Subject studied and its impact on how graduates access opportunities

Dr Teresa Crew FHEA
Lecturer in Social Policy
School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences
Bangor University, Bangor,
Phone: 01248 382838
Email: t.f.crew@bangor.ac.uk
UK

Abstract

The paper seeks to provide perspectives on how graduates access employment and postgraduate study. A total of 66 graduates from three separate HE institutions, studying three different subjects took part. Data was collected via a semi-structured questionnaire and interviews (in person and via social media). The study found that 'warm' knowledge was the most popular form of gaining information regarding employment opportunities but results were inconclusive regarding the postgraduate study. Whilst there were subject differences, this data needs to be explored in more detail using the broad range of subjects from one institution to gain an understanding of the specific support needed. Practical implications of the study included the notion that higher education institutions need to develop strategies for engaging students in the career-seeking process early in their studies and promote the availability and utility of their services. Alongside this, Careers services need to develop more of a subject-specific knowledge.

Keywords: Graduates, Employment, Careers, Postgraduate Study, Universities, United Kingdom

Introduction

The last twenty years have seen an expansion in the numbers of individuals with a degree. For instance, whilst 17 percent of the population had a degree qualification in 1993, this doubled to 38 percent in 2013 (ONS, 2013). Data from the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) (2018) reports that in 2016/17, there were 757,300degree qualifications obtained in the UK. Over two thirds (67 percent) of these graduates reported that they were in full or part-time employment, whilst one fifth (21 percent) went into further study (HESA, 2018). Research on graduates is vast but it tends to focus on 'what graduates do' as opposed to the ways in which that graduates learn about employment or postgraduate study. Good quality information is an essential component for graduates to make career decisions as such graduate job searching strategies have emerged as an important research area following the 2008 global economic crises. However, similar research relating to postgraduates remains under-researched (See Scott et al 2011; O'Donnell et al 2009; Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zammit 2014). This paper explores how a cohort of graduates from North Wales accessed employment and postgraduate opportunities with a specific focus on the subject studied.

Current research on accessing graduate opportunities

Employment opportunities

Labor market information is generally divided into what Ball and Vincent (1998) describe as being hot and cold knowledge. These categories were developed further when Hutchings (2003) noted that students also acquired knowledge from strangers with which there is a relationship i.e. university lecturers perceived synergy as being warm. Edirisingha et al (2009) further developed these categories to make the distinction between informal and formal sources (hot and cold knowledge) and develop a third category from semi-formal resources such as lecturers, personal tutors and peer mentors entitled 'warm knowledge'. Try (2005) who evaluated data captured from the Norwegian Graduate Surveys, found that the most common job search strategy for 72 percent of the graduates they evaluated was in the formal job market (or 'cold' knowledge) e.g. advertisements published in newspapers, what used

to be the 'Job centre', and, more recently, the Internet. Hot knowledge refers to that which is acquired through the 'grapevine' e.g. from family, friends and former employers. These can be a valuable resource as informal networks provide information about forthcoming employment opportunities and even personal recommendations for jobs. Employers, especially those in rural areas, often recruit new staff by 'letting it be known' that they were seeking additional workers.

Edirisingha et al (2009) discuss 'warm knowledge as being those resources are officially provided by the university e.g. peer, mentors and personal tutors. These sources have the advantage that they provide the perspectives of hot knowledge e.g. personal experience, but as they are provided by the institution they will have official knowledge of the typical employment trajectory for graduates in their school or department. Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) focused on the career decision making the process of students in the final year of their degree. Nearly half of the sample (n14) had spoken to their lecturers about issues relating to careers. Alongside this, Purcell et al (2005) note that employment agencies have become an increasingly frequent early career experience for graduates (p79). Studies such as those by Clinton et al. (2011) and Kinnunen et al. (2011) highlight the positive employment prospects associated with temporary employment. Although Purcell et al, (2005) suggest that in the long term those graduates who are still employed on a temporary basis tend to be working in non-graduate employment. In addition, HE Careers departments are also a useful resource as careers adviser can provide information, advice, and guidance to undergraduates, graduates, and postgraduates through individual interviews and group work. Much research including Purcell et al 2005; Greenbank and Hepworth, 2005 and Purcell, Pitcher and Sims (1999) note that HE Careers departments are a popular source of information for many graduates.

