

# The role of information in postgraduates' decision-making cycle.

MCNICHOLAS, C.

2020

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THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN  
POSTGRADUATES' DECISION  
MAKING CYCLE

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PHD

2020



# The Role of Information in Postgraduates' Decision Making Cycle

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the Robert Gordon University degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

The global market for international postgraduate students is becoming increasingly competitive as more institutions offer Masters level courses and universities need to increase revenues. The UK Government and universities want to stop the declining trend in market share of international students and have ambitious plans to attract these students to the UK. Understanding the decision making and information searching processes of international postgraduates will help universities to support these students as they make their decisions and tailor their marketing communications strategies to raise awareness of the institution, increase applications and ensure postgraduates' satisfaction whilst at university.

The aim of this study is to explore the role of information within the individual decision making cycle of international non-EU postgraduate students when selecting a business qualification and studying at university and evolve a decision making cycle model. The information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making process from the time they recognised a need to study, through application and enrolment to graduation, were investigated. Influential members of the decision making unit were identified and their information needs explored alongside the factors that impacted on the decision making cycle.

The methodological approach was underpinned by an interpretivist philosophy. A quantitative scoping study, based on the author's previous research, was used as an exploratory framework to help design the qualitative data collection. Under an inductive research approach 42 interviews were conducted with international non-EU postgraduates studying a business qualification in a post-92 English university. Thematic and Interpretative Phenomenological analysis were carried out on the full transcripts.

A theoretical contribution is made by evolving a new conceptual model of the role of information in the decision making cycle of individuals when making a significant purchase decision; the Iterative Decision Making Cycle Model. The model is unique as it builds on models proposed by both marketing and

consumer behaviour scholars, and Kuhlthau, a LIS academic, to create a new model which reflects the connectedness of individuals in the digital era. Kuhlthau's research is extended into a new context as the focus is on the postgraduate as an information seeker and their use of information when making a high involvement purchase decision. A new consumer Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology is proposed.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in marketing and LIS as it helps individuals to understand the cyclical and iterative nature of the decision making cycle, the sequence of decisions made regarding the country, university and course and then city to study in and the significance of online sources including the university website, rankings and online reviews regardless of their credibility. There is a need to stimulate recommendations and information exchange amongst prospective, current students and alumni due to the influence of word of mouth information sources and communicate pertinent information to students, parents, agents and partner staff as important target audiences. Despite living in an information rich world there was a lack of rationality and informedness amongst certain groups of postgraduates when making these significant decisions and 'new', 'experienced' and 'connected' prospective postgraduates should receive tailored information as identified in the typology. Once at university information plays an important role in structuring expectations and contributing to the student experience and satisfaction levels of international postgraduates.

Recommendations are made to the Government and universities on targeting prospective postgraduates and other influential members of the DMU, on tailoring the messages and media to be used when communicating with these target audiences and to provide the information required by postgraduates immediately post purchase and whilst studying at university.

Keywords: postgraduate, international student, decision making, information behaviour, information search, motivation, information sources

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This reflection from one postgraduate student standing waiting for a bus, having just arrived at the University, sums up the determination of the participants in this study:

*'It's a rainy day and there are dark clouds and I feel maybe sad about this. I have to stand alone with the rain coming down. I am not sure about this. Is this a good decision that I am coming here because it's not a good day, it's not a sunny day [...] But I think that I have to fight for it because I want to graduate with a Masters degree and I am already decided. I trust my decision. It will be great.'*

## Abbreviations

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CABS	Chartered Association of Business Schools
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DMP	Decision making process
DMU	Decision making unit
ELIS	Everyday life information seeking
eWOM	Electronic word of mouth
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEC	Higher Education Council
HECSU	Higher Education Careers Services Unit
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEP	Higher Education Provider
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
ISP	Information Search Process
LIS	Library and information studies
NUS	National Union of Students
NSS	National Student Survey
PAL	Peer assisted learning
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RGU	Robert Gordon University
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SNS	Social Networking Site
WOM	Word of mouth



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## CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter provides an introduction and rationale for the research. The aim, objectives and research questions are presented and the context for the study is provided.

### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

This study explores the role of information within the individual decision making cycle of international non-EU postgraduate students when selecting a business qualification and studying at university and evolves a decision making cycle model. The contribution that international postgraduates made to the UK economy and universities was acknowledged when the current author first started researching the topic in 2000. International postgraduates have become increasingly important, hence the focus of this study:

*'Postgraduate education and training has shifted from being a fringe activity in higher education institutions to commanding a role that takes centre stage.'* (Burgess 1997 p16)

Universities and the Government trying to recruit international postgraduate students to study in the UK are in an increasingly competitive arena. A rise in the number of universities offering postgraduate study on a worldwide basis and the acknowledgement that international postgraduate students provide an increasingly valuable source of revenue has meant that it is becoming more difficult to for the UK to increase market share in terms of the number and quality of postgraduate students.

In 2018 157,720 international non-EU postgraduates studied in UK institutions which represented 28% of the postgraduate student population (HESA 2019). The majority of them were studying taught qualifications with 69% studying qualifications in business and administrative studies (CABS 2019). International students generated £25.8 billion through on and off campus spending by themselves and their visitors in 2017 (Universities UK 2017) and the



Government planned to increase their numbers to 600,000 students in the UK by 2030 to gain revenues of £35 billion (HM Government 2019).

This study is timely due to the current challenges that the Government and UK universities face in recruiting international postgraduate students. There has been a decline in the number of international students in the UK relative to Australia and Canada as the UK becomes a less attractive study destination. The mobility of international postgraduates is increasing however business schools are expanding in Asia, new countries are becoming study destinations and Asian students are increasingly remaining within their regions to go to university. Concerns about Brexit, stricter immigration laws and tighter student visa regulations for international students provide obstacles to study in the UK. Universities and the Government are having to market the UK and their educational services more aggressively on an international basis and in order to do this they need to understand the role of information in the decision making process of international postgraduates as they choose to study at an overseas university. Little previous research has focused on international postgraduate students as a group of students despite their complex decision making process and distinct information needs. This study fulfils the need for up to date research which reflects the interconnectedness of individuals and media channels in this digital era and focuses on international non-EU postgraduates and other members of the decision making unit as target audiences.

An understanding of the decision making and information searching processes of prospective international postgraduates can help the Government and universities to tailor their marketing communications strategy. They need to raise awareness of the UK as an educational study destination and of its universities as offering high quality postgraduate courses that meet the needs of prospective international students. Universities can decide on the right marketing communications messages and media and target those key individuals who make and influence the final decision as to which university to attend. Studying the role that information plays in structuring the expectations of international postgraduates, and its contribution to the student experience and satisfaction levels whilst at university, is of use to universities who need to provide the right sources and types of information to postgraduates. Knowledge

of the contribution of postgraduates to the pool of information available helps to encourage a virtuous circle of word of mouth communication amongst prospective, current and previous postgraduates.

## 1.2 Rationale

The rationale for the proposed research is fourfold based on 1) theoretical contribution, 2) a clear gap in the research, 3) providing valuable insights for the Government and universities and 4) the author's interest and experience.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by evolving a new conceptual model of the role of information in the decision making cycle of individuals when making a significant purchase decision by combining marketing and information behaviour models. The study contributes to academic knowledge as it helps individuals to understand the nature of the cycle, the sources and types of information that are used the most intensively during the cycle, the level of informedness of the decision makers, the impact of others in the decision making unit, their information needs and how individuals can be supported by others when they are making these high involvement decisions. Studying individuals on an international basis provides insight into the impact of culture and other factors on the decision making cycle. The need to avoid miscommunication, the role of information in meeting expectations and ensuring satisfaction and the contribution of people to the pool of information are investigated and conclusions reached. The author hypothesises that despite living in an information rich world there is a lack of rationality and information used when making these significant decisions. The author believes that the traditional model of the linear decision making process should be replaced with a cyclical, iterative model which reflects the connectedness of individuals in this digital era.

This research also contributes to academic knowledge in the Library and Information Studies (LIS) field. LIS will be used throughout this study to denote research conducted by library and information studies scholars, rather than ILS. The focus of previous studies has been on information seeking behaviour and the information seeker rather than looking at the role of information in the process

of making a decision. This study explores how information was used by the information seeker and is grounded in the real life experiences of prospective international postgraduates.

