employment type than employment security, and thus suggests that this is easier for those on teaching-only or research-only contracts. Academics employed on teaching and research contracts, as is still the norm in the UK, have to juggle multiple demands, which presumably makes study abroad engagement more difficult. A European-wide comparison would yield even more interesting results, as while precarity has become more common in English-speaking academia, job security in countries like Germany is still relatively safeguarded (Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet, 2021). This also highlights the limitations of previous studies on this topic, which are overwhelmingly Anglocentric in nature, and creates a basis for future research to investigate whether career status is equally influential – or not – for explaining willingness to engage with study abroad in other cultures.

Precarity carries further significance in terms of how study abroad engagement is not just unrewarded – and as such, becomes "contingent upon the availability and 'goodwill' of individual staff" (Breeze, Johnson and Uytman, 2020, p. 30) – but also unevenly distributed.

While findings do reflect how outreach and pastoral work in academia more generally tends to be casualised and feminised (Greider et al., 2019; Guarino and Borden, 2017; Holmes et al., 2008; Morley, 2013), the male dominated sample of this study would appear to suggest otherwise. This does, however, raise an interesting question over which demographic is more likely to be involved with study abroad, as although the gender imbalance in study abroad participation among students has long been recognised, whether or not a similar gender imbalance in study abroad engagement among academics exists is yet to be observed. As before, the focus of this thesis was on comparing institutional characteristics, not personal background characteristics, but this does present considerable novelty and scope for future research to investigate in regards to both gender and career status.

### 4.3.3 Organisation of study abroad

As touched upon previously, and in line with Wade and Demb in the original Faculty Engagement Model (2009), the choice to engage with study abroad is not solely a personal one based on an academic's own values and beliefs, but rather one that can either be enabled or constrained by factors beyond their control. This section explores how an individual's capacity to engage with study abroad is firstly influenced by disciplinary affiliation, which can be more challenging for some academics than others. It then investigates how attitudes towards study abroad are shaped from an institutional perspective in terms of how said activity is managed and organised, and the extent to which this may exacerbate existing inequalities.

#### 4.3.3.1 Curriculum constraints

Findings correspond with the professional dimension of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017), and are widely reflective of the literature in that STEM academics tend to view study abroad less favourably than their counterparts in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; Twombly et al., 2012), and are also less likely to encourage the take up of international opportunities among their students (Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008).

> *"I know that some of my colleagues don't get the time and the resources to devote to study abroad. Some departments, especially in STEM, don't even*

> *have a named person as their dedicated study abroad adviser, so it's not really surprising that students are never encouraged to take part if their department doesn't see it as important."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

While this is typically attributed to prioritisation of discipline specific research and technical skills over the soft skills associated with study abroad (Giedt, Gokcek, and Ghosh, 2015), findings also suggest that curriculum flexibility plays a more significant role in explaining their resistance. These highlight a key limitation of the study's chosen conceptual model in that Danjean (2017) does not account for how reluctance to engage with study abroad may likewise arise from disciplinary constraints, which determine the ease or difficulty in which students on these subjects can study abroad. Adding this factor would therefore enable a better understanding of why STEM academics might be less willing to facilitate study abroad uptake.

Attitudes would be better explained by how knowledge in STEM is sequentially structured, and requires specific prerequisite modules to be passed before a learner progresses onto the next level of study (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010). As such, the need to confirm that learning outcomes are appropriate makes organising overseas placements both challenging and time-consuming for academics in these disciplines, unlike those in the arts, humanities and social sciences, whose course content is more easily transferable to other countries and contexts (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2018).

> *"It seems like there's much more flexibility in other departments regarding which modules students can choose at certain points of their degree, and they don't really build up in the same way. Each module is quite separate, whereas we will have lots of prerequisites for some of our modules, so if the students haven't taken these already, then they won't have a clue what I'm talking about."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Findings are also consistent with those by Salisbury et al. (2009) and Stroud (2010), and demonstrate how the need to ensure a close match between the home institution syllabus and that of the host institution is even more critical for specialised degrees with professional

accreditation requirements, such as Architecture and Engineering, which further limits options for their students as to where – and when – they can study abroad.

> *"We have to meet RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) criteria, which is extensive, so there's not a lot of room for manoeuvre."* (Academic J, Old University, Architecture)

> *"They need to have those prerequisites, but also, if they don't cover the right spread of subjects, then they lose their BCS (British Computer Society) accredited degree, which means that they wouldn't automatically get consideration to be a chartered engineer later on in life unless they filled in the gaps."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

These constraints did not negatively influence willingness to engage with study abroad for all STEM affiliated participants, however, and while findings do align with recommendations by Bridger (2015) for such academics to consider alternative methods of enabling placement uptake, rather than fixating on mapping course content, this method was only adopted by a handful of interviewees. Their solution was to place a student's home learning 'on pause', so to speak, and let them choose modules at the host university to suit their interests, as opposed to matching professional benchmarks. These were then assessed on a simple pass/fail basis, without any grades contributing towards their degree classification.

> *"It'll be intercalated, or fall between the middle year and final year, so extending the degree then basically by year. That will solve all the problems related to accreditation and make it much easier for people to go abroad and pick whichever modules they like, just for the experience of going abroad. That's the upside. The downside is, of course, it's an additional year."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

> *"We don't map our accreditation criteria to the semester abroad, so this gives our students the flexibility to go abroad. It'd be impossible to precisely match our course content with our overseas partner institutions anyway, so it doesn't matter as far as the professional body is concerned.*

*They have to pass the module, but it doesn't count towards their final award."* (Academic B, New University, Architecture)

This participant's approach was arguably made possible by only sending students abroad for a semester, which was perceived as being less disruptive to their overall qualifications than a year abroad might have been. It could also explain why similar attempts made at Old University to overcome the barrier of curriculum inflexibility were less successful, where the only option available for STEM students to have an international experience was through an extended year abroad. This was admittedly unpopular, however, as students in these subjects tend to be employability-minded (Giedt et al, 2015; Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014), and can be reluctant to prolong their studies at the expense of delaying their entry into the labour market (Courtois, 2017; Findlay et al., 2006; Spiering and Erikson, 2006).

Short-term stays may be more palatable to those who are concerned with time-to-degree, particularly if this is made relevant to both their course and their career goals, which suggests the need to look beyond the usual summer school offerings and instead consider overseas internships or global research-based activities. All three stakeholder groups – academics, students, and universities – could therefore benefit from diversifying these programmes but also their perspectives on what the purpose of study abroad should entail. Inflexible curriculums require flexible interventions, and as Erasmus demonstrates, study abroad does not only have to function as a purely academic endeavour, but rather one that offers a wide variety of opportunities to foster international exchange.

Wider institutional policy and practice should also be considered in terms of how partner links are developed, and what impact this might have on attitudes towards study abroad among academics. How study abroad is managed – and by whom – is significant when considering that this process has become increasingly centralised over the years, which has led to academics having less autonomy to establish international networks, vet overseas institutions or enable adaptable decision-making as to what would be most appropriate for their students (Wolf and Jenkins, 2020).

*"We've got quite highly international staff within our departments and developed links through their relationships that they've got with overseas*

*universities, so it was very organic in that process."* (Academic F, New University, Business)

How positively centralisation – and the removal of control from individual departments – was received by academics appeared to vary. Some viewed this more favourably than others for reducing the pressure to redress the imbalance between incoming and outcoming students, and also appears to align with the then Conservative government's rationale for withdrawing from Erasmus by opening up global opportunities, rather than remaining EU-focused, which they perceived as benefiting mainland European students more than British-domiciled ones (Lewis, 2023).

*"I did manage to develop quite a few partner links from my own personal connections, but after a few years of every individual department making their own agreements, the university decided that this was just too unmanageable, so they said, no, you're not doing that anymore. We now have a dedicated study abroad office who organise placements. It balances the numbers better though, because sometimes we'd be sending a bunch of our students but never getting any back, and vice versa."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

Others were more negative about this being used as a way of managing participant numbers, however, and were largely resistant to the centralisation of study abroad management. As indicated in the comment below, retaining control of their own partner links gave them the flexibility to increase – or decrease – placement numbers as required, unlike the study abroad office which had only a fixed amount of these and would thus reject any unsuccessful applicants rather without considering their extenuating circumstances, by negotiating directly with their personal contacts to send more students if needed.

*"A lot of this is becoming centralised now, and the study abroad office is trying to streamline the process. This is a blessing on one hand and a curse on the other, because of the lack of flexibility it gives us in terms of European destinations. I think it's moving towards our department supporting the central study abroad team, rather than taking the initiative and doing our own thing. What I'd often do is get in touch with one of our*

> *European partners and say, 'we have 3 or 4 places with you, can you accommodate one or two more students?' And in many cases, they'd say yes."* (Academic Q, Old University, History)

Concerns were also raised by academics over how centralisation may have caused study abroad to become less attractive to their students after losing partner links which they had developed organically, and with student interests in mind, to less bespoke options offered by the main study abroad team. As indicated previously, students from both under-represented backgrounds (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) and from under-represented disciplines (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Ramakrishna, Sarkar and Vijayaraman, 2016) are often more concerned with employability, so making study abroad more appealing by offering international work placements can be an effective way of facilitating uptake (Allinson, 2017; Bridger, 2015; Twombly et al., 2012).

> *"We developed it through personal links, basically. It's not a university-wide thing, it's specific to a set of courses at our end and a set of courses at their end. They can also apply for all the university-wide schemes, but our students don't do that. It's relatively easy for them to do these exchanges because we present them with a ready-made package, if you like, of six months studying at a university and a six-month internship. Anything else feels like it would water down what is working incredibly well for us in our department at the moment."* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

> *"We found people with good work and connections, like, we had one lawyer who has a really big international reputation and works for firms across the globe. He could get placements for students, but he could also get firms to sponsor these placements so that students got paid. That's the platinum level of what we do. It's always very bespoke, we're always concerned about getting the right students in the right places, so it is very resource intensive, but it works well."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

Findings thus align with other studies indicating that centralisation generally results in partner links chosen not by academic staff based on what might benefit their students on an

individual level in terms of outcomes or satisfaction, but by administrative staff based on what might benefit their university on an institutional level in terms of profit or reputation (Courtois, 2019). However, while centralisation appears to have diluted the ability of academics to be more responsive to their students' needs, it could also be argued that centralisation has been more successful at reaching the student body as a whole, at least in relation to study abroad promotion. As such, centralisation is not entirely negative, given that some departments are not only larger but also more well connected than others (Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Dewey and Duff, 2009; Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019), which arguably helps to widen study abroad opportunities rather than concentrating these solely among the most successful departments.

#### *4.3.3.2 Selection process*

Both disciplinary affiliation and institutional affiliation were found to influence attitudes towards study abroad in terms of eligibility criteria, with the majority of academics preferring to allocate overseas placements based on academic performance. In line with previous studies, access was restricted to the strongest students to ensure that they could cope with the challenges of an international sojourn (Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016), while selectivity was also perceived as a crucial risk management strategy for preventing any detrimental impact on achievement upon their return (Nerlich, 2021; Whatley and Raby, 2020).

> *"Grades are a rough criterion for exclusion, so we expect an average of 60% or above. The grade is an indication of someone's commitment and seriousness, and also how well they're doing, because we wouldn't want to send anyone struggling."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

> *"The main thing is making sure they can handle the workload, because the cultural appeal of going to a different university often can take over the study. They have too much of a good time, basically."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Findings therefore contrast with normative assumptions in the literature that study abroad delivers only positive learning outcomes in terms of attainment (Findlay et al., 2006;

Malmgren and Galvin, 2008), but while some academics attributed its damaging ramifications to a student's own experience in which leisure and enjoyment are prioritised over education (Waters and Brooks, 2010), others associated this more with the intellectual rigour of an overseas institution (McBurnie, 2000).

> *"You see the academic performance of some of the incoming international students and that's a real worry, because you think, if this is the standard for other schools of Architecture - they could be in France, Belgium, Canada, wherever - sending our students out there could be quite dangerous. We don't get to vet the overseas schools - it's all run centrally by the study abroad team - so we don't have much quality control over where our students go."* (Academic J, Old University, Architecture)

These concerns may have arisen from an inability to vet receiving universities at departmental level due to placements instead being coordinated by their university, thus removing any control to maintain standards and highlighting the undesirable consequences of centralising study abroad organisation. Conversely, academics who had managed to retain control over their partner links expressed greater levels of confidence that study abroad would not have any negative effects on student achievement. This did, however, require more effort not only to match course content between the home and host institution – which, as observed previously, is more difficult for STEM subjects (Bridger, 2015; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010) – but also to match course quality.