Postgraduate opportunities

Whilst there has been much research discussing the journey from college to university (See Macaro and Wingate 2004 for instance), little has been conducted on Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott (2014) gathered the views of over 1,800 prospective postgraduate students across the UK relating to how they made decisions about postgraduate study. The study found that information and guidance were easy to find for 'continues' (those who study PGT immediately or soon after prior degree) but more difficult for returners (those who return to postgraduate study after three years). Both 'types' agreed that more information relating to course, departmental reputation and funding was needed. Research by Diamond et al (2012) found that university visits are consistently ranked among the most useful sources, but are not used as often compared to other sources. The most commonly cited sources were: university prospectuses and websites; UCAS directories and guides; family and friends as well as teachers and careers advisors (p8). Alongside this, Bourne, Jackson, and Hodges (2012) who interviewed final-year doctoral researchers, found that only one third had used their higher education careers service as postgraduates, substantially less than did so as undergraduates. Findings from the I-Graduate (2013) research study on the information needs of postgraduate taught (PGT) students noted that current and potential PGT students perceived that the information they need to help them choose a PGT course is already available somewhere, but the sources are scattered and sometimes out-of-date (even on institutional websites).
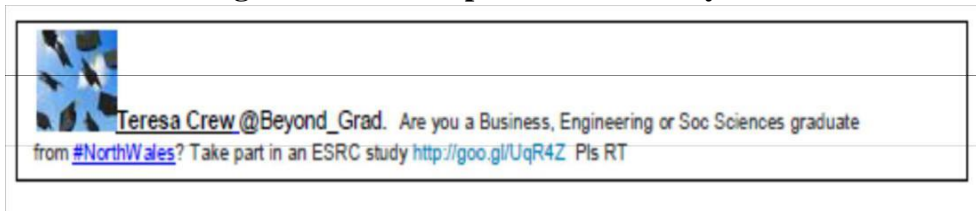
Methods

Graduates from a traditional, a post-1992 and a distance learning institution were selected. There were institutional differences in terms of the graduate cohort as full-time students formed the majority in the traditional institution, whilst part-time was the favored mode of study for graduates from the post-1992 institution and the distance learning university. All institutions had a good representation of local and mature students and those who were on low incomes (HESA, 2011). This is consistent with statistics on Welsh institutions as these tend to have higher proportions of students from low participation neighborhoods and students who receive a disabled students' allowance (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, 2010: 1). When considering the subject areas, this study chose graduates from subject areas that might be associated with different career trajectories3. Business and

administrative studies were chosen as it is described as a vocational degree that is highly transferable. As successive UK Governments have been keen to increase the number of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) students at British universities a STEM subject was chosen, in this case, Engineering and Technology. Finally, as the literature review highlighted those Social Studies graduates have a healthy engagement with further study, this subject area was included.

The sample frame should be understood in terms of the approach taken for each institution. Research participants from the traditional institution were selected from data provided by the University Alumni Office. Due to my links with the institution the name and contact details of the full sample of graduates (n249) from the 2007/08 cohort in the target subjects. The sampling methods for the other institutions required a purposive approach. All were contacted via telephone to explain the study, and then a follow-up email and telephone calls were then made. All institutions agreed to send details of my research, on my behalf, to past graduates. I also sought to make use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and Linked In as a method of 'advertising' the study to potential research respondents. An example of a Tweet I sent out via Twitter is

Figure 1: Tweet to promote this study

Teresa Crew @Beyond_Grad. Are you a Business, Engineering or Soc Sciences graduate from #NorthWales? Take part in an ESRC study http://goo.gl/UqR4Z Pls RT

Data was collected via self-completion questionnaire and semi-structured interviews

☐ *Self-completion questionnaire*

A total of 66 respondents completed the survey: half (34) were from the traditional institution; the second largest group were from the post 1992 university (23); and the remainder were from the distance learning institution (9). 9 Social studies graduates formed the majority in terms of subjects; followed by 24 from business and administration subjects and 9 with an engineering degree. The sample varied considerably from HESA statistics on graduates as the majority was female and half were aged 25 and over.