Secondly, this study fills a clear gap in the research. International non-EU postgraduate students are valuable to both the Government and universities and have been found to have distinct information requirements. There was a need to acquire more information about them and their information needs. Previous studies have been mainly quantitative and focused on undergraduate students, local postgraduates or local and international postgraduates together. Prior research has not provided the in-depth qualitative information required concerning international non-EU postgraduates as a separate group of students. Much of the previous research has used outdated linear decision making models and has not recognised the importance of members of the decision making unit when choices are made between alternative options. Similarly, studies have not taken into account the increasing availability of digital media and changes in the use and perceived credibility of information sources. This study fills a gap in the research as it is an up to date exploratory study conducted in a UK institution involving postgraduate students from different countries as requested by Hemsley Brown and Oplatka (2015). It provides an in-depth insight into the role of information in international postgraduate students' decision making cycle.

This study provides valuable insights for universities and the Government. The global market for international postgraduate students is very competitive and they make a significant economic contribution to the UK economy and universities. There is therefore a need for the Government and UK universities to understand the decision making process and information requirements of these postgraduates to attract them and then ensure they are satisfied whilst studying in the UK. International postgraduates are making a life impacting purchasing decision with high levels of perceived risk so it is important for universities and the Government to recognise how they could support these students in making their choice. This research helps university marketers to understand the international postgraduate student's information searching process, the sequence of decisions made, the sources they use and the types of information they require at all stages of their decision making cycle. It provides practical

recommendations to universities on marketing communications strategies in terms of segmentation, targeting and positioning and the media to employ to raise awareness of the university amongst prospective international postgraduates. The study proposes a typology of international postgraduates which universities can use to decide on the segments to target and outlines other potential segments based on the analysis of the information requirements of members of the decision making unit. The evaluation of the types of information prospective international postgraduates require in order to help make the decision to apply to a university is helpful in deciding on the messages to use to appeal to this audience.

After postgraduates have started to study at a UK institution this research helps universities to understand the role of information in the student experience, how information provision meets student expectations and enhances satisfaction and the contribution of current students to the pool of future information for prospective applicants. From this research there is the opportunity in the future to produce a toolkit based on the recommendations made. The toolkit would help universities and the Government to decide on segments of international postgraduates and other members of the decision making unit such as parents and agents from different countries to target, how to position the UK and the institution as a favourable place to study and the media to use to communicate with the chosen target audiences. The toolkit would also address the information requirements of international postgraduates once at university to help contribute to their satisfaction levels.

The author is interested in the topic having been a professional marketer and university lecturer for 31 years who has enjoyed having daily contact with international postgraduate students. She first started researching postgraduates as a target audience for marketing communications strategies in 2000 for her Masters and subsequently published on the topic.

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research is:

To explore the role of information within the individual decision making cycle of international non-EU postgraduate students when selecting a business qualification and studying at university and evolve a decision making cycle model

The objectives are to:

1. Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation
2. Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment
3. Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction
4. Assess the factors that influence the information searching process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates
5. Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decision and studying at university
6. Provide conclusions on the role of information within international postgraduates' decision making cycle and the information requirements at each stage
7. To contribute to the understanding of information behaviour by evolving a decision making cycle model

### 1.4 Qualitative Research Questions

The qualitative research questions are as follows:

1. What were the sequence of decisions taken before enrolling at university?
2. To what extent were the decision making and information searching processes iterative and cyclical?
3. To what extent was the approach to the decision making cycle and information searching process rigorous and rational?
4. What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?
5. What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?
6. What sources of information were accessed in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?
7. What types of information were required in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?
8. What factors influenced the information searching process and decision making cycle of postgraduate students?
9. How did postgraduate students contribute to the pool of information throughout the cycle?
10. Were there any gaps in information provision during the stages of the decision making cycle?
11. To what extent did the information provided structure the expectations of postgraduates?
12. How did the information provided influence the level of postgraduate satisfaction?
13. What have postgraduates learnt about the decision making process that will inform future decisions?
14. How did the postgraduates' experiences of information searching affect future information searching behaviour?
15. How informed were postgraduates during the process of making a purchase choice?

## 1.6 Structure of the Study

The structure of the study is shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Structure of the Study

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Contents</b>
Chapter 1	Background to the Study
Chapter 2	Literature Review
Chapter 3	Methodology
Chapter 4	Quantitative Research Findings
Chapter 5	Qualitative Research Findings
Chapter 6	Discussion and Conclusions
Chapter 7	Recommendations

Source Author's Analysis 2020

## 1.7 Context for the Study

In this section the context for the study is considered concerning the UK higher education market and international postgraduates. Definitions of postgraduate education and international non-EU students are provided. The size and growth of the UK international non-EU postgraduate education market, trends in international student mobility and the value of the sector to the Government, universities and the economy are discussed. Lastly the debate concerning the marketisation of higher education is explored. These topics are linked to the sample population for the study, which is international non-EU taught postgraduate students studying a business qualification, and to the economic and marketing rationale for the study.