> *"We want the students to have a similar learning experience with all the advantages of learning in a different country, but we want them to receive a similar level of teaching. It's something we pride ourselves on, really, and when I looked into establishing partnerships for the year long programme, I spent a long time going through the syllabus of the different universities to see if they could offer a very similar degree."* (Academic M, Old University, Journalism)

Findings suggest that the type of partner link attended can improve academic performance when students are assigned to universities of equal or higher ranking and status (Czarnitzki, Joosten and Toivanen, 2021), and as indicated in the below comment, explains the rationale

for sending only students with the highest grades abroad, who are then 'pushed' to excel further still after having covered more advanced material.

> *"We don't tend to find that our students go abroad and are like, oh, it's so easy here, and feel as though they're not being pushed. It's always the other way around. They'll get there and they're quite shocked at how difficult it is, so we're never really worried about the scientific rigour. All of our partners have good standing."* (Academic L, Old University, Physics)

Academics in the arts, humanities and social sciences, conversely, linked improved performance with a difference in teaching cultures and pedagogic practice. One participant discussed how some students found the continuous assessment approach favoured among US universities more beneficial for their learning than the UK's end of year assessment emphasis. The American HE system also incentivises regular attendance through additional course credit and offers more contact hours in general, even for those on less intensive subjects, which may be advantageous to students who struggle with the British focus on autonomy and self-reliance. This includes those from under-represented backgrounds, for whom the transition from further to higher education – and subsequent shift from structure and support to independent learning – can be more challenging than their academically well-prepared peers (Breeze, Johnson and Uytman, 2020; Christie, Barron and D'Annunzio-Green, 2013; Pike and Harrison, 2011).

> *"Some of them just squeaked into getting a place, but then they come back with really good grades because they're like, I'm abroad, I want to work harder, so their grades go up as a result. This tends to happen to those who go to places like North America where there's a much stricter attendance policy and they have pop quizzes, which keeps them on top of things and forces them to learn."* (Academic E, New University, Psychology)

Findings consequently support those of Cardwell (2020) and Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra (2014) by demonstrating how a change in learning environment enables students to learn new study skills and strengthen existing techniques. Freedom to experiment – and to take a break

from the everyday stressors of studies at home – may likewise result in students feeling more refreshed and better prepared to take on their final year (Courtois, 2017).

> *"You can see a big change in the students when they come back. Their attitude towards studying is more professional. They definitely step up."* (Academic G, New University, Business)

> *"When grades count, it puts more pressure on them, so experience has shown that those on the extended programme tend to have more fun and perform even better, because they are under less pressure."* (Academic P, Old University, Politics)

Academic achievement could, however, be determined by the type of study abroad programme participated in and, more importantly, how said activity is assessed. The extended year abroad model, for example, is marked on a pass/fail basis, which some students might not take seriously if grades are not counted towards their final degree classification, and instead of working harder, just coast through the experience (Merva, 2003). Questions should also be raised as to whether the duration of a study abroad programme determines attainment, given how short-term stays offer less time and fewer opportunities for students to try different learning strategies than, say, a semester abroad. This may explain why some academics were more cautious when asked about study abroad outcomes, as while a positive difference in attainment had, for the most part, been observed, they were unable to confirm whether this was solely a result of having received an international experience or the self-selecting nature of their placement allocation.

> *"We tend to see that they're more successful in their studies as well. I only say that because you see their grades going up. Whether this happens because they're developing that way naturally or if it's the international experience, I don't know, but we do see them perform well and do better on the back of it."* (Academic D, New University, Law)

The latter is significant, and corresponds with how scholars are beginning to cast a more critical eye over the generalisability of previous studies (Twombly, 2012). If the students who study abroad were high achievers to begin with, then it is entirely logical to assume that they

would have continued this trajectory and graduated with the best grades, regardless of whether or not they choose to have an overseas sojourn (Czarnitzki, Joosten and Toivanen, 2021; Nerlich, 2021). Learning outcomes are not always correlated with prior academic performance, however, as demonstrated by one of the few academics who did not restrict access based on grades. They instead put forward what would have been considered 'weak' performers, whose scores were in the 40s and 50s (the percentage required for third-class or lower second-class honours), rather than the preferred 60s and 70s (the percentage required for upper second-class and first-class honours). Tellingly, this participant was affiliated with a post-1992 university, who was more willing to trade the risk of sending students who could have struggled to cope on their own overseas for the reward of providing them with a transformative experience.

> *"We've definitely had students going with grade percentages in the 40s and 50s, and then they come back and get a first. It's just those life skills that they gain, the time management, they're learning about themselves. You can't put a price on that."* (Academic A, New University, Computer Science)

This was a surprising finding, and one that contradicts those from previous studies indicating that even teaching-focused universities typically restrict access based on academic performance and not on student interest, as opposed to applying the same open access policies they use with general admissions to study abroad for the sake of making said activity more inclusive and accessible (Whatley and Raby, 2020). Although not explicitly explored at interview stage in this study, findings could be explained by how scholars in the field of study abroad inequalities are beginning to criticise this method of placement allocation for discriminating against socially disadvantaged students (Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; van Mol, 2022). It also raises the question of whether access should be determined by academic potential rather than academic achievement, which is an issue worthy of further exploration in the study abroad context, given what is already known about the impact a student's personal circumstances and background characteristics can have on academic performance from a broader WP perspective. In contrast, however, one participant at Old University who faced a similar problem in deciding whether to widen or restrict access to prospective applicants from WP backgrounds ultimately chose not to take the risk of sending them abroad, despite the benefits they could potentially have gained from this.

> *"It's a shame because this was someone who'd come through our foundation year, you know, not necessarily a standard route. There may have been some issues due to a leave of absence and having to repeat some modules. They were very enthusiastic about going on a year abroad, they did the module matching extremely well. Unfortunately, they scored in the 40s at the end of first year, so although they passed, we weren't happy to let them loose in a foreign country."* (Academic K, Old University, Computer Science)

As discussed previously, non-traditional students face multiple competing demands such as work commitments and caring obligations (Callender, 2003; Davies et al., 2008; Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Reay, 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), or health issues for those with disabilities (Shames and Alden, 2005), and thus have less available time to study than their traditional peers, whose grades may not be a true reflection of their actual ability (Christie, 2007; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009). In other words, university is not a level playing field, nor is the admissions process, although this has changed over recent years to consider a student's future academic potential, as opposed to evaluating them based solely on past academic performance. Reduced standard offers, where high-tariff universities lower their entry requirements for non-traditional applicants, are now one of the most commonly used tools for widening access, albeit one that faced considerable backlash when first introduced (Boliver et al., 2017). While some assert that grades are a necessary filtering mechanism for preventing academically unprepared students from struggling at the most selective institutions, others counter that they can actually thrive and even outperform their privileged peers (Gorard et al., 2006).

It could be argued, then, that past performance is not always an accurate prediction of future performance, and indicates that a change in learning environment – whether this be from a school rated as 'requiring improvement' or merely the preferred teaching cultures of a university – can make all the difference to WP students. Applying the same contextualised admissions process to study abroad as is used in general university outreach interventions could widen access to international opportunities by moving away from existing merit-based selection towards a needs-based consideration. This would, however, present a number of challenges, the first of which ties in with how the study abroad application timeframe tends to

coincide with the end of semester assessment period (Deakin, 2013; Pope et al., 2014; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2010).

> *"In first year, it's also a matter of I don't know you yet. I have your A Level grades but I don't know whether you'll survive the first year of university, so if you're looking to study abroad, then you need the right skills."*
> (Academic I, Old University, Aerospace Engineering)

As demonstrated by the comment above, academics have limited information available from which to review how well a first-year student is performing this early in their time at university, and while alternative eligibility criteria are often used in conjunction with grades, such as short essays, these may disadvantage some applicants over others. Similar criticisms have been faced by UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) in terms of how not all students receive the same level of coaching and guidance required to write a strong personal statement, or the written account supporting one's choice of course and university, which will instead be replaced in 2025 with a guided question format (Khalil, 2024). This sheds light on the ethical problems associated with needs-based allocation, such as data protection and the sharing of sensitive personal information with academics, which universities are not always willing to allow access and students are not always willing to divulge.

It also highlights how much additional work would be required to assess an applicant's measure of social disadvantage, which many academics already struggle to manage alongside the competing priorities of teaching, administration and research (Courtois, 2017; Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Jessani et al., 2020; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012). Whether applying a contextualised admissions process to study abroad is even feasible or realistic in the context of an HE sector in crisis should also be considered, given the threat of job cuts and redundancies that academics currently face (Foster and Gross, 2024; Williams, 2024). Ultimately, findings demonstrate the need for further research and evaluation of existing study abroad organisation strategies, along with greater collaboration between individual academics, study abroad offices and outreach departments for the potential trialling of widening access interventions.

## Summary

This chapter examined three main themes drawn from the fieldwork stage of the thesis, where interviews with academics were conducted between October 2021 and March 2022. Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) was combined with Bourdieusian Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) to illustrate: (a) why there is a need for academics to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students, (b) how academics can facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students, and (c) what enables or constraints academics from facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students.

The first theme discussed academic understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students. These were found to be largely influenced by institutional factors, with differences in student demographics playing a significant role in determining their level of resources for, familiarity with and information about study abroad. New University's regional intake was unsurprisingly observed to possess limited economic, cultural and social capital stocks compared to Old University's national intake, which therefore increased the difficulty of encouraging WP students to consider the idea of study abroad. Departmental factors also impacted the choice for many of these to self-exclude, given their preference for STEM and vocational subjects, which may be more visibly linked with employment, but are less aligned with study abroad than their arts, humanities and social sciences counterparts. Pragmatic and emotional decision-making was noted at both universities, where risk aversion over the prospect of detaching from existing support networks and giving up stable part-time employment increased the difficulty of pushing students out of their comfort zones.

The second theme highlighted strategies used by academics to increase study abroad access for WP students. Institutional characteristics once again played a major role in influencing their preferred methods, with different approaches taken to reflect their different intakes. Emphasis at New University was placed on flexibility and accessibility, where alternative options for mobility was the outreach intervention of choice, whereas emphasis at Old University was more on affordability by increasing the availability of low-cost destination partner links. While this did help to some extent in addressing the cost deterrent for WP students, findings argue that the more obstacles are overcome, the more successful academics will be at widening access. Designing study abroad programmes with the aim of overcoming

cost, confidence and information barriers, as academics at New University did through the use of ILPs, was found to be particularly effective for enabling the development of both cultural and social capital, and for tackling the obstacle of economic capital. Academics at Old University did, however, excel at raising awareness of study abroad opportunities by promoting information not just among current students, but also among prospective applicants at open days, thus planting the seed at an early stage to increase participation.

The third theme discussed challenges of increasing study abroad access for WP students from the academic perspective. These were found to be influenced by individual factors, with different academics expressing different motivations for giving their students an international experience. Those at Old University focused on the cultural development outcomes of study abroad, where attitudes were shaped mainly by international background, while those at New University were preoccupied with the transformational aspects of study abroad, where attitudes were shaped more by sociodemographic characteristics. Findings posit that although the former is more likely to extol the benefits of study abroad, their values might not necessarily align with those of students, whereas shared experiences among the latter can make such academics more understanding of barriers to study abroad from the student perspective. Meanwhile, both institutional and departmental factors were found to affect capacity for study abroad involvement, which was made more difficult for STEM-based academics, but also those operating in the role of study abroad adviser alone and without support. Organisation of overseas placements was reported to be challenging for academics in these disciplines, but issues were also raised more broadly in terms of how an academic's personal priorities might not necessarily align with their professional responsibilities, such as research and grant proposals, and as such, negatively impacted their availability for study abroad engagement.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

## Introduction

This study focused on a stakeholder group – academic staff members – that has been largely overlooked in the literature, and builds on the work of scholarly research from a US context (Barbour, 2021; Danjean, 2017; Hull, 2013; Savishinsky, 2012) to improve current understandings of study abroad inequalities from a different national setting. Although it is not the first study to explore academic perspectives on study abroad under-representation from a UK context, it does extend findings made almost a decade ago from a mixed methods paper by Bridger (2015) through a purely qualitative investigation. The study adds to existing knowledge by drawing on interview data to offer more in-depth insights into how strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake for a specific under-represented group – WP students – compare between two different types of universities, a research-intensive pre-1992 institution and a teaching-focused post-1992 provider.