☐ *Semi-structured interviews*

In total 15 graduates were interviewed. There was an even gender split (eight females, seven males), and all but two interviews were carried out with mature graduates. Interviews were evenly spread across the subject areas (five interviews for each subject), but more were conducted with graduates from the traditional and post 1992 institutions (six each) compared with the distance learning institution. Interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and NVivo was used to analyze the qualitative data.

Considerably from HESA statistics on graduates as the majority were female and half were aged 25 and over.

• *Semi-structured interviews*

In total 15 graduates were interviewed. There was an even gender split (eight females, seven males), and all but two interviews were carried out with mature graduates. Interviews were evenly spread across the subject areas (five interviews for each subject), but more were conducted with graduates from the traditional and post 1992 institutions (six each) compared with the distance learning institution. Interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and NVivo was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Findings on how graduates access information on employment opportunities

Graduates were asked about the methods they had used in order to access employment opportunities-there was also the option to give more than one answer.

Table 1 Methods graduates used to find out about employment opportunities

Q. What methods did you/have you used to find out about employment opportunities?

Careers Service	Lecturers	Employers website	Newspaper/ Magazines	Personal Contacts	Recruitment Agencies	Job Centre
22	19	10	6	20	28	20

The most popular answer was recruitment agencies with 42 percent of the sample of graduates suggesting that this was a way of finding out about employment opportunities. There were three key themes within the data.

Recruitment agencies-the route to graduate roles for Social Science graduates
Almost half of respondents had used recruitment agencies, with Social Science graduates being most likely to use this resource. This is an interesting finding as graduates in this study suggested that university careers departments a free resource that is available to graduates often promote the view that graduates should be wary of recruitment agencies as such services may not have their best interests in mind. I did not find any such concerns amongst my own respondents. Overall it appeared that the use of recruitment agencies was motivated by convenience or the general feeling that someone else was working for you to help you find work. As one Deborah mentioned:

> *They* [the recruitment agencies] *are in constant contact with* [opportunities for] *work. Some may not be suitable but at least they are thinking of me. Due to them I have been in work on a consistent basis.*

Respondents spoke about being given access to a greater variety of jobs than what is immediately available advertised in newspapers and the internet. This method was particularly noted by Dave, also a respondent with a Social Sciences degree as being helpful when looking for first employment.

> *I was struggling to find work for a few months, but as soon as I went to* [name of recruitment agency] *I was given some project work that was very useful for my CV.*

One of the negative aspects of recruitment agencies, alluded to in the literature, is that recruitment agencies may put individuals forward for positions for which they are unsuitable, or lack experience. This was evident amongst North Wales respondents, but was perceived as being a positive trait, indeed, a confidence raising process. A number of respondents mirrored the comment made in the following extract of an interview with Zoe.

> *Recruitment agencies have been exceedingly helpful. First they have raised my confidence that I should be able to get the types of jobs that I gained previously i.e. professional jobs.*

Recruitment agencies may not have been discussed positively in the literature nor promoted by career services because previously these agencies focused on non graduate employment. However, alongside the increases in graduate numbers there has been a change in the types of roles that recruitment agencies are being asked to fill. Ten years ago, in a more stable labour market with fewer graduates, recruitment agencies may have been called upon to fill an administration vacancy for a number of weeks or months. Changes in recruitment practices (from permanent to temporary roles), and the influx of project-based employment means that such agencies are now asked to find graduates for officer level or managerial positions. The questionnaire data for this study showed the types of graduate roles that respondents gained from Recruitment Agencies: Local Authority Project Manager; Data analyst and Health Coordinator. Whilst interviews with both Dave and Hannah highlighted how often these roles were available.