There were various definitions of postgraduate education but for the purposes of this study postgraduate education comprised courses that were more advanced than those at undergraduate level (Sastry 2004) up to a PhD degree (Arambewela and Maringe 2012). There were a wide variety of courses offered at postgraduate level as Table 1.2 illustrates.

Table 1.2 Typology of Postgraduate Provision

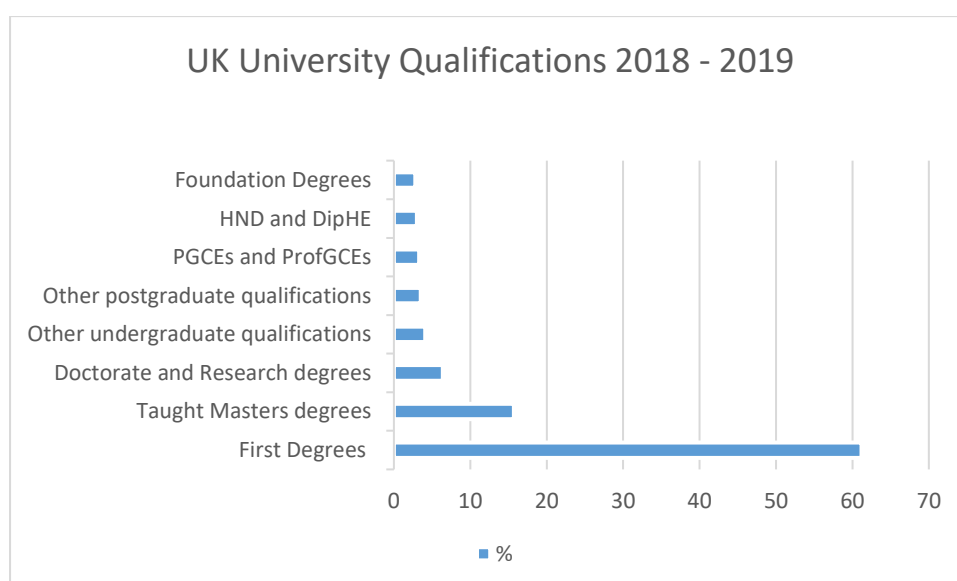
PG Taught (PGT)	PG Professional (PGP)	PG Research (PGR)
Postgraduate diploma and Masters courses, extending an individual's knowledge or allowing them to convert to a new discipline	Professional certificates and diplomas	Research Masters – e.g. MRes; includes methods training and often used as a stepping point to a PhD; MPhil; sometimes used as a PhD exit point
Integrated Masters such as MEng	PGCE and similar licences to practise	Traditional model PhD
Postgraduate modules e.g. Open University courses	Vocational Masters courses – either as CPD or preparing individual for a particular profession	'New route' PhD with larger taught elements and wider skills training
	MBA	Some professional doctorates – that count in RAE / REF
	Some professional doctorates – where required as licence to practise but not included in REF	

Source HEC 2012 p. 20

This study focuses on taught and professional postgraduates studying business qualifications hereinafter referred to as postgraduate students. Business qualifications were classified as those qualifications offered by a typical Business School in a UK university.

Figure 1.1 shows the different qualifications offered by UK Universities.

Figure 1.1 UK University Qualifications 2018-19



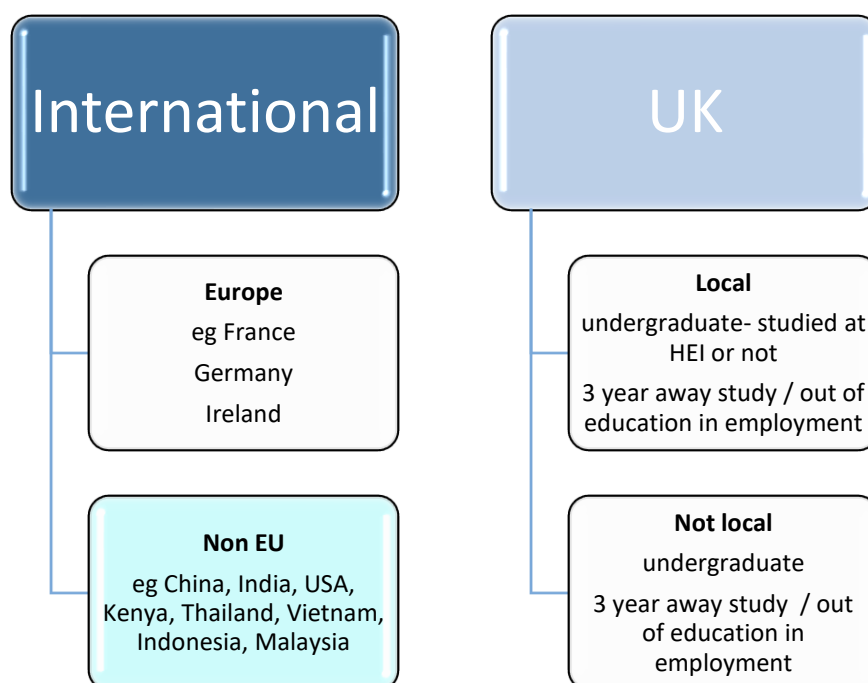
Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on IBIS World 2018