The first part of this concluding chapter begins by answering the first of this study's research question: What are academics' understandings of the barriers to study abroad for WP students? This section addresses how factors such as international experience and social background characteristics may explain what shapes perspectives on the decisions that result in student self-exclusion from study abroad.

The next section moves on to address the second research question: What are academics doing to overcome these barriers and increase study abroad uptake for WP students? This is split into two parts to compare methods between pre- and post-1992 universities, and between academic fields of study, in terms of enhancing study abroad programmes and raising awareness of study abroad opportunities.

The following section provides a response to the third research question: What do academics perceive to be the main challenges of facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students? It does this by discussing the factors that constrain or enable engagement with study abroad on an individual, departmental and an institutional level, and explains why some academics might find increasing participation in study abroad more difficult than others.

The second part of this concluding chapter provides a critical evaluation of the study by reflecting on its chosen conceptual approach, and how this relates to the stakeholder group of investigation. It first discusses the relative absence of theoretical underpinnings explaining study abroad engagement from an academic perspective, in contrast with the numerous models and framework that explain this from a student perspective. It then illustrates how the study overcame these shortcomings by combining Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) with Bourdieu's Capital Theory (1986). It also identifies contributions to knowledge by suggesting recommendations to be implemented by universities at both a departmental and an institutional level through examples of best practice for increasing access to study abroad for WP students.

The third part of this concluding chapter acknowledges the limitations of this study, where the scope – restricted by necessity due to it being a doctoral thesis – could have been broadened by recruiting not only academics who are already engaged with study abroad, but also those who chose not to engage to better understand what could be done to overcome the barriers to involvement for this stakeholder group. A UK-wide study with a greater variety of universities might also have offered more insightful results, had the thesis not chosen to focus solely on two HEIs from one specific English city. Finally, potential avenues for future research are highlighted through recommendations for further exploration of a study abroad stakeholder that has been even more overlooked than academics: parents. More research on alternative study abroad programmes – chiefly short-term stays in the form of ILPs – from a UK context is also strongly recommended.

## 5.1 Research questions

### *5.1.1 Study abroad barriers from the academic perspective*

The direct cost of study abroad is well documented by scholars as a deterrent to those from WP backgrounds (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010; Stroud, 2010), and academics at both universities were well aware that the finances required for programme fees, accommodation, travel and subsistence can cause some students to perceive said activity as an unaffordable luxury. Non-repayable grants and scholarships may assuage concerns to some extent, but these rarely cover costs in full (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Bridger, 2015;

Kehm, 2005), and other issues arising from the UK's transition from Erasmus to Turing were also highlighted by participants. These included delayed payments or the need to pay upfront and then be reimbursed at a later date (IFF Research, 2024; Staton and Foster, 2023), which students with limited stocks of economic capital are more likely to struggle with. Interestingly, and somewhat unique to the UK context given its current political situation, findings reveal that Brexit was observed to have exacerbated existing study abroad inequalities.

Academics expressed concern over how increased bureaucracy required for international exchange, such as visa costs, would make study abroad more expensive for WP students, now that they no longer had freedom of movement within the EU (Adams and Hall, 2021). This issue has yet to be acknowledged in the literature, and thus requires further exploration as to whether Brexit will continue to have a negative impact on study abroad uptake for WP students, or whether measures will be introduced by policymakers at the national and institutional level to mitigate matters. Unsurprisingly, the preference among such students was to minimise the cost of university by living with family and attending a local provider (Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), and to supplement their studies through part-time work (Callender, 2003; Christie, 2007). In line with other findings, WP students were reluctant to sacrifice potential earnings for the sake of an overseas sojourn (Allinson, 2017; Brux and Fry, 2010; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008), which academics observed had only been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

This was not the case for all students, however, and suggests that while lived experience of socioeconomic disadvantage can be shared by many from under-represented backgrounds, motivations and future plans might not (Netz, 2015). As indicated in the literature, some WP students focus on the long-term gains of an international experience, rather than the more immediate concerns of forgone income, and view study abroad as their one and only chance to travel before traditional adult milestones get in the way (Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020). While this attitude may be influenced more by programme type and duration than the spirit of adventure, given that short-term stays are more flexible and easier to manage around their commitments (Bridger, 2015; Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014), it should be noted that summer schools or field trips abroad are often used as a stepping stone for future mobility, either for further study or future

employment (Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Lewis and Niesenbaum, 2005).

This appears to be relevant from a UK context too, as indicated by recent research from both UniversitiesUK (2021) and the Year 1 Evaluation of the Turing Scheme (IFF Research, 2024), but highlights how the study's greatest strength – its focus on an overlooked stakeholder group – is also its biggest weakness. Barriers to study abroad are seen through the perspective of academic staff members, not from WP students themselves, who can only comment on what they have observed, not on the WP student lived experience, and although findings do strongly align with those from previous scholars on study abroad inequalities, these should still be limited accordingly.

This can be seen in how pragmatic decision-making was found to have ramifications on the likelihood of self-exclusion from international opportunities regarding student preference for gaining work experience, where earning and learning was noted by academics to be a more attractive option than study abroad. Findings are again reflective of others that detail how WP students are driven to maximise the cost of university, not just by increasing their chances of securing a well-paid graduate job via placements and internships, but also by opting for subjects visibly linked with employment (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Hurst, 2019; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). This could explain why academics in STEM expressed greater difficulty in encouraging their students to study abroad than in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Findings also align with those from other studies indicating that students in these disciplines are typically focused on career development, as opposed to cultural enrichment, and as such, may not view study abroad as being relevant to their interests or future plans (Stuber, 2011; Thirolf, 2014; Twombly et al., 2012). Interestingly, only participants at New University attempted to increase participation rates among this group through the creation of international work placements.

Enabling students to boost their employability whilst simultaneously gaining an international experience was therefore viewed as an effective way of making study abroad more appealing, although this may have been made possible by their university's emphasis on vocational degrees. Old University, like many research-intensive institutions, was geared more towards providing traditional subjects in contrast. Even so, this is a potential solution for widening access for students not only from under-represented backgrounds, but also under-represented

subjects that have received relatively little attention in the literature. Scholars have largely explored ways in which to increase study abroad participation through a purely academic context, rather than a work experience one. Although this has been touched upon by considering what motivates students in general to take part in international work experience (Cranston, Pimlott-Wilson and Bates, 2020), it does present an avenue for future research to determine whether engagement rates with international work experience are higher for some specific groups, such as those from WP backgrounds, than others.

Additional concerns were raised by academics over the indirect cost of study abroad, with accommodation being cited as another key factor in deterring WP students from accessing international opportunities. Some attributed this to the UK's residential model of HE, where the first year of university is spent in purpose-built student accommodation, before moving into shared housing in the private rental sector with friends or course mates for their second and third years (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; Whyte, 2019). Student tenancy agreements, which cover a full 12-month period, were described by one participant as actively working against study abroad by making a semester abroad less financially desirable, due to the prospect of paying rent for an empty room, and a year abroad impossible if an accommodation contract had already been signed even before applications for study abroad open. Inability or unwillingness to leave one's home environment has long been acknowledged as a barrier to study abroad for WP students (Beerkens et al., 2016; Daly, 2011; Netz, 2015). Although it was anticipated that academics at Old University would touch upon this issue, given how the majority of their intake consisted of 'movers', or those who chose to relocate for their studies, it was also unexpectedly mentioned at New University, whose intake is primarily made up of 'stayers', or those who chose to commute from home for their studies.

While it is generally accepted that students enrolled at teaching-focused institutions are less bound by accommodation contracts as a result of having never left the family unit (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009), findings may be explained by their disciplinary context, as academics at New University who did highlight the accommodation barrier were all based in the arts, humanities and social sciences, or fields that are traditionally linked with higher rates of study abroad participation (Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Hurst, 2019; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). Findings therefore suggest one of two things: firstly, that they counter studies claiming that WP students tend to be more

mercenary with their degree choices (Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) and instead study what they love, rather than what will make them money. Conversely, these align with other scholars indicating that the students more commonly found in such disciplines are also those who are more likely to relocate for university, and thus be more likely to study abroad regardless of which university type they are enrolled in (Bridger, 2015; Cairns, 2017; Stroud, 2010).

The latter point is of particular interest, not only because it challenges the normative assumption that so-called free movers are less likely to attend teaching-focused universities when they could have chosen a more academically selective institution instead, but also because these students are considered to be less tied down by commitments, such as work or caring responsibilities, than their commuter counterparts (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009). This should, in theory, result in them being more adventurous and less risk averse when it comes to study abroad, yet even these students can be constrained by their accommodation choices, as opposed to their personal and financial circumstances.

In this instance, findings may be explained by the social cost of study abroad, which stems not from reluctance to disrupt one's current housing status, but from not wanting to be separated from friends and family. The former was recognised by academics at both universities as being more of a deterrent to study abroad than the latter – attributed again by many to the UK's residential HE model – or more specifically, the extent to which it markets the student experience, and how this factors into university choice (Daly, 2011; Holton, 2018). On the one hand, findings contradict other studies indicating that the desire for a social life tends to be less of a concern for WP students, who often treat their studies as a job and express little interest in campus involvement (Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2018; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010). It could be argued, however, that WP students are instead motivated to develop a social support system, where peers play a crucial role in helping them feel accepted and understood (Wilcox et al., 2005). The risk of social exclusion is higher for WP students enrolled at selective institutions like Old University, given the difficulty of fitting in and adapting to unfamiliar cultures (Munro, 2011; Raffe and Croxford, 2015; Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003). Findings therefore suggest that the more difficult it is for WP students to form social connections, the less inclined they will be to detach from these once they have been established (Henderson, 2020; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005).

Again, however, it should be remembered that findings are limited, given the study's sole focus on the academic staff member perspective, and although these remain largely supportive of WP student behaviour and decision-making in terms of study abroad, they are also not representative of WP students as a whole. While the general consensus is that experience of having already detached from a familiar home environment and existing support networks to relocate for university predisposes 'movers' more towards international opportunities than 'stayers' (Beerkens et al., 2016; Bridger, 2015; Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010), it could be argued that residential status is not the only variable that can drive or deter students from study abroad.

Age and emotional maturity may play more of a role in determining the likelihood of participation, as even those with a family history of HE are increasingly beginning to struggle with the transition to independent living (Lewis et al., 2015; Thompson, Pawson and Evans, 2021), and the more reliant they are on parental support, the more difficult it becomes to develop the life skills and confidence needed to study abroad. This suggests that social isolation is as much of a concern to 'movers' as it is to 'stayers' (Chung, Turnbull and Chur-Hansen, 2017; Murray and Klinger, 2012), and explains why friendship groups may be more of an impediment to study abroad than socioeconomic background. The social costs of an international experience, then, may be no higher for WP students than their more traditional counterparts, who can both be deterred by fear of change or unwillingness to accept disruption to existing routines (Doyle et al., 2010; Huják, 2015; Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta, 2016).

Limited stocks of cultural capital also have implications for study abroad in that movement, be it domestically by relocating for university (Beerkens et al., 2016; Hurst; 2019; Stroud, 2010) or internationally through family foreign holidays (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010) and school trips abroad (King et al., 2011; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018) normalises the mobility process (Carlson, 2013; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) and gives students the confidence to cope with different cultures and situations (Lehmann and Trower. 2018; Pope et al., 2014). While this was keenly understood by academics at New University, who spoke at length about the difficulty of encouraging WP students to consider study abroad for these reasons, it was also noted that these would actually drive a small minority to push themselves out of their comfort zones and experience something new.

Findings are thus reflective of those by Netz (2015) in that not all WP students perceive barriers to study abroad in the same way, as while some may be deterred by these obstacles, others view them as something to be overcome.