I have been contacted at least once every few months with what I would describe as being graduate roles. Whilst I may have had to wait for one role to start and another to finish I have never been unemployed. I have worked in roles ranging from a Business Development Executive to managing a scheme where I am in charge of the planning, budget and impact of a large portfolio of European projects [Dave]

My current role as a Resource analyst/ manager has come directly from two separate temporary contracts as a project admin and then working to secure funding for community projects in and around a large city. Even though I have permanent employment I know I would always be able to get temporary work again with the same agency. I think my degree makes me very desirable [Hannah].

Hannah highlights an issue that might explain the availability of graduate vacancies within such agencies. As the clientele of recruitment agencies *may* still largely consist of individuals with lower level qualifications, graduates that contact these agencies may accrue capital (due to their degree qualification) that they would not have if they were in the traditional graduate labour market.

Engineering graduates and their access to social networks

The typical engineering student and subsequent graduate, according to HESA statistics and supported by my own research, is male, under the age of 25, and generally from a middle class background. I also observed that the majority had a family background in that specific field. This supports findings by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) in their study on working class students making the transition into higher education, where they note that a person's habitus can influence their decision making, or their general disposition to behave in a certain way. They mention how people are likely to move towards fields in which they feel familiar. When attempting to understand the relativity positive employment performance of Engineering graduates when compared to those from other subjects, these early family experiences are exceedingly helpful. A person's habitus, a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action), develops in response to the objective conditions it encounters. A person's habitus helps them to develop a 'feel for the game'.

The data showed that both entry into HE and an understanding of the engineering field was greatly aided by having a father who had and who worked in this employment sector. For instance, when I asked one engineering respondent, discussed in the previous chapter, why he decided to undertake a degree in this subject he suggested that initially he wasn't sure what he wanted to do in university, but he chose engineering due to a familiarity with that specific area. The same respondent, who studied at Glyndwr University, also discussed how he gained a great deal of informal knowledge regarding mechanics when he was growing up as he would be around his father and his father's work colleagues whilst they were working. After analyzing the responses of engineering graduates I feel that this imparting of knowledge continued post graduation and may have aided them in the subsequent labour market. The following respondent best illustrates this point. Jake was aged 21-24 when he decided to study for a degree qualification in Electrical and Electronic Technology. His father and brother were engineers. After completing his course he was unemployed. However what is interesting is that he explicitly states that although he was out of work he used the time to work with his father to develop *key engineering skills*. Whilst the skills they developed were not outlined in any detail, it is notable that after this time the graduate reported in year two that he went onto undertake a MS in Electrical Studies for a two year period and when asked about his current or recent circumstances, the respondent replied that he was working as a Quality Manager, whilst combining further study

Another respondent also with a father in the engineering field, was unemployed in year one, but then by year two, and until the end of his recorded trajectory was working as a maintenance engineer. Engineering graduates were most likely to utilize these contacts. A typical response from such graduates included:

Friends and family who work in my field were very helpful in letting me know when certain vacancies were coming up [Hugh].

Out of all the respondents it was engineering graduates who were able to demonstrate that they had contacts within the Engineering field that led to employment. Tom highlighted how he was given a job as soon as he graduated because a friend of his father's was retiring. Whilst Jake, the respondent discussed earlier, was currently combining further study with employment in a firm recommended by his father.

University career services-useful for guidance, but needed for jobs

Purcell, Pitcher and Simm (1999) who surveyed one in three final year undergraduates at 21 UK universities regarding their experiences of university careers services found that they were very satisfied with the quality of information and guidance they had received. One in four of my respondents had used university career services, and like the respondents from the Purcell, Pitcher and Simm (1999) study, all stated that they were happy with the service. Female Social Studies graduates and male Business graduates were most likely to say they had used HE Career Services. Respondents utilised all three of the core activities of career services: information; guidance, and employer placement services (Watts,1997) although the first two were cited most frequently. One respondent, Lucy, suggested that she had been given excellent support with interview practice, whilst Jake noted, that the: *Careers service had been very good for courses and general support with CV.* Lucy also commented on how supportive the staff were whenever she came to see them. These views were echoed by almost all graduates that suggested they had visited the Careers service. Overall this service was given the most praise, of all forms of IAG, in terms of up to date knowledge approachable staff and a variety of knowledge e.g. for employment and further study.