Figure 1.1 shows that the taught Masters degree was the most common UK postgraduate qualification and represented 15.7% of qualifications in 2018/19.

Figure 1.2 shows that taught postgraduates could be classified as UK, international European Union (EU) or international non-EU students. For the purposes of this study an international non-EU postgraduate student was defined as a student who was enrolled in a UK university undertaking a postgraduate taught course who was not a UK or EU citizen, an immigrant, or refugee and did not have permanent residence in the UK (Al-Quhen 2012, Tran 2011).

Figure 1.2 Taught Postgraduate Student Segments



Source Author's Analysis 2020

The author started researching postgraduate students in 2000. She identified from the quantitative scoping study that international non-EU postgraduates were a distinct segment of postgraduates in terms of their information requirements and chose to focus on them in her qualitative study. The author acknowledges that as the UK has just departed from the European Union the rationale for differentiating between EU and non-EU international students as separate segments and for focusing on just non-EU students may not be as strong. However, she still believes that international non-EU postgraduates have

distinct information needs. Non-EU international postgraduate students will be hereinafter referred to as international postgraduates.

The size of the international non-EU market in the UK and trends impacting on the market are now discussed.

UK postgraduate numbers have grown steadily over the last five decades and at a faster rate than undergraduate students. The number of postgraduate students in higher education increased from 19,260 in 1962 to 566,545 in 2017/18 which represented 24% of the total number of higher education students in the UK (Dearing 1997, HESA 2019).

The number of international students who studied abroad in 2017 was five million compared to 2.1 million in 2000 which in turn was more than triple the number of mobile students in 1990 (University of Oxford 2015, ICEF 2017b). This trend is set to continue with predicted forecasts of eight million internationally mobile students by 2025 (OECD 2017). Countries which received the highest percentage of foreign students were the US (19%), UK (10%), Australia (6%), France (6%) and Germany (5%) (OECD 2015).

Table 1.3 shows the number of students and postgraduates studying in UK institutions by domicile.

Table 1.3 Students by Domicile

<b>Student domicile</b>	<b>All students 2013/14</b>	<b>All students 2017/18</b>	<b>Postgraduate 2017/18</b>
Total non-EU student	310,205	319,340	157,720
Total EU student	125,315	139,150	45,070
Total UK student	1,863,940	1,884,575	363,755
<b>Total all students</b>	<b>2,299,460</b>	<b>2,343,095</b>	<b>566,545</b>

Source HESA 2019

According to Table 1.3 319,340 students came from non-EU countries to study in the UK in 2017/18, which was an increase of 2.9% on 2013/14. Of these non-EU students, 157,720 were postgraduates which represented 28% of the postgraduate student population. The majority of these non-EU postgraduate

students were studying taught postgraduate degrees which amounted to 128,365 students (HESA 2019). Postgraduate qualifications in business and administrative studies were the most popular degrees with 69% of international non-EU students studying them (CABS 2019). International non-EU postgraduates therefore represented a significant proportion of the £36.4 billion revenue in the UK university sector and are an important segment of students which the author has chosen to research (IBIS World 2018).