One academic at Old University demonstrated similar observations, albeit by pointing out the differences between WP subgroups in terms of how BAME students were more likely to study abroad than their Caucasian counterparts, despite both of them coming from similar LSES backgrounds. This again aligns with other findings demonstrating how students with second- or third-generation immigrant status are more likely to have experience of prior international travel, typically gained from visiting relatives in their country of origin, and the ability to speak more than one language, both of which increases the likelihood of study abroad participation (Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014; Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Canché, 2022). As such, this study offers a valuable contribution to knowledge not only by adding to a growing awareness of the link between migration history and study abroad propensity, but also by highlighting the need to account for what WP students possess that might predispose them towards study abroad, rather than focusing on what they lack.

This highlights how the choice to adopt a broad stroke approach to study abroad inequalities in the thesis may have potentially obscured important intra-group differences, and although the WP student categorisation was justifiable as a variable of analysis for this particular study, future research would benefit from examining specific WP subgroups in isolation. Ethnic identity would be an interesting aspect to explore in further detail, considering how some minorities have a higher propensity for study abroad than others (Allinson, 2017). Demographic data from the Turing Scheme's first cohort does support this, with participants identifying as Asian (1,235) far outnumbering those who identified as Black (530), but offers little insight as to why this might be the case (Turing Scheme, 2024). Previous studies suggest that cultural norms and religious identity may constrain some BAME students – particularly females – from participating in study abroad than others (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018), so the potential for exploring these differences in more detail is ripe.

### *5.1.2 Strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake: comparing pre- and post-1992 university approaches*

When asked about methods for facilitating uptake of study abroad placements for WP students, academics at New University demonstrated greater awareness of how the traditional Erasmus model, which involves spending 6 to 12 months overseas, might not be appropriate for those with work or caring responsibilities. As such, they chose to communicate the accessibility of study abroad by offering more flexible, less disruptive options to better accommodate student financial situations and personal circumstances. The popularity of these suggests that, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, making study abroad more inclusive through alternative mobility programmes could have a greater impact on increasing participation levels (Bridger, 2015; UniversitiesUK, 2021). ILPs were perceived as a particularly effective enablement for overcoming the cost barrier, given the short length of the stay – lasting anywhere between 3 days and 1 week – and how student financial contributions towards these were either minimised or, in some cases, eliminated entirely through favourable discounts given by travel and hotel companies for group bookings (Keese and O'Brien, 2011).

ILPs were also considered by academics as an effective enabler for overcoming the confidence barrier, as WP students considered these to be less intimidating and overwhelming than the prospect of travelling alone. Findings therefore lend support to other studies indicating how the more supported students are, the more likely they will be to participate in study abroad, due to the 'safety in numbers' mentality associated from being accompanied by both their peers and a trusted academic (Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014). Increasing their sense of security not only made them more likely to venture into the unknown – which can be a significant risk for those who have never left the family home to attend university (Amani and Kim, 2018; Meier and Smith, 2016; Niehaus and Wegener, 2019) – but was also beneficial for addressing parental concerns that might have otherwise have prevented them from going abroad in the first place. This demonstrates a keen understanding by academics at New University not only of barriers to study abroad from the student perspective, but from the parental perspective, and highlights the need for greater awareness of how family influence can either enable or constrain the decision to study abroad. Putting appropriate support mechanisms into place is an effective method of providing reassurance to the type of parents who may be more reluctant to let their children study abroad due to religious or personal safety reasons (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018; McClure et al., 2010; Paus and Robinson, 2008).

However, while academics were broadly positive about the impact of ILPs on increasing participation, they also discussed how time-consuming involvement with these could be (Berger and Paul, 2017; Henthorne and Panko, 2017; Hull, 2013; Meier and Smith, 2016). This calls attention to a key problem identified by the literature, which highlights how academics are rarely prepared for the demands associated with leading such programmes (Dewey and Duff, 2009). Developing these can be more difficult given the requirement to juggle multiple responsibilities during the trip – that of teacher, leader, and counselor – as academics are often left to create programmes from scratch, without prior guidance or templates to draw upon (Barbour, 2021). More importantly, ILPs are still relatively uncommon in the UK, which not only raises the barrier to entry for academics in terms of the workload required for researching potential placements or planning travel and accommodation arrangements, but also results in the value of such programmes being poorly understood (Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019). Similar to other studies, participants spoke about having to defend these from colleagues, many of whom dismissed ILPs as little more than a vacation, by emphasising both their learning outcome benefits (Conran, 2019; Tran et al., 2021) and their potential for delivering a transformative educational experience (Henthorne and Panko, 2017). Training is therefore recommended in the form of best practice workshops, where the sharing of knowledge and the creation of resources would not only better prepare academics for ILP involvement, but would also potentially ensure their continued engagement with this form of study abroad programme to prevent future issue of burnout and make ILPs more sustainable (Savishinsky, 2012).

Methods for facilitating uptake of study abroad placements for WP students at Old University were somewhat different, with academics instead demonstrating the affordability aspects of these through their preference of an extended year abroad programme. Although this was perceived as being a more cost-effective option for students, due to the combination of reduced tuition fees and increased financial support, its advantages were not always communicated effectively with students, who tend to assume the opposite and may not be aware that study abroad can be cheaper than they think (Collinson, 2015; Lulle and Buzinska, 2017). Findings consequently demonstrate the importance of enabling students to make informed decisions about the practicalities of study abroad if they are to overcome these misconceptions (Carroll, 1996; Coldwell, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010; Gray et al., 2018), both by

raising awareness of funding availability and by making clear the benefits of participating in this particular programme.

Meanwhile, the extended year abroad was viewed as being an effective enabler for overcoming curriculum constraints that can make study abroad more difficult for students in STEM and professionally accredited subjects (Ahn, 2014; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012). Academics did, however, acknowledge that this might not appeal to everyone, given the opportunity costs involved of delayed entry into the labour market. As anticipated, findings align with other studies demonstrating how students in STEM – and by extension, those from WP backgrounds, who often choose these subjects for their career prospects – are more likely to be concerned with time-to-graduation (Bridger, 2015; Courtois, 2017; Findlay et al., 2006; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008; Spiering and Erikson, 2006), and thus consider an extended year abroad to be neither suitable nor desirable for their future plans. Limited uptake could potentially be tackled by offering something more relevant to their interests, such as international work experience, given the risk such students will take to prolong their degrees through sandwich years preference among such students for sandwich years, or 12-month full-time placements in industry, for the reward it brings for their employability (Allinson, 2017; Findlay et al., 2011).

This solution might be more attractive to students, but the likelihood of it being implemented at a research-intensive institution like Old University could be slim. Participants were also dismissive of short-term alternative options for mobility, such as summer schools or overseas research placements, not because they viewed these as inferior, but because they wanted their students to receive the maximum possible benefits from an international experience. The traditional Erasmus model, involving either an inbuilt or extended year abroad, was therefore perceived as the most effective way of delivering these. Attitudes could be explained by how participants were wedded to the purpose of study abroad as an opportunity for personal growth, rather than a vehicle for professional development, which again highlights misalignment between what academics value and what students expect to gain from their studies.

Despite their attachment to this model, effort was still taken to account for another key barrier that typically deters WP students from accessing study abroad opportunities – distance

from home – by encouraging them to consider countries closer to the UK, such as Ireland or the Netherlands, which are less expensive and more convenient to move between than the perennially popular US or Australia. The rationale informing this strategy could be explained by how WP students typically prioritise proximity when choosing a university to enroll in, due to financial restrictions or the need to remain embedded within existing support structures (Christie, 2007; Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010), but not all of them were found to be geographically constrained with their decisions. Interestingly, academics at New University appeared to observe the opposite in that closer destinations were viewed as less novel or exciting by their WP students, and although this was an unexpected finding, it could be explained by how some might view study abroad as their only chance to visit a far-flung destination before being impeded by life events after graduation, like full-time work or starting a family (Nguyen, 2014; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Whatley and Canché, 2022).

While findings correspond with those by Netz (2015) by demonstrating that not all WP students are equally risk averse or prioritise the same things in terms of their decision-making, they also argue that the desire to be more adventurous with one's destination choice could be attributed to the length of a study abroad programme, rather than a drive to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (UniversitiesUK, 2021). Prior research has already established that WP students find short-term stays less intimidating and overwhelming (Bridger, 2015; Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014), so future research would benefit from investigating whether the duration of a study abroad programme does indeed influence the choice of a study abroad destination, as this connection has yet to be explored.

Findings thus not only raise questions about the utility of using WP students as a single category of analysis, given how motivations and perspective can vary significantly between different subgroups, they also highlight the need to mitigate this study's confirmation bias – and its focus solely on the academic staff perspective – by understanding barriers to, and drivers for, study abroad participation from the WP student point of view. Validity of the research design could have been enhanced if WP students were recruited as originally planned to compare perceptions among both stakeholders, but as mentioned in the methodology chapter, gatekeeper restrictions and Covid lockdowns made access to the

student group impossible. Future research would benefit from focusing less on the deterring factors that prevent WP students from studying abroad, and more on the enabling factors that result in their participation to learn how economic, social and cultural disadvantage can be overcome.

Just as this study challenges the consensus that WP students prioritise proximity when choosing both their home university (Clayton, Crozier and Reay, 2009; Davies et al., 2008; Henderson, 2020; Hinton, 2011; Holdsworth, 2009; Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010) and their host university (Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016), future findings may also challenge the consensus that WP students prefer concrete outcomes like employability and career development over the abstract benefits of an international experience (Bridger, 2015; Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014). Previous research has highlighted university preference for presenting study abroad as a transformative and life changing experience (Michelson and Valencia, 2016; Miller-Idriss, Friedman and Auerbach, 2019), but while some WP students may find this off-putting (Brux and Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen and Pascarella, 2011), not all of them will be discouraged by the prospect of fun and excitement.

A unique gap is thus presented, not only in terms of what influences the decision to participate in study abroad, but also in relation to what shapes placement preference. This topic remains under-researched in the field of study abroad inequalities (Netz et al., 2024), although previous studies have suggested that pop culture can significantly impact destination choice (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015). Future research could therefore challenge the consensus that WP students – and those from Anglophone countries in particular – are deterred more from study abroad by the language barrier, and as such, are drawn towards countries that are culturally and linguistically similar to their own (Green et al., 2015; King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; Pope et al., 2014; Tran, 2016). It would be interesting to see whether modern media has begun to change this inclination, given how the popularity of anime from Japan and K-pop from South Korea has increased both interest in visiting and learning the language of these respective countries for English-speaking students (Fukunaga, 2006; Keith, 2018). Research on the WP student perspective is therefore crucial to better understand the level of soft power said countries wield on their decision-making, since academics can only speculate on what trends they have observed, not on what actually interests or shapes the direction of travel for students themselves.

Once again, strategies for encouraging WP students to pursue study abroad differed significantly between institutions, as while all participants acknowledged the need to provide reassurance and push students out of their comfort zone, only academics at New University took a more proactive approach towards reducing their fears of the unknown. This was done gradually by exposing students to something different but still familiar via a field trip to London, which was perceived as a crucial first step of getting them to think beyond the local and towards the national. Participants at this institution were well aware that many of their students might not have left their hometown before, never mind the country (Reay 1998; Reay et al., 2001, Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010), so built their confidence up in small stages by giving students the experience of mobility to help them realise that if domestic travel was possible, then international travel could be, too. This was effective not only in broadening student horizons (Nguyen and Coryell, 2015; Paus and Robinson, 2008), but also for enabling them to accumulate the necessary stocks of cultural capital required to make study abroad participation possible.

Pre-departure preparation was likewise considered key for increasing confidence levels by letting students know what to expect from a study abroad experience, as while other studies have long since recognised how language proficiency, or lack thereof, deters students from accessing international opportunities (Findlay et al., 2006; King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010), rarely are recommendations made as to how this obstacle could be overcome. Some scholars suggest that basic survival courses can make students feel more capable of coping in a non-English speaking environment (Oh and Arthur-Banning, 2021; Conran, 2019), and one academic at New University demonstrated good practice by providing these for free. Access to languages, both at compulsory education level (King et al., 2011; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018) and at higher education level (Universities, 2022), is highly unequal in the UK, but although much is known about what affects this in the former, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the latter. Said context is therefore deserving of further interest, given that unlike state schools, most universities offer opportunities for language learning, but while the availability of these might differ between institutions, affordability does not (Bridger, 2015). Languages for all offerings can be expensive, with prices ranging from £200 minimum and £500 maximum per module, so subsidising the cost of these or even, as New University did, eliminating this altogether, could potentially make such programmes more accessible to WP students.