A number of respondents also spoke about the good subject knowledge that careers advisers had. However, this was an area that graduates suggested needed improvement. Zoe mentioned that whilst she appreciated the information that careers services had regarding employment she felt that there needed to be improvements with regards to both local and national employers in her area.

> *I understand that a Social Science degree can open doors to a wide range of companies but there seemed to be a lack of links with the sort of employers that I would want to work with. So whilst it is helpful to be told about private companies that were looking for employees just like me, I wanted to know about local and national third sector employers i.e charities. I would also want to know about how easy/difficult it might be to apply for a role with local government. Instead I would be given information about government roles that, I would suggest, would need an economics degree. I am not playing my degree down but it was as if the Career service had more detail about roles that would suit a Business degree as opposed to a Social Science degree.*

Whilst Lucy had been very complimentary about the Career Service, she also mentioned that the information she was given was graduate specific, and not suitable for those who were not looking for a job outside of the local area. An observation is that the types of graduates have changed dramatically over the last thirty years. Whilst the IAG has also changed with the demographics of students, there is a still gap in knowledge e.g. how can a particular graduate from a particular subject get a local job? What degree subjects are these local employers looking for? There also needs to be a less generic approach. As Natalie mentioned in her interview:

> *The Careers Service needs to examine in detail the statistical data regarding graduates so as to understand more about their clientele.*

Overall HE Career Services received the most criticism from the respondents. It is useful to note that all respondents who complained about the services were reticent to do so as they appeared to recognize that the

service has an ever changing remit. The respondents appreciated the advice and guidance they had received, as well as the opportunities to gain valuable work experience. There was also acknowledgement that support was available to them as graduates and not just for when they were in university. However they did note that improvements were needed. Echoed by a number of other respondents, is the comment by Jade, a female aged 30-39. When I asked her which had been the least successful method, she said:

> *Unfortunately, the careers service. I feel harsh saying this as they are individually very good, however the support is never tailored to what I need - actual jobs or contacts.*

My respondents had a keen understanding of the services offered, were comfortable in talking to professionals with regard to their career, and attended courses where necessary. However, overall they suggested that the careers services did not provide them with the service that they required. Graduates suggested they wanted individualized one-to-one support that offered direct information on local (and sometimes national) employment opportunities similar, some might say to the service that recruitment agencies provide. It is difficult to criticize such services as it is acknowledged that cuts over the last twenty years have left them seriously under-funded but with the same remit (BBC, 2013). Respondents felt that the careers services could improve by concentrating on providing a service that had more in common with that of the employment agency, i.e a direct link to employers with vacancies who were actively seeking graduates seemed to be paramount. In order to provide such a service that graduates want, the university careers services may need to capitalize on their existing links with local employers, and cement them so local and national employers would wish to promote their vacancies through them, as opposed to recruitment agencies.

How graduates access information regarding postgraduate study

A distinction is sometimes made between courses which are *postgraduate in level* e.g. those that are more advanced than undergraduate courses, and *postgraduate in time* e.g. courses which are postgraduate only in the sense that they are studied by people who already hold degrees. Eighty percent of the sample who went on to further study was in courses that were postgraduate in level, with most being Masters Courses. In line with research by Wakleing and Kyriacou (2010) that found that there was a positive relationship between undergraduate and postgraduate subject area, all but one graduate (Respondent 012) transitioning from a first degree stayed in the same subject area. In terms of the methods graduates used to find out about postgraduate study, Table 2 provides these details.