The international top ten non-EU countries that sent students to the UK to study in 2013/14 and 2017/18 are displayed in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 Top Ten non-EU Sending Countries to UK

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of students 2013/14</b>	<b>Number of students 2017/18</b>	<b>% of total number of students 2017/18</b>
China	87,895	106,530	33.3
India	19,750	19,750	6.1
United States of America	16,485	18,885	5.9
Hong Kong	14,725	16,350	5.1
Malaysia	16,635	14,970	4.7
Nigeria	18,020	10,540	3.3
Saudi Arabia	9,060	7,950	2.5
Singapore	6,790	7,020	2.2
Thailand	6,340	6,270	2.0
Canada	6,350	6,180	1.9

Source HESA 2019

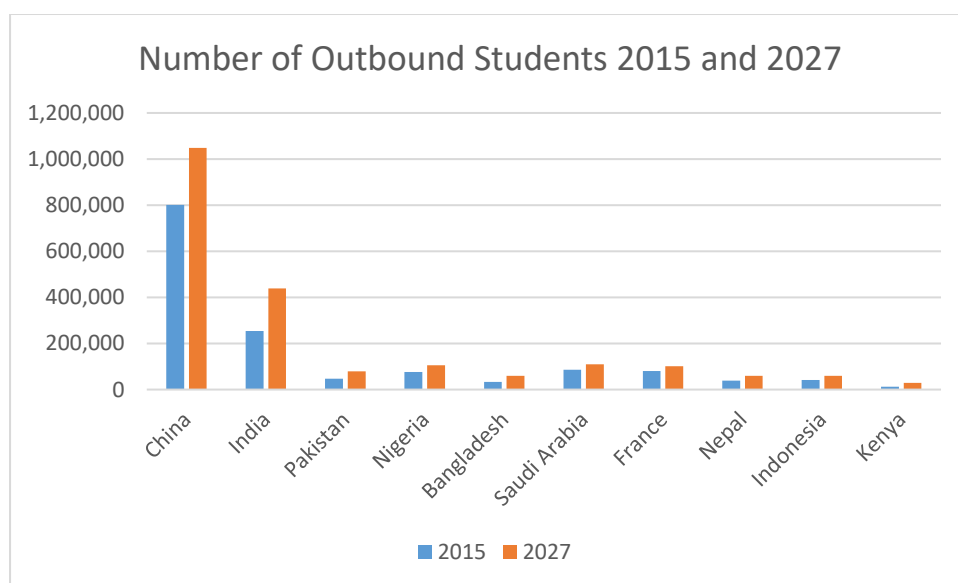
Table 1.4 shows that 33% of the international non-EU students studying in the UK came from China followed by India (6.1%), the USA (5.9%), Hong Kong (5.9%) and Malaysia (4.7%). The number of international non-EU students coming to the UK from the top ten countries had increased between 2013/14 and 2017/18 for half of the countries in the table. The number of students coming from India remained the same and for Malaysia, Nigeria, Singapore, Thailand and Canada the numbers of students decreased.

The mobility patterns of international students have been changing. Students were shifting east and regionalising so that more students who wished to study abroad were doing so within their own regions (Becker and Kolster 2012,

University of Oxford 2015, ICEF 2017b). China was the world's fifth leading study destination with 489,200 international students enrolled in educational institutions (ICEF 2018b).

The British Council (2018) predicted that the growth in outbound mobility of international students would slow down from an annual average growth rate of 5.7% from 2000 to 2015 to 1.7% in 2027. This was due to local investment in higher education provision and decreasing tertiary-aged populations. The top ten growth markets for outbound students up to 2027 are pictured in Figure 1.3. It is estimated that there will be an increase of 245,000 students in China and 185,000 in India up to 2027 and these two countries were forecasted to account for 60% of the global growth in outbound students to 2027 (British Council 2018). However increasingly China and India were offering postgraduate courses to their own citizens and actively trying to attract students from other countries.

Figure 1.3 Number of Outbound Students 2015 and 2027



Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on British Council 2018

In the UK there was a decline in applications from international students from 2012/13 which was due to stricter immigration laws, tighter student visa regulations, concerns about Brexit and other countries increasing their efforts to recruit international students (ICEF 2018b, IBIS World 2016). Canada and Australia successfully competed with the UK for international non-EU

postgraduates on the basis of educational quality, reputation for safety and opportunities for residency and work. In 2017 Canada's and Australia's international enrolments rose by 20% and 17% respectively whilst international enrolments rose only marginally in the UK (1%) and USA (3%) indicating declining market share for both the US and UK.

The increasingly competitive nature of the global market for international non-EU postgraduates, the UK's declining market share and the fact that UK universities are disadvantaged by Brexit, the Government's international student visa policy and immigration regulations, means that this study is timely as it will help universities to understand how to raise awareness and enrolment for their courses amongst international postgraduates.