Methods of developing cultural capital may have differed, but similarities were broadly observed at both universities in how word-of-mouth promotion was considered to be the most effective way of closing the information gap (Di Pietro, 2020; Leask et al., 2020), especially when creating a platform to enable the development of social capital via peer endorsement. Connecting returnee students, or those who had already studied abroad, with those who had yet to consider taking part in said activity was viewed as an effective way of assuaging their concerns (Deakin, 2013; Nguyen and Coryell, 2015), particularly if they themselves had come from WP backgrounds (Brux and Fry, 2010; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), and by serving as a trailblazing example that could inspire others like themselves to follow in their path (Ahn, 2014; Bruce, 2012; Coldwell, 2013; Sweeney, 2013). Returnee students were also found to be a vital source of information, and were often better placed to advise prospective applicants on specific grants or scholarships than academics, who, as noted in the literature, might not be as knowledgeable regarding matters of cost (Carroll, 1996; Coldwell, 2013; Doyle et al., 2012).

Timing was found to be equally crucial for promoting study abroad, with participants at Old University demonstrating the importance of raising awareness not just among current students, but also with prospective ones. Interaction with the latter at open day events, meanwhile, opened up avenues for communication with another key stakeholder group – parents and guardians – whose influence has been largely overlooked in recommendations for facilitating study abroad uptake. Convincing them of its feasibility was therefore effective for increasing buy-in (Paus and Robinson, 2008; Robertson, 2019), as the more informed parents are, the more likely they will be to accept their child's desire to study abroad (Hurst, 2019; Kutsche, 2012; McClure et al., 2010; Shames and Alden, 2005).

Departmental talks were another commonly utilised strategy for generating interest in study abroad, and running these whilst students were already on campus for lectures, rather than expecting them to take time out of their schedules to attend one-off drop-in sessions, was found to be a more successful method of promotion. This indicates a need to consider how different students have different capacities for engagement, and therefore differing levels of access to information on study abroad (van Mol and Perez-Encinas, 2022), as WP students typically prioritise work or other commitments over socialising or extra-curricular activities (Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2018; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2010). Academics would also

benefit from proactively targeting information, because as one participant at Old University pointed out, not all students felt comfortable enough to take the initiative and approach them first. This was an interesting finding, and suggests that confidence for engagement should also be accounted for when raising awareness of study abroad opportunities. Effort should thus be made to meet students halfway, given how those from WP backgrounds might not know 'the rules of the game', such as making use of office hours for advice (Lehmann and Trower, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Umbach and Wawrynzki, 2005).

Creating a more supportive environment for interaction is key for enabling relationships to be fostered with WP students, who might not know that academics can be associated with outside of class, as is recognising the challenges they face in navigating the norms and cultures of an unfamiliar setting. Institutional characteristics and priorities strongly influenced the ease to which an academic could connect with these students, however, as emphasis on pastoral support made this easier for participants at New University, while the focus on research excellence at Old University actively impeded opportunities for interaction (Courtois, 2017; Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Jessani et al., 2020; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012). Findings therefore demonstrate a need to consider, as with students, what enables or constrains an academic's capacity for study abroad engagement, if accessibility of interaction is to be increased.

### *5.1.3 Challenges in facilitating study abroad participation*

While findings add to the consensus that academics most likely to champion the cause of study abroad are those who have benefited from having either worked or been educated overseas and can thus see the value of said activity (Bridger, 2015; Childress, 2010; Leask et al., 2020; Rampold et al., 2018; Savishinsky, 2012), different participants were found to have different motivations for giving students an international experience. Academics at Old University placed more emphasis on the intercultural outcomes associated with study abroad, such as broadening horizons (Black and Duhon, 2006; Carlson and Widaman, 1988; Clarke et al., 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Edmonds, 2010; Raczkoski and Robinson, 2019) and enabling students to become more critical of their own culture as a result of having had something to compare it to (Anderson et al., 2006; Carlson and Widaman, 1988; Douglas and Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Kelleher, 2013; Maharaja, 2018).

These attitudes could be explained by their international background where, unlike the so-called Brexodus movement observed by Courtois and Veiga (2020), EU nationals in this study chose to remain at their current universities to keep the UK engaged with outside affairs through the spirit of student exchange. This makes the UK an interesting case study, and one that could be compared more closely with the US than with the EU. Findings therefore reflect those by Calikoglu, Lee and Arslan (2022), who suggest that the geographical isolation of the US and the UK from their nearest neighbours is what places them at greater need of exposure to other cultures, hence academics' utilisation of study abroad to prevent their respective host countries from become even more insular. A desire to counter the negative impacts of Brexit by maintaining cultural ties with mainland Europe, however, did lead to a sense of frustration among academics at Old University when the interests of students did not align with their own, who struggled to comprehend what they perceived as lack of willingness to take advantage of study abroad opportunities.

Academics at New University, in contrast, were more likely to demonstrate awareness of the factors that shape the decision to self-exclude from study abroad, partly because of their institutional intake – drawn largely from the local region and occupying multiple WP criteria – but also because many participants were drawn from the same social backgrounds as their students. This understanding may have been attributed to similarities in sociodemographic characteristics (Brux and Fry, 2010; Leask et al., 2020; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), and is something that continues to be overlooked by previous research. It also highlights the need to re-incorporate the WP oriented variables that Danjean (2017) removed from Wade and Demb's original Faculty Engagement Model (2009) to explain why academics at non-selective universities are more likely to emphasise the transformative aspects of study abroad than those at more prestigious institutions.

While academics from WP backgrounds typically do have greater interest in social justice issues (Hull, 2013; Niehaus et al., 2018), and are more driven to make a positive difference to the lives of students like themselves by enabling those least likely to take part in study abroad to gain the most benefits from an international experience (Allinson, 2017; Dean and Kelly, 2020), findings remain limited due to the study's sample being self-selective, and therefore cannot be considered generalisable or representative of WP academics as a whole. As discussed previously, the choice to engage with study abroad is not purely personal, but

rather one that can either be enabled or constrained by institutional or departmental priorities. Not all academics who share a background with their WP students will be equally willing – or even able – to champion the cause of mobility, and may consequently divert their efforts to other causes. This aligns with studies indicating how post-1992 universities tend to prioritise activities that benefit their students such as pastoral support and career development (Hurst, 2019; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010) and career development, whereas pre-1992 universities are generally more concerned with personal development and a well-rounded education (Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Russell Group, 2017; Stier, 2004). Academics may thus choose – or have little choice but to focus – on other aspects of the university experience, such as ensuring that WP students engage with extracurricular activities other than study abroad.

Furthermore, it should be noted that this study does not account for the possibility that academic staff may have limited or incomplete information on WP student participation rates in study abroad, and while institutional data on these was not made publicly available on either case study university website to support staff claims, their Access and Widening Participation Plans do appear to be in some alignment. UK universities are measured on their efforts to ensure student success at all stages of the academic lifestyle to improve retention for those deemed most at risk of non-continuation (Jerrim, 2014; Quinn, 2004; Rose-Adams, 2013; Sosu and Pheunpha, 2019; Vignoles and Powdthavee, 2009; Yorke and Thomas, 2003), which then filters down to academics to ensure student satisfaction via yearly evaluation metrics (Kinzie et al., 2008). While study abroad has been positively linked with persistence, and would be of considerable benefit to WP students (Pike and Kuh, 2005; Sutton and Rubin, 2004), this could explain why academics choose to focus on enabling degree completion rather than encouraging the uptake of international opportunities.

Although they themselves may value the impact of study abroad and desire to bestow such an experience upon their students, addressing the gaps in attainment and continuation may instead take more importance (Whatley and Raby, 2020). In short, findings might not be generalisable, but they should still be of interest to other inequality scholars by fostering a better understanding of what influences academics to engage with study abroad – or not – and what shapes their choice of strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students. Findings also highlight examples of best practice that would potentially be of interest to universities and outreach practitioners alike, and offer a valuable opportunity to learn from

what works well at widening access to international opportunities for students from under-represented backgrounds.

Findings therefore demonstrate that simply identifying the barriers to study abroad is not enough to facilitate uptake for WP students, and that a better understanding of the inequalities in access is needed to affect change. Academics at selective universities should be encouraged to consider how their own values and experiences compare to those of their students, and why these might potentially alienate WP students, rather than encourage them to pursue international opportunities. Findings also correspond with the issue of approachability identified by previous scholars, where the teaching culture and practice of prestigious institutions tends to discourage WP students from making use of tutor time, and thus miss out on valuable study abroad information (Lehmann and Trower, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Umbach and Wawrynzki, 2005). This raises questions over the extent to which shared identities would be useful for overcoming this barrier, and whether these would enable WP students to be more forthcoming with their concerns if academics shared a similar social background, or whether difficulties in navigating unfamiliar territory and social norms might negate the relatability element. Either way, this highlights the need for understanding and proactivity in facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students, and calls for reflexivity in order to understand the assumptions underpinning current practices for increasing access to study abroad and how these might present challenges.

As argued by Wade and Demb in the original Faculty Engagement Model (2009), the choice to involve oneself with study abroad is rarely shaped by an individual's values and beliefs alone, as while these may explain what influences an academic's willingness to engage with study abroad on a personal level, they do not account for what enables or constraints their capacity for engagement on an institutional level. Similar to other studies, participants who reported having supportive colleagues to share the workload with were less likely to feel overwhelmed by the duties required for their study abroad adviser role than those who were operating alone (Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Madden, McMillan, and Madden, 2019). The need for support is crucial, given how time-consuming the role can be in terms of both promoting study abroad opportunities and encouraging, advising and assisting students with the application process (Castro et al., 2016; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Courtois, 2017), which can be tackled in one of two ways. Less

intensive tasks could be delegated to either fellow academics and administrative staff, or through greater collaboration with the central study abroad office to assist with marketing campaigns and information sessions (Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012).

The latter stakeholder group is of great significance, due to their emphasis on dealing more with the practicalities of study abroad, such as sourcing and approving partner links or obtaining and targeting financial aid, which makes them a valuable source of advice on how to facilitate study abroad uptake for WP students. Unlike the study abroad office, which works together as a team, academics tend to work in isolation, and often without any training or preparation for engaging with study abroad. Findings thus add further weight to scholarly work illustrating the level of knowledge required for taking on the role of study abroad adviser, and how study abroad engagement is made more difficult if pre-existing guidance outlining what this position might entail does not exist (Dewey and Duff, 2009; Savishinsky, 2012). Participants at both universities discussed having to build up the role from scratch, often through trial and error to determine the most effective methods of increasing study abroad participation. Universities should therefore provide opportunities for workshops where academics can learn from best practice examples (Childress, 2010), or consider rotating the study abroad adviser role among different staff members so that expertise can be shared more evenly throughout the department (Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016). This would simultaneously lower the barrier to entry and prevent knowledge from being lost when an academic either steps down from the study abroad adviser role, or leaves their university altogether to pursue employment elsewhere (Keese and O'Brien, 2011).

Findings also add support to how working in isolation can make study abroad engagement more challenging if academics struggle to balance their study abroad adviser duties alongside their other responsibilities. Most participants touched upon the combined pressures of having to raise both their departmental profiles, which place more emphasis on rankings and student satisfaction than outreach or other extracurriculars, and their individual profiles through publications and presentations. Lack of recognition for study abroad engagement is a known problem in the literature that deters many academics from sacrificing time that could be spent instead on conducting research or securing grant funding (Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet 2020; Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet 2020; Leask et al., 2020). This may be explained by institutional characteristics, as competing priorities were found to be more of an issue for academics at Old University. Emphasis on scholarly productivity left even the most

passionate and dedicated mobility champions with little incentive to engage with study abroad (Criswell and Zhu, 2015; Moseley, 2009; Savishinsky, 2012), with one participant describing this as a 'nice to have', rather than something that could actually benefit their career in the face of their university's existing reward structure.