Table 2. Methods graduates used to find out about postgraduate opportunities

Q. What methods did you/have you used to find out about postgraduate opportunities?

Careers services	HE website	Research Council websites	UCAS/ Prospects Guides and directories	Lecturers	Personal contacts	Charities and trusts	Businesses	Employers
13	10	5	10	23	3	5	2	2

The most popular methods were related to the institution itself e.g. university lecturers; HE careers service or the university website. There were low responses for personal contacts, businesses and employers. Individual differences are difficult to discuss as only one third of respondents (21) completed this section of the questionnaire and many of those that did gave little detailed qualitative information. The lack of respondents who consulted research council websites for information may be a concern for these organizations, but as

qualitative data on the reasons for these choices was not provided by any respondents it is difficult to draw conclusions. There were two main observations from the data.

Gaps and difficulties in sourcing information

Respondents all agreed that course-specific information was difficult to come across. Participants talked about needing material relating to: course content; a list of modules as well as assessment methods; reading lists and the number of taught/independent learning hours. In short they wished to understand more about the impact of the course on their personal life in terms of time spent and resources needed. Participants such as Jane also noted that case studies former students would be helpful:

> *It's important to have the institutional information, but I think many students would want to hear from those that have come before us. So how what grades a student may have achieved; recommendation regarding additional reading; sources that were useful but did not appear on the reading list. Also, I would appreciate knowing a little more about past students experiences of the course.*

This is consistent with research by Tobbell et al., 2008 and Tobbell, O'Donnell and Zammit (2010) who noted that the lack of research on transition to postgraduate study has meant that there are some taken for granted views such as previous experience of university study means that detailed information prior to entering postgraduate study is not needed. Respondents suggested that this was not the case. A number of whom stating that the lack of coherent information on how to apply, the eligibility criteria and the deadlines for submitting applications meant that even though they wanted to undertake postgraduate study, this lack of information meant that they had considered not doing it. As Emma noted:

> *A course is a lot of money. You wouldn't buy a car without all the relevant information? So why on earth would you sign up for a course that will stretch you both financially and mentally without knowing all the details?*

The complicated funding process was also an issue for postgraduate students. Findings from the I-Graduate research study (2013) noted that most actual or potential postgraduate students felt that the information they needed to help them choose a course is readily available. All graduates interested in studying for postgraduate study outlined to me the array of scholarships and bursaries available from a variety of sources. However, when I unpicked the data there was an underlying issue with regards to students knowing how to apply for such funding. Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) identified the complicated funding process as being a disincentive as being for potential postgraduates. As they noted, the principal source of funding for postgraduate research students, at the time of their study, was research council studentships. These awards cover tuition fees and maintenance payments for three to four years of full-time study at doctoral level, or in some circumstances for one year full-time research training master's degrees. These studentships were allocated to individual university departments: some were available on a competitive basis; some awarded in collaboration with other public, private and voluntary sector bodies; whilst others were made direct to institutions, which were then free to select a student themselves.

Other sources of funding include institutional studentships and funding from industry, charities or government body funding. The difficulties in funding a postgraduate course are highlighted in the following extract from John who indicated that he would like to go on to further study but was unable to do so, at that time, due to financial reasons. Approximately a year after our interview he enrolled in postgraduate study - I was privy to this information because, although I had no further face to face contact with the respondent, he was a member of a group that I was part of. He posted the following message on the message board for this group, which I replicate in full with his permission.

"Hi all, I recently started a MA and am now looking at opportunities for funding. There are hundreds of websites out there stating that funding is out there, but no actual information beyond the typical Research Councils as where to go for it...It is quite mind boggling...I just wondered if the educational veterans here had any additional advice?