The value of international postgraduates studying in the UK to the UK economy, to universities and to the Government are now considered.

The provision of education services has become a global business (Chadee and Nadoo 2009) with a predicted value of \$7.8 trillion in 2025 (HolonIQ 2019). The contribution of international postgraduate students to the UK economy through the generation of GDP, jobs and taxes is undisputed by the Governments in the UK (Scottish Government 2015, BIS 2010, HEFCE 2013a, HEC 2012, HM Government 2019).

Various bodies have estimated the size of the contribution. The Department of Education (2019) estimated that higher education exports and transnational education were worth £19.9 billion to the UK economy in 2016, up 26% since 2010. In 2014 £8.5 billion in revenue came from international non-EU students (Department of Education 2017). The UK Government has set a target of £35 billion for the value of education exports by 2030 amounting to 600,000 international students hosted in the UK (HM Government 2019).

Additional benefits to the UK from having international postgraduate students study in the country included the global alumni network that could encourage international trade, international research collaborations, personal recommendations from alumni supporting future higher education exports and

alumni allegiance to the UK impacting on sales of UK brands, tourism and the positive perception of the UK, its people and its culture (Mellors Bourne 2013a).

Universities benefited from having international postgraduate students as they offered a valuable source of income. It was estimated that Higher Education Institutions obtained 8% of their income from international undergraduate and postgraduate fees (IBIS World 2018). International postgraduates also provided opportunities for staff development and underpinned research activity (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson 2013). Other benefits included enhanced internationalisation of the curriculum, networking and knowledge production opportunities and increased prestige for the institution (Seeber et al 2016).

The Government have for many years acknowledged the contribution that international postgraduate students could make (BIS 2003, Scottish Government 2018, HM Government 2019). Since 2009 many educational and governmental bodies have commissioned studies to look at postgraduate students; their motivations, choice factors and information needs in order to encourage more individuals to undertake postgraduate study as shown in Table 8.1 in appendix 1. The focus of the majority of these reports was on UK taught postgraduate students however international postgraduate students were increasingly the focus of later reports.

The marketisation of higher education and its impact on the provision and marketing of educational services will now be considered.

Whilst Governments encouraged an expansion in higher education and universities tried to grow their market share and profitability in an increasingly competitive global environment, there has been a debate in the literature concerning the marketisation of higher education (for example Fairclough 1993, Scullion Hearn 2018). Marketisation referred to the exposure of universities to market forces (Foskett 2010) with the result that staff were positioned as service providers and students were being increasingly viewed as customers whose demands should be met (Arambewela and Maringe 2012). Gibbs (2008) referred to this as the 'commodification' of higher education whereas Ritzer (1996) was one of the first to use the term 'McUniversity' which referred to the

transformation of Higher Education Institutions from generators of knowledge to providers of a service. Viewing a student as a customer could lead to pressure to reduce academic standards and provide the student with the opportunity to gain a degree as a right, as they had paid for the service (Hemsley Brown and Optlatka 2016). The result is that universities have become increasingly accountable and have prioritised student satisfaction as an indicator of quality (Bartram 2009).

Studies have been undertaken on the impact of marketisation on international students. Smith (2007b) argued that seeing an international student as a customer and the university as a provider of educational services could undermine the authenticity of the relationship. Jabbar et al (2018) studied the impact of international recruitment on a UK business school and found that staff were operating in an increasingly pressurised environment and experiencing conflicts of interest when faced with international students who had not achieved the previously stated academic standards but could pay for the course. Daymon and Durkin (2013) researched the marketisation of the postgraduate curriculum in Australian universities and the preparedness of students for careers in public relations and marketing communications. They found that the tension between academic rigour and relevancy to employers of the degree content led to an underdevelopment of critical and creative abilities with the result that students were less employable.

The customer and market-oriented focus of universities has led to increased marketing activities aimed at international postgraduate students (Woodall et al 2014). The Government has also run marketing campaigns to increase the number of international students at British universities (Hemsley Brown and Optlatka 2006). Marketing communications activities, especially in direct and interactive media have become increasingly important to raise awareness of universities' services (Royo-Vela and Hünermund 2016).

In summary, the value of the international non-EU postgraduate student segment to the economy, universities and the Government has been demonstrated. The exploration of the role of information in the decision making cycle of international non-EU postgraduates in this study will help the

Government and universities to tailor their marketing communications strategies to attract increasing numbers of this important student segment. It will also help universities to understand the influence of information on student satisfaction and enable them to provide the academic and personal information international postgraduates require whilst at university. Recommendations to universities are made in section 7.1.