Disciplinary characteristics were likewise recognised for increasing the difficulty of study abroad engagement, which academics in STEM subjects attributed to the additional time and effort associated with organising overseas placements. This arose from the need to match course content with the host university and ensure that learning was sufficiently transferable, which was deemed as being less flexible and more hierarchical than that in the arts, humanities and social sciences (Courtois, 2018; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012). These difficulties were compounded for subjects with specialised course content such as Architecture and Engineering, due to their accreditation requirements (Salisbury, 2009; Stroud, 2010), which may explain the reluctance of STEM academics to engage with study abroad, despite demonstrating favourable attitudes towards, and extolling the benefits of, said activity.

Reluctance to engage may also tie in with the selection process where, similar to other studies, there was an overwhelming preference among participants to allocate study abroad placements based on academic performance (Courtois, 2017; Twombly, 2012). Sending the type of students who they believed would cope best with the challenge of an overseas experience was perceived as a necessary filtering mechanism, and as a means of ensuring that their grades would not deteriorate either during their sojourn or upon their return to the UK. This insistence on maintaining academic standards was particularly interesting, and could be explained by one of two factors. As already discussed, disciplinary affiliation plays a key role in determining whether attitudes towards study abroad are positive or negative, with academics based in STEM subjects more likely to express concern over the quality and rigour of overseas universities (Giedt, Gokcek, and Ghosh, 2015; McBurnie, 2000; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020), and thus being more reluctant to encourage their students to pursue international opportunities (Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008). National context should also be accounted for in this instance, given how universities in the UK are being placed under increasing pressure by the government to address issues of retention, progression and attainment, with the threat of sanctions for those deemed not to have met the threshold for improving overall student outcomes (OfS, 2022).

There was one outlier, however, who outweighed the risk of sending weaker performing students abroad with the reward of providing them with a life-changing educational experience, and rather tellingly, this participant was based at New University. As mentioned previously, academics affiliated with non-selective universities are more likely to emphasise the transformative aspects of study abroad (Allinson, 2017; Dean and Kelly, 2020; Hull, 2013; Niehaus et al., 2018), but findings also challenge the rationale for sending only the strongest students by arguing that everyone should benefit from international opportunities, regardless of prior achievement. This academic's students came back not only more confident and independent, but also went on to complete their qualifications with higher grades than when they began them. While study abroad has long been linked with improved academic attainment (Findlay et al., 2006; Malmgren and Galvin, 2008), reasons for this are varied, with positive changes being attributed by this participant to a difference in learning environment (Cardwell, 2020), which enabled students to develop more effective study and time management skills (Courtois, 2017). Findings therefore suggest that prior academic performance does not necessarily predict subsequent attainment, and could be considered reflective of how WP students with modest A Levels can thrive academically in an HE setting and even outperform their peers who entered university with higher entry qualifications (Gorard et al., 2006; Hoare and Johnston, 2011).

Findings lend weight to the growing argument that restricting access to study abroad based on academic performance actually exacerbates inequalities (Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020), and raises the question of whether placement allocation should be based on need, rather than merit. This does have groundings in the broader WP context, where scholars acknowledge the impact of an individual's personal circumstances, such as work commitments or caring responsibilities (Christie, 2007; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009), or disability and illness (Shames and Alden, 2005) on the time they have available to study, and how this might result in their academic performance not reflecting their true ability. Universities already evaluate applications to account for geographical and socioeconomic measures of disadvantage, or whether a school below the national average was attended, by utilising contextualised admissions to consider an applicant's potential to succeed, as opposed to basing acceptance solely on their entry qualifications (Gorard et al., 2006). A similar process could be applied to study abroad, and although this was not brought up at interview by asking if academics

thought this might be a fairer way of allocating placements, it does present a unique angle from which future research could potentially inform policy and practice.

## 5.2 Conceptual approach reflections

While there are many models and frameworks that explain student engagement with study abroad, there exists very little theoretical and conceptual work that explores academic engagement with said activity. Danjean's modified version (2017) of the original Faculty Engagement Model by Wade and Demb (2009) was consequently useful for understanding why some academics are more willing to involve themselves with study abroad than others. This model does have some shortcomings, chiefly in that it was only applied to one field of study – Agricultural Science – and to two somewhat niche types of universities in the US – land grant institutions, or those focused on developing skills and practical knowledge – but was, for the most part, largely transferable to other countries and contexts.

Previous studies support the model's assertion that personal experience of having lived, worked or studied overseas, for example, is strongly associated not only with willingness to engage in study abroad, but also the increased likelihood of an academic encouraging their students to participate in said activity (Bridger, 2015; Green and Olsen, 2003; Hulstrand, 2009; Paus and Robinson, 2008). Sociodemographic characteristics, such as coming from a BAME background or being the first in their family to attend HE, has also been found to influence proclivity towards study abroad engagement, which can play a significant role in shaping motivations for widening access to international opportunities (Hull, 2013; Niehaus et al., 2018).

On a professional level, the model strongly aligns with findings of other scholars highlighting the influence of academic discipline on study abroad engagement, given the imbalance of STEM participation compared to the arts, humanities and social sciences (Ahn, 2014; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012), with negative attitudes among academics in these subjects being attributed to concerns over academic rigour (Stuber, 2011) and misalignment with their field of study's learning priorities (Giedt, Gokcek, and Ghosh, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Research on the influence of professional rank and career status, meanwhile, is more nuanced, but the

literature generally agrees that established academics are more likely to engage with study abroad, due to having greater job security and the freedom to pursue their own research interests (Green and Olson, 2003; Raczkoski and Robinson, 2019). Early career academics, on the other hand, are less likely to engage, whose efforts are focused more on professional development such as publications and research funding (Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet 2020; Jameson et al. 2012; Savishinsky, 2012).

Institutional priorities, then, are equally influential for shaping not only an academic's willingness to engage with study abroad, but also their capacity for engagement, given the tendency of university promotion policies of rewarding easily quantifiable activities over outreach and community involvement (Courtois, 2017; Leask et al., 2020), while pressure to raise their departmental profile through rankings and student recruitment can likewise impede involvement (Criswell and Zhu, 2015). Administrative and financial resources may also enable or constrain engagement, with greater funding levels translating into more support for academics to manage and organise study abroad, thus easing their workload and enabling their sustained involvement (Barbour, 2021; Savishinsky, 2012).

What Danjean's modified version (2017) of the original Faculty Engagement Model does not account for, though, is what influences the choice of methods for facilitating study abroad uptake, as while it does recommend the need for increasing participation rates for students in under-represented disciplines, it does not offer any concrete suggestions for suitable strategies, nor was it designed to explain study abroad inequalities on a broader basis. The model's applicability was therefore limited, and would have benefited from reincorporating the factor of institutional status, which Danjean (2017) removed from Wade and Demb's original Faculty Engagement Model (2009), to better understand academic willingness to engage with study abroad in a UK context. This decision was understandable, given that Danjean's selected universities would likely not have been concerned with selectivity or prestige (2017), but growing acknowledgement by scholars of the link between institutional characteristics and study abroad opportunity structures (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Di Pietro, 2020; Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020; van Mol, 2022) is worthy of further investigation.

As such, the addition of Bourdieusian theory to this thesis elevated current understandings of the factors that can either impede or encourage study abroad engagement, albeit by exploring

these through an overlooked stakeholder perspective: that of academics, rather than students. Capital and Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) has been employed extensively to explain the existence of study abroad inequalities through a variety of cultures and contexts (Netz and Finger, 2016; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012) to determine what might cause WP students to self-exclude themselves from accessing international opportunities. This includes limited resources required for study abroad, with direct costs such as accommodation, travel and subsistence (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Lien, 2007; Presley et al., 2010), indirect costs such as forgone income from part-time work (Allinson, 2017; Brux and Fry, 2010; Relyea, Cocchiara and Studdard, 2008), and even social costs such as separation from existing support networks (Beerkens et al., 2016; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010) being among the most commonly cited deterrents.

Previous research has also documented how limited familiarity with study abroad – typically gained through foreign family holidays (Beech, 2015; Smith, Rérat and Sage, 2014; Waters, Brooks and Pimlott-Wilson, 2011) or overseas school trips (Findlay et al., 2006; King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010; King et al., 2011) – can impact access. Similarly, limited information about study abroad – obtained from knowledgeable others, such as peers, family or teachers (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Carroll, 1996; Coldwell, 2013; Doyle et al., 2010) – and limited opportunities to develop these connections in the first place by prioritising other commitments over socialisation and campus life involvement (Salisbury et al., 2009; Trilokekar and Rasmi, 2011; van Mol and Perez-Encinas, 2022) can both impact the likelihood of receiving a study abroad experience.

However, while these studies provide valuable insight into the obstacles preventing WP students from taking up study abroad opportunities, rarely do they offer suggestions as to how this issue could be addressed. The thesis overcomes these limitations by examining what is being done by academics to increase participation rates among these students and, more importantly, the extent to which methods used are informed by their understanding of the barriers to study abroad. Whether strategies and attitudes differ between academics – and by extension, between institutions and fields of study – is relevant, given the consensus that different types of universities offer different types of opportunities for study abroad, less is known in comparison about whether different types of universities utilise different approaches to facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students. Findings therefore contribute

to knowledge by filling in these gaps, with recommendations made for both future research and for potential policy and practice.

## 5.3 Contributions to knowledge

**Understandings of the role of academics in facilitating study abroad uptake**

Findings from this study provide a contribution to knowledge by addressing the main critique of Danjean's modified Faculty Engagement Model (2017) – that it only explains the factors contributing to study abroad under-representation, but does not offer solutions for increasing uptake – and offering new insights into how study abroad could be made more inclusive, not just for under-represented academic disciplines, but also for under-represented students. Strategies at New University appeared to have been more effective at widening access to study abroad than those at Old University, despite their institution being less well financially-resourced and internationally connected. This could be explained by their greater awareness of WP student needs, with effort being made to meet them halfway and offer flexible options for mobility to suit their personal circumstances.

Findings are, however, somewhat limited, given that the study focused only on two specific types of university – a pre-1992 institution and a post-1992 provider – located in one particular UK region. While these might not be entirely generalisable, findings were never intended to be representative of universities as a whole, but rather, it was hoped they would at least be of interest to any HEI keen to learn from best practice examples of widening access to study abroad for under-represented students. Further research and evaluation of strategies to increase uptake among this group is therefore recommended from both a policy and practice perspective, given that the thesis was limited in scope by necessity on account of being such a small-scale project, so including a wider range of universities would enable further insight by comparing and contrasting their respective outreach strategies.

Comparing the effectiveness of such strategies from an academic stakeholder perspective with that of the WP student perspective would have simultaneously elevated this study and addressed its key limitation of confirmation bias, but as touched upon in the methodology section, was unfortunately beyond the remit of this thesis due to the combination of Covid

and gatekeeper restrictions. Future research is therefore recommended to further examine the practical implications of these findings, because although the general consensus is that academics play a pivotal role in the decision to study abroad for WP students (Amani and Kim, 2018; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Doyle et al., 2010; Kinsella, Bossers, and Ferreira, 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator, 2010), success cannot be attributed solely to this stakeholder group. Others, such as family (Brooks and Waters, 2010; Nguyen, 2014; Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Whatley and Canché, 2022) and friends (Ahn, 2014; Beech, 2015; Glavee-Geo and Mørkeset, 2016; UniversitiesUK, 2021), can be similarly influential for encouraging study abroad uptake. An additional basis is thus created for future research to overcome the shortcomings of this thesis by determining just how much of an influence these stakeholders may have from the WP student point of view, particularly considering how the parental perspective remains even more overlooked than that of academics (Amani and Kim, 2017; Gerhards and Hans, 2013).

This could yield some interesting and unique angle in the field of study abroad inequalities, given how acceptance of – or opposition to – their child's desire to study abroad can vary significantly depending on a parent's educational level and migration background (De Jong, Schnusenberg and Goel, 2010; Whatley and Canché, 2022). Previous findings are nuanced in that while some parents may discourage WP students from study abroad in favour of career development to improve their future prospects (McClure et al., 2010), others actively encourage them to take advantage of international opportunities, particularly if this involves getting in touch with their ancestral roots (Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014), again presenting a novel basis for future research to capitalise on.