☐ *I am awaiting a decision on a bursary that will help in part,*

☐ *I have a loan so am not considering that an option*

☐ *Have approached my employer (council said no to finance though have offered time which was nice of them)*

☐ *Have approached both the relevant research arm and also the semi-relevant one (answer pending and "no" respectively)*

☐ *Have approached bodies that fund other bits but not necessarily students ("no")*

☐ *Have approached National Schemes for which it is likely I may get some small sums which will help a lot, though answers are pending.*

What seems apparent is that the respondent had tried the many sources that graduates are advised to try and that whilst he had some success in terms of funding, this had required multiple funding applications, not all of which were successful. Whilst charities, and other funding institutions have processes in place to help people overcome financial difficulty, includes supporting students with postgraduate funding, having conducted my own research in this area I was aware, like the above respondent, that applicants may need to meet some specific criteria, i.e. awards will either be targeted by nationality, region, profession, subject area or theme (The Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding, 2012-13).

I'd like to do postgraduate study but

As postgraduate study is emerging as *the new frontier in WP* (Moore et al, 2013), one area of immediate interest was to understand some of the reasons why some graduates do not go onto further study. Some respondents, like Luke for instance, stated:

I want to continue into further study, though simply cannot afford to do so. It is still something I may attempt to do in the future.

Respondents mentioned not only funding the course, but also the price of the academic books they would be required to buy. One interviewee, Anthony, who was considering enrolling on a postgraduate course, asked in a half joking, half serious way, if I would like to forgo buying him a coffee for the purpose of the interview, but instead purchase one of the books of his required reading list. Another respondent James said that it would be difficult for him to undertake further study as it would mean he would either lose money due to having to 'drop' specific shifts in his current, non graduate employment, or 'lose' the job as he would no longer be as flexible as he had been. What struck me when speaking with this particular graduate was the dilemma that he faced? It was clear that he would almost certainly benefit from gaining a Masters degree in applying for a graduate position, but unfortunately he was not able to enroll on such a course as it might mean losing his current employment.

Tobbell et al's (2012) study on the transition into postgraduate study revealed that the '*demands of real life'* was a further issue that impacted on the decision to undertake further study. This included trying to combine family life with studies as well as attempting to negotiate paid employment to support the study. Graduates observed that social activities would have to be sacrificed, alongside noticeable levels of 'denial' when engaging with further study: for example, giving up time (with family and friends) and money (if not able to work an extra shift), in parallel with the tensions of family demands and self-denial. I found examples of these occurring amongst my own sample of graduates who were engaging in postgraduate study as all mentioned that there were elements of sacrifice involved with carrying on with their studies. No respondent suggested they had given up 'family time', however, perhaps in an attempt to not miss out on this, the sacrifices made seemed to be personal. For instance Annabelle, who undertook a PhD within her graduate trajectory, said she was not able to do anything else but her PhD. She felt that her decision to complete as early as possible i.e. within a three year period, because she was self-financing, meant that she did not have time to socialize, to relax or to have conversations outside of her studies. The latter comment certainly highlights how difficult it is for some to continue with their studies, particularly if they are the only individuals in their social circle who are undertaking further study.

The all encompassing nature of further study was cited by a small number of interviewees, all females, as a reason why they stayed in employment. As Michelle noted:

I gave up an awful lot when I undertook my undergraduate degree. I can't put my family through that again, especially when the MA, or any other qualification would be for the purpose of learning, as opposed to earning.

Whilst these respondents stressed that they enjoyed their undergraduate experience, they were unsure if they would be able to combine postgraduate study with their family life. For instance, when I asked respondent Patty if she had considered going on to her PhD, she said it may be a step too far, naming a number of concerns that included family responsibilities (as well as how to finance it). Further research would be ideal to see if this is reason for not undertaking further study is, as I suspect, gender based, or if males defer postgraduate study due to family based reasons.

Recommendations and concluding remarks

This paper has outlined how a sample of graduates from North Wales accessed information regarding employment and postgraduate study. The study found that 'warm' knowledge was the most popular form of gaining information regarding employment opportunities. There was no subject specific data found regarding postgraduate opportunities but this was due to the smaller numbers of graduates who took part in this section of the study. Thus these findings should be taken as an invitation for researchers to explore if and how a wider range of subject areas can influence how graduates access information on employment and postgraduate study. This paper offers a greater understanding of student experiences which can be used by universities to better prepare students when trying to access employment opportunities and postgraduate study.
This study has three recommendations:

☐ In terms of *employment* HE Careers services were widely supported by graduates who were seeking information and guidance. However, respondents mentioned that there is scope for a more local and subject specific approach. Further research may be needed to ascertain exactly how this would look and work in practice but the theme from these participants was that the Careers Service should incorporate features of a recruitment agency. Detailed subject specific support could just mean a greater emphasis on the information that careers services already provide but given in a more subject specific manner. So subject specific career options but with more detail the top ten employers for the degree subject; links that

the Careers service has with these employers; how to promote your specific degree to employers and case studies of graduates in that field. As there was also an interest in having more local knowledge, this information could also be subject specific e.g. types of employers that might be interested in a graduate with a specific degree, typical roles available; how to gain work experience; who to contact etc.

☐ In light of findings related to Engineering graduates and their access to social networks yearly alumni events were suggested by graduates as a way of giving students the opportunity to network with past students, and discover how their careers had progressed. Norris (2011), whose research focused on further education colleges, adds to this by suggesting that universities could further help undergraduates build social capital by *developing relationships with organizations that have high social and cultural capital (1).* Whilst HE careers service already hold graduate fairs, making these more subject specific and ran by the college or school could be a further way of helping graduates link with local employers

☐ In terms of *postgraduate study* participants recommended a centralized university website which outlines course specific information as well as data regarding outcomes of previous graduates. So detailed information regarding course content e.g. specific modules; reading list and types of assessment studied. Whilst this information is available as yet it is still brief and does not give graduates enough detail in order to understand the transition between undergraduate to postgraduate. In terms of funding respondents asked for more information about all potential sources, with a clear pathway to determine eligibility as well as clear descriptions of the criteria for eligibility to apply. Alongside this a step-by-step chronological guide outlining how to apply for funding would be. Information how funding applications are judged and the criteria for success need to be clearly outlined so that prospective students can tailor their application. Qualitative stories from graduates from the specific course sharing their experiences and career outcomes would be a particularly effective recruitment tool. Graduate alumni events may also provide useful for both the prospective postgraduate student and the institution.

References

Ball, S. and Vincent, C. (1998) 'I heard it on the grapevine': 'hot' knowledge and school choice. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 19, 3: pp 377-400.

Diamond, A; Jones, S; Vorley, T and Roberts, J. (2012). Behavioural Approaches to Understanding Student Choice. Report for National Union of Students and Higher Education Academy.

Edirisingha,P; Cane, C; Cane, R and Nikoi, S. (2009). Informal Mobile Podcasting And Learning Adaptations for Transition. The Higher Education Academy

Greenbank, P .(2008). Working Class Students, the Career DecisionMaking Process and Employability. *Prospects. Graduate Market Trends*.

Greenbank, P. and Hepworth, S. (2008). Working class students and the career decision making process: a qualitative study. *The Higher Education CareersServices Unit.* [Online, available from: http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Working class.pdfaccessed 11October 2018].

Heussi, A. (2012) Postgraduate student perceptions of the transition into postgraduate study. *Student Engagement and Experience Journal*, 1(3),

Higher Education Statistical Agency. (2015). *Statistical First Release 217 -Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education in the United Kingdom.* [Online,available from: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pr/3630-statistical-first-release-217 accessed 20 October2018].

Purcell, K.., Elias, P., Davies, R and Wilton, N. (2005). The Class of '99. DfES Research Report No 691 DfES: Sheffield. [Online, available from: http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/Class_99_Full.pdfaccessed 20 October 2018].

Tobbell, J., O'Donnell, V., & Zammit, M. (2010). Exploring Transition to Postgraduate study: Shifting Identities in Interaction with Communities, Practice and Participation. *Educational Research Journal*, 36 (2), 261-278.

Warwick Institute for Employment Research. (2015). Frequently Asked Questions. [Online, available from: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/faqs/ accessed 20 August 2018].