Findings also lend support to other studies highlighting the effectiveness of short-term programmes, such as summer schools and ILPs, in overcoming financial barriers by making study abroad more accessible (Brown, McLeod, and Erlingsson, 2021; UniversitiesUK, 2021) and confidence barriers by making study abroad less overwhelming and intimidating (Ramakrishna, Sarkar, and Vijayaraman, 2016; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014). Enabling WP students to study abroad in a more structured and supportive environment was also found to increase buy-in with parents, particularly those from BAME backgrounds, who were more willing to let their children travel internationally as part of a group, or when accompanied by a trusted academic (Amani and Kim, 2018; Meier and Smith, 2016; Niehaus and Wegener, 2019).

While limited familiarity with international travel has long been acknowledged as an obstacle to study abroad for WP students (Carlson, 2013; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), relatively little attention has been paid to how limited familiarity with domestic travel can be equally influential in shaping attitudes. Many of the students at New University had never left their hometown before, let alone gone overseas, and as such, were more reluctant to venture out of their comfort zones (Allinson, 2017; Bridger, 2015). Academics thus effectively broadened their horizons by taking them on a field trip to London, which gave students both a boost in confidence and the opportunity to experience something new.

This study argues that taking small steps to tackle large apprehensions is paramount for developing cultural capital for WP students, particularly in terms of addressing the language barrier – another significant deterrent to study abroad (Doyle et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2006; King et al., 2011; Tran, 2016) – which one participant did through the use of pre-departure preparation. Good practice was demonstrated here, both by providing basic language courses to increase confidence in the ability to cope in a non-English speaking country, and by offering these for free. Unequal access to language learning, be it at compulsory education level (King et al., 2011; Tinsley and Board, 2017; Tinsley and Dolezal, 2018) and at HE level (Bridger, 2015) is an overlooked contributor to the imbalance in study abroad participation rates, with lack of affordability, rather than lack of interest, discouraging WP students from taking this up once at university. Languages for all modules can be prohibitively expensive, so reducing or eliminating costs altogether, as this academic chose to do, might go some way towards tackling inequalities.

**Understandings of the challenges of facilitating study abroad uptake for academics**

Findings also extend existing theory through including an additional construct to the study's chosen conceptual model, which recognises the influence of study abroad organisation and management on attitudes towards international exchange. As pointed out by Wade and Demb in the original Faculty Engagement Model (2009), capacity for involvement can be enabled or constrained by institutional and departmental priorities. In other words, study abroad engagement is not purely a personal choice, but one that is also shaped by external forces. While Danjean's modified version of the Faculty Engagement Model (2017) does

acknowledge disciplinary differences in how STEM academics are less likely to encourage their students to study abroad, this is largely explained by their prioritisation of subject specific learning outcomes over the soft skills associated with study abroad, such as critical thinking and intercultural competence (Giedt, Gokcek, and Ghosh, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Paus and Robinson, 2008).

This explanation does not account for disciplinary constraints, however, or how curriculum flexibility and transferability can make organising study abroad placements more challenging for some fields than others. Unlike the arts, humanities and social sciences, STEM course content is hierarchical, meaning more effort is required from academics in these subjects to ensure a close match between what the home institution offers and what the host university provides (Ahn, 2014; Chang, von Imhoff and Ustrup, 2016; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Stroud, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012). Findings also make a contribution to a growing field of inquiry illuminating how the study abroad selection process – which typically allocates placements based on academic performance (Courtois, 2017; Czarnitzki, Joosten and Toivanen, 2021; Nerlich, 2021) – may exacerbate study abroad inequalities (Lorz, Netz and Quast, 2016; Netz and Finger, 2016; Schnepf, Bastianelli and Blasko, 2020; Whatley and Raby, 2020).

Findings consequently question whether the contextualised admissions scheme used by universities to consider applicants based on their potential to succeed, rather than on grades alone – which are often impacted by family background, type of school attended, or living in an area of low progression to HE (Gorard et al., 2006; Hoare and Johnston, 2011) – could be implemented for study abroad. While needs-based allocation would potentially introduce an element of risk to placement management, the rewards of enabling WP students to benefit from an international experience would more than outweigh this. This outreach intervention has yet to be trialled by practitioners, or be investigated by researchers, and therefore offers a valuable alternative for broadening study abroad access.

## 5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

The scope of this study was limited by necessity, given the temporal and financial restrictions associated with conducting a graduate level research project, both of which had various

implications for stakeholder recruitment. Findings would have been more illustrative if academics who were not involved in study abroad had also been sampled, rather than focusing solely on those who had already made a conscious choice to engage with said activity. While this did yield some interesting and unexpected insights, the thesis would have been strengthened by investigating not only what is being done to facilitate study abroad engagement for under-represented students, but also what could be done to facilitate study abroad engagement for under-represented academics. Further exploration of this group is therefore warranted to determine how buy-in could be increased, as although much is known about why some academics are less willing to become involved with study abroad than others, less is understood about what might help in overcoming their reluctance to engage.

If academics do not perceive study abroad as being relevant to the learning outcomes of their students, as may often be the case for those in STEM (Green and Olson, 2003; McBurnie, 2000; Nelson Laird et al., 2008) or vocational subjects (Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Smart and Umbach, 2007), then supporting them to have an international experience of their own via research sabbaticals or greater funding for overseas collaboration, could enable them to better understand the value of international exchange (Bridger, 2015; Green and Olsen, 2003; Paus and Robinson, 2008). This highlights how study abroad can be just as transformative for academics as it is for students (Childress, 2010; Giedt, Gokcek, and Ghosh, 2015), who are more likely to encourage students to pursue international opportunities if they themselves have benefited from these (Klahr and Ratti, 2000; Leask et al., 2020; Savishinsky, 2012).

The need for international exchange is greater than ever in the current UK context, due to the Turing Scheme – unlike its predecessor, Erasmus – only funding student mobility, not staff mobility, as significantly reducing the likelihood of academics receiving an international experience could have negative implications for the likelihood of their students receiving an international experience. Future research could investigate what, if anything, universities are doing to address this funding shortfall, and whether increasing academic investment in study abroad does indeed have positive consequences on student participation rates. International academic mobility – and by extension, its outcomes and impacts – remains an under-researched topic, and thus offers considerable novelty for future scholars to capitalise on.

Similarly, although the small-scale focus of this study was appropriate for generating the in-depth observations characteristic of qualitative research, it must be noted that only two

universities were selected for comparison, with both being located in the same UK nation. Findings should be of interest to any HEI with the aim of widening study abroad participation, but due to devolutionary differences, might not be entirely applicable to providers in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. It would therefore be useful for further research not just to compare approaches in facilitating study abroad uptake for those from WP backgrounds among different types of universities, but also between different types of countries within the UK. This has only been done by one study, conducted almost a decade ago (Bridger, 2015), and thus presents ample opportunity for a timelier update, particularly in view of more recent changes such as Brexit and the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus.

Further research is likewise recommended to ascertain the extent to which national context influences the perception of study abroad barriers. The social cost of this can be higher for WP students, for whom the prospect of delaying their graduation for an international sojourn can make them more reluctant to leave behind friendship groups and established support networks (Daly, 2011; Deakin, 2013; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010). This might be less of a concern for Scottish domiciled students, however, where the four-year completion period of a bachelor's degree – unlike the rest of the UK, where they are three years long – potentially minimises the emotional risks of study abroad. A Scottish-English comparison would offer a unique angle from which to explore whether the social costs of study abroad are lower for WP students in the former than in the latter, and whether differences in degree length have any impact on the decision-making process.

A comparative perspective beyond the distinction between pre-1992 and post-1992 universities, meanwhile, would facilitate a more critical discussion of social costs as an explanatory factor in study abroad under-representation. Further exploration is also warranted of the distinction between 'movers', or those who choose to relocate for university, and 'stayers', or those who choose to live at home and commute to their local provider, to determine whether there is more nuance than initially thought in terms of how residential status affects study abroad propensity (Beerkens et al., 2016; Bridger, 2015; Cairns, 2017; Hurst, 2019; Netz, 2015; Stroud, 2010). Moving beyond the UK context would therefore enable a better understanding of why students from countries with higher study abroad participation rates might be less concerned about separation from family and friends. Some scholars attribute this to geographic proximity, where travel between neighbouring nations such as the Benelux region is easier and inexpensive for students in this region, thus making

it easier to return home at short notice if required for family obligations (Van Mol and Ekamper, 2016). Others argue that mainland European countries are more active in promoting study abroad programmes than the UK (Teichler, 2009), or that they simply have a culture of movement for historical reasons, such as Ireland (Courtois, 2020), both of which increase the likelihood of study abroad participation.

Higher study abroad participation rates in mainland Europe may also stem from the strength of a country's domestic labour market, as is the case with Italy where many students use said activity as a springboard into employment abroad, or as a means of escaping perceived poor-quality education at home by attending a more internationally recognised university overseas (Granato et al., 2024). What functions as an academic driver to Italian students may serve as an academic barrier to British students, however, who in contrast, have access to world leading institutions (QS Top Universities, 2023; Times Higher Education, 2023), and prefer to remain in their home countries for what they view as the best quality education for their degree. This decision is entirely rational, given the UK's market-driven HE system, where university choices are typically made on ranking and reputation to receive the best return on investment (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2017; Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion, 2009; Walsh et al., 2015).

While all of the above factors may explain to some extent why mainland European students are more likely to participate in study abroad than those in the UK, despite also being more likely to participate in the localised HE model than their British counterparts, social isolation can still be as much of a barrier to the former as it is for the latter. Greater social support could potentially alleviate the factor of friendship groups as an impediment to study abroad (Doyle et al., 2010; Huják, 2015), but even so, this highlights how the distinction between 'movers' and 'stayers' might not be so useful after all for explaining differential participation rates. In other words, those who relocate can be equally likely – if not more so – to remain rooted in place for the sake of their social networks as those who live at home. This suggests that the social costs of study abroad are not solely experienced by WP students, and that age and psychological maturity may be more of an influential factor than either residential status or socioeconomic status (Santoro, Sosu and Fassetta, 2016). Unlike previous generations, young people today appear to struggle more with the transition to independent living when moving away for university, which can make them increasingly dependent on parental support (Lewis et al., 2015). This also makes them less willing to disrupt their existing

routines or detach from familiar social networks, thus reducing the likelihood of study abroad participation (Thompson, Pawson and Evans, 2021).

Duration, too, should be accounted for to determine how effective certain types of programmes are at facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students, as while findings lend support to other studies indicating that short-term stays in general are perceived as being more accessible, affordable and flexible by under-represented groups (Bridger, 2015; Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner, 2014; UniversitiesUK, 2021), prior exploration of specific international opportunities, such as ILPs, has exclusively been conducted in a US context (Amani and Kim, 2018; Barbour, 2021; Conran, 2019; Henthorne and Panko, 2017; Keese and O'Brien, 2011; Meier and Smith, 2016; Niehaus and Wegener, 2019; Oh and Arthur-Banning, 2021). The UK setting continues to be overlooked, and although this thesis may have been the first to document a usage of such programmes, a more in-depth exploration is required to discover how common these actually are, and whether they tend to be utilised more in certain types of universities – namely post-1992 providers – than others. Given the resistance towards short-term programmes demonstrated in this study among academics at pre-1992 universities, further investigation of how buy-in for adopting ILPs could be increased for academics at these institutions is therefore recommended.

While ILPs are largely considered to be successful at increasing study abroad uptake for WP students, their future in the UK could be in doubt, given how the Turing Scheme's funding requirements – that mobility must last a minimum of 4 weeks total – may impact on a university's capacity to offer programmes any shorter than this. Post-1992 universities are not only less financially well-resourced than their pre-1992 counterparts (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Findlay et al., 2006; Gerhards and Hans, 2013; Glavee-Geo, and Mørkeset, 2016; Netz, 2015; Stier, 2004; Waters, 2009) and thus more reliant on bids for Turing funding (Turing Scheme, 2022), but are also facing more significant financial pressures due to reduced international student recruitment, increased operating costs and the tuition fee freeze (Foster and Gross, 2024; Williams, 2024), all of which have implications for unequal access to study abroad.

In the meantime, further research is recommended to explore other programmes for facilitating uptake of international opportunities, such as work placements abroad. IWPs remain overlooked in the academic literature, despite Deakin's seminal 2014 study

highlighting their effectiveness at increasing participation rates not only among under-represented students but also under-represented disciplines. Previous studies demonstrate how such students are typically drawn to STEM and other vocational degrees for being more visibly linked with employment (Callender and Melis, 2022; Clayton, Crozier, and Reay, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005), so making study abroad both financially worthwhile and relevant to their future career plans could make IWPs a more attractive prospect than study abroad in its traditional academic format (Allinson, 2017; Cranston, Pimlott-Wilson and Bates, 2020; Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014). It would therefore be interesting to determine how this type of mobility programme is faring under the Turing Scheme, and whether the ability to earn and learn while gaining an international experience has become even more appealing to such students, given the UK's current economic downturn and consequent shrinking of the graduate job market at home (High Fliers, 2024).

A basis is also established for future research into the student stakeholder perspective, as although effort was originally made to recruit this group, gatekeeper restrictions – and the increase in workload their inclusion would have brought – prevented such investigation. In addition, while adopting an intersectional approach to explore strategies for facilitating study abroad uptake for WP students as a whole did provide important observations, further exploration is needed to discover how participation rates could be increased among specific subgroups. Mature students, for instance, are the most overlooked of these, both by scholars and by universities, and continue to be disregarded as a potential market for study abroad. This is based on the assumption that such students have neither interest in, nor time for international activities, or that having children – particularly young ones – makes it too difficult for them to study abroad. The few studies that exist on this topic, however, counter that mature students often HE in order to access opportunities that may have been denied to them at an earlier stage in life, and may actually be keener to seek out new experiences like study abroad than their traditional-aged peers as a result (Shallenberger, 2009).

Furthermore, different WP students have different perceptions of the barriers to study abroad, as what dissuades one from taking up said activity might not deter another (Netz, 2015). It should also be remembered that not all mature students are parents, and even those who are could have strong support structures in place or possess the financial resources required for overcoming these obstacles. Future research could establish what, if anything, is being done to encourage mature students to study abroad, or for those who have already participated,

what the mature student experience of study abroad actually consists of. The mature student experience of HE in general has been widely documented, and tends to be characterised by isolation and a limited sense of belonging, among their peers or their institution's campus culture (Gallacher et al., 2002; Kahu et al., 2014; Waller, 2005). Countries without a tradition of lifelong learning might view mature students with curiosity at best or hostility at worst, so study abroad could exacerbate such concerns, or potentially turn what should have been a positive experience into a negative one.

Finally, findings offer considerable opportunity for the exploration of specific BAME groups. While much attention has been given to the study abroad ethnicity imbalance, scholars have recently begun to criticise the emphasis of previous research on what these students lack that prevents them from taking part in study abroad, rather than on what they might possess. Some scholars argue that WP students from BAME backgrounds can actually be more predisposed towards study abroad than their Caucasian peers, due to prior international experience gained from visiting family in their country of heritage and the language proficiency required to communicate with non-English speaking relatives (Bamberger, 2020; Nguyen, 2014, Perkins, 2020; Whatley and Canché, 2022), both of which increases the likelihood of study abroad participation (Beech, 2015; Brooks and Waters, 2010). Again, this work has been mostly conducted in a US setting, leaving a UK context ripe for further investigation. The UK diaspora is very different, for example, and tends to be drawn from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean, whereas research examining the influence of migratory background on study abroad propensity in the US focuses largely on students of Korean or Hispanic descent. A US-UK comparison would thus offer useful contributions to theory and practice in the field of study abroad inequalities.

Focus on specific BAME subgroups is also warranted, and although the use of WP students as a category of analysis was justifiable for this study due to its emphasis on identifying strategies for – and challenges of – enabling participation from an academic perspective, this may have obscured important intra-group differences. Previous research has already highlighted differential participation rates between ethnicities, with some minorities having a higher study abroad propensity than others (Allinson, 2017), and while a demographic breakdown was not made publicly available on either of the case study university websites to corroborate this, it is supported by recent data from the Turing Scheme, with those identifying as East Asian being more likely to participate in the scheme than those who

identified as Black (Turing Scheme, 2024). This could be explained by intersecting elements of disadvantage that prevent females from South Asian backgrounds, who tend to have less freedom and autonomy to pursue their own interests and independence than their male counterparts (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018), and indicates how more research is needed to explore this gap in further detail if these differences are to be fully understood.

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# Appendix 01: Ethics approval letter

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Education

10 January 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to confirm that **Lindsay Hirst** is enrolled as a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

The ethical dimensions of their research have been discussed with a 'knowledgeable person of standing' and approved, with no ethical issues which require further clearance foreseen. The summary of proposed methods and any consent/information sheets provided were reviewed as part of this discussion and Lindsay has been approved to commence data collection/fieldwork.

Yours faithfully,

Jo Styles
*Doctoral Administrator*
*Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Email:* ***[email address redacted]***

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

**[signature redacted]**

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# Appendix 02: Participant recruitment email

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a research study to explore unequal access to study abroad. As such, I would be particularly keen to hear from academic staff who work in the role of study abroad adviser to learn about their perspectives on and experiences of facilitating study abroad uptake for students from widening participation backgrounds.

**About this study**:

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of what deters under-represented students from taking part in international opportunities and to determine what is being done to increase access to study abroad for this group. This information will benefit current and prospective students by increasing their awareness and information about study abroad activities. Findings will also be of interest to academics and other study abroad professionals by determining strategies that would make access to study abroad fairer and more equitable.

**Ethical information**:

This study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Education at the University of Cambridge. Please read the following information before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Participation in this study is voluntary. You will be able to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason why.

- You will be invited to take part in an interview which will last around 30-60 minutes. This will be audio recorded with your consent.

- The data from this study will be fully anonymised. Findings will be presented through the use of aliases to prevent names or other identifying information being revealed.

- The findings from this study will be kept completely confidential. All data will be stored securely on a password protected university drive that only I, the researcher, have access to.

This study has received ethical clearance by the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. It also complies with up-to-date guidance from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) by seeking to safeguard participant privacy and welfare. This study is being supervised by Professor Susan Robertson, Head of Faculty.

If you are interested in participating in this research and would like to volunteer yourself for interview, then please click the link below to leave your contact details and your availability. You can email me at **[email address redacted]** if you have any questions about the research. Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part.

Lindsay Hirst
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

# Appendix 03: Participant information document

**University of Cambridge**
Faculty of Education
**[Email address redacted]**

**Research Project:** Exploring academic perspectives on the barriers to study abroad for widening participation students

**Information for Participants**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

**1. What is the project's purpose?**

I am interested in finding out about attitudes and perceptions towards study abroad. This project aims to address issues of inequalities and under-representation in study abroad participation by gaining a better understanding of the barriers to entry for non-traditional students and what is being done by universities to address these.

**2. Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because:

> You work for the university as an academic member of staff in the role of study abroad adviser/coordinator.

**3. Do I have to take part?**

You are free to decide whether or not you would like to participate in this research. If you do decide to take part, then you will be given this information sheet to keep for your own reference along with a consent form to sign. You can also withdraw from the research at any time without having to give a reason why.

**4. What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be invited to participate in a one-to-one semi-structured interview that will last between 30 and 60 minutes. This will be audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis, with permission. Excerpts from the recording will be included anonymously in the research project for illustrative purposes.

**5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is not expected that there will be any disadvantages or risks of taking part in this research, and it is hoped that everyone will be able to discuss their views and opinions without experiencing any psychological distress or offense.

**6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no monetary benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that participants will find the research to be of interest and that their experiences and suggestions will enable the university to gain further understanding of how to improve participation rates for non-traditional students in study abroad activities.

**7. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If this is the case, the reasons will be clearly explained to participants via email why they will no longer be required to take part in the research. Any data that has been gathered up to this point will be stored in a password-protected drive on the university network until the end of the 2022-2023 academic year before being destroyed.

**8. What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to make a complaint or withdraw your consent for participation in the study you can contact myself, the researcher, at **[email address redacted]** in the first instance.

If you would like to express any further concerns, such as your treatment by the principal researcher or something serious occurring during or following your participation in the project, please see the contact details at the end of this document.

Should there be any area for concern during the research process, or if you wish to complain following your participation, please contact my research supervisor, **Professor Susan Robertson**, directly at **[email address redacted]**.

**9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information collected from you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. An alias will be used for the inclusion of any excerpts from the interviews.

**10. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of this research project will be submitted in 2023 for the PhD in Education thesis requirements. The thesis will also be adapted into academic papers for publishing at a later date.

**11. Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This study has been reviewed by the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and has received ethics clearance. The University of Cambridge has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research with students and young people, and these are consistent with the current British Educational Research Association guidelines, which can be found at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018.

**12. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

The audio recordings made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in this research project. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. They will be stored in a password-protected drive on the university network until the end of the 2022-2023 academic year before being destroyed.

## 13. Contact for further information

After you have read this information document you will be invited to complete a Consent Form.

If there is concern about any aspect of this research project it should be addressed in the first instance to myself, the researcher, at **[email address redacted]**, or to my research supervisor, **Professor Susan Robertson**, at **[email address redacted]**.

In addition to these avenues the University of Cambridge also has a complaints procedure, details of which may be found at: **https://www.studentcomplaints.admin.cam.ac.uk**.

Thank you for considering participating in this study.

**Lindsay Hirst**
PhD Student
Faculty of Education
University of Cambridge

# Appendix 04: Participant consent form

**University of Cambridge**
Faculty of Education
**[Email address redacted]**

**Participant Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Exploring academic perspectives on the barriers to study abroad for widening participation students

Please answer each statement concerning the collection and use of the research data.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. I have received the information sheet provided for the above project. | YES ☐ NO ☐ |
| 2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about this study. | YES ☐ NO ☐ |
| 3. I agree for the interview to be audio-recorded and for anonymised excerpts to be provided for illustrative purposes in the thesis. | YES ☐ NO ☐ |
| 4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation. | YES ☐ NO ☐ |
| 5. I understand that the project has received ethics clearance through the University of Cambridge's ethical approval process for research involving human participants. I also understand who will have access to the data, how it will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the study. | YES ☐ NO ☐ |
| 6. I agree to take part in the above research project. | YES ☐ NO ☐ |

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

---------- For Researcher's Use Only----------

Name of researcher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

# Appendix 05: Interview protocol for participants

***Introductory protocol***

1) Introduce self. Explain the purpose of the research and why participant has been asked to take part.

2) Read consent form with participant before gaining verbal and written consent.

3) Explain how confidentiality will be maintained e.g. anonymity, data protection.

4) Begin asking interview questions.

5) Debrief participant and ask if they have additional questions or anything else they'd like to add.

6) Conclude the interview and thank participant for their time.

***Interview questions***

**Theme: Study abroad facilitation strategies**

***Sub theme: Strategies, student engagement and information***

1) What do you do to communicate information about study abroad opportunities to current students in your department?

2) Do you communicate information about study abroad opportunities to prospective students?

3) What kind of information do you think students find most helpful?

***Sub theme: Academic engagement***

4) What is your role as a study abroad advisor?

5) How do you encourage students in your department to study abroad?

6) What are the challenges of facilitating study abroad in your department?

**Theme: Study abroad participation trends**

7) How many participants go abroad in your department each year?

**Prompt**: Out of how many students?

**Prompt**: Has there been an increase or decrease in these numbers?

8) How do you determine which students go abroad in your department?

**Prompt**: Is selection based on academic performance or are places open to everyone who applies?

***Sub theme: Destinations and duration***

9) What type of study abroad programmes are available to students in your department?

**Prompt**: Which options tend to be most popular?

10) Which countries/universities are the most popular with students in your department?

**Prompt**: Why do you think that is?

**Theme C: Study abroad influences and concerns**

***Sub theme: Drivers and barriers***

11) What do you think motivates students in your department to go abroad?

12) What do you think might influence the decision to not go abroad for students in your department?

13) What advice and support do you think might be helpful for students who might otherwise be discouraged from taking up study abroad opportunities?

14) What do you think the positive outcomes of study abroad are for students in your departments?

15) Have there been any negative outcomes of study abroad for students in your department?

**Prompt**: If so, why do you think that might be?