Chapter 2 will review the literature pertinent to the aim and objectives.



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter reviews the literature pertinent to the aim and objectives. In the first section the role of information is considered and in the second section the literature on the postgraduate decision making process is evaluated. Gaps in previous research are identified and linked to the author's rationale for conducting the study and the research questions.

### Role of Information

In this part the literature and key concepts on information behaviour, Kuhlthau's Information Search Process model and the sources and types of information required by postgraduates pre and post purchase are reviewed. The breadth, depth and timing of information search pre purchase and the impact of information provision on postgraduates' expectations and satisfaction post purchase are discussed. Justification is provided for positioning Kuhlthau's Information Search Process model in the inner ring of the author's proposed new model.

#### 2.1 Information Behaviour Concepts

In this section the information behaviour concepts that are explored in the author's research and which provide the theoretical underpinning for the study are considered.

In the context of this study the role of information encompasses aspects of information behaviour, information seeking, information searching, information use and information literacy when deciding where to study a postgraduate qualification and when studying at university. These terms are defined in Table 2.1.

It should be noted that Kuhlthau's definition of information searching extended beyond the standard definition and overlapped with descriptions of information seeking as described in Table 2.1.



There were scholars such as Atkin (1972, 1973) who viewed information seeking as driven by rational judgement and a lack of emotional motivation. Whereas other scholars such as Dervin (1992) believed the search for information was motivated by feelings of unease or anxiety at having a gap in knowledge. They acknowledged that missing knowledge motivated individuals to search for information and that information seeking was not an entirely rational process.

The debate in the literature regarding whether the information searching process was driven by rational judgement or emotional feelings is echoed in the literature on the rationality of the decision making process which will be discussed in section 2.12.

Gaining information to reduce uncertainty is a concept that dates back to the nineteenth century (Morowitz 1991). Atkin (1973 p.206) defined an information need as:

*'a function of extrinsic uncertainty produced by a perceived discrepancy between an individual's current level of certainty about important environmental objects and a criterion state that he seeks to achieve.'*

In the definition Atkin referred to the uncertainty an information seeker felt when looking for information on environmental objects such as people, events, ideas or things that were important to them.

Belkin (1978, 2005) stated that people were motivated to seek information due to an 'anomalous state of knowledge' (ASK). When an individual recognised an anomaly, which was a gap or uncertainty, in their knowledge then an ASK existed. The individual might then try to reduce uncertainty by seeking information.

Brashers (2001) agreed that information seeking was a strategy to 'manage uncertainty' in one's environment and so became a prime motivation for information seeking. Kuhlthau (1993a p345) described the information seeking process as one in which 'users progress from uncertainty to understanding' and developed the principle of uncertainty when searching for information in her research (Kuhlthau 1988a,1988b,1991,1993a,1993b,1997,2004,2005).

Uncertainty was the initial feeling that people experienced when undertaking any search for information which was often accompanied by feelings of anxiety which motivated people to continue the search or to give it up (Kuhlthau 2005).

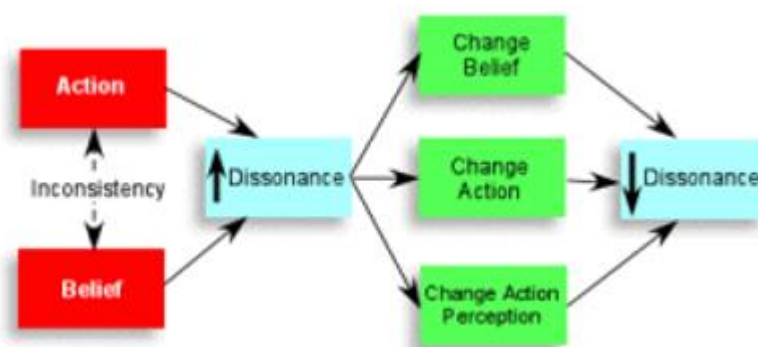
Kuhlthau (2005) identified that for complex tasks, like choosing a postgraduate course, uncertainty was high (see section 2.2).

This section demonstrates the important role of information in reducing people's uncertainty. This is an interesting area that will be researched by the author in relation to postgraduates' information searching and decision making processes.

Related to the need to gather information to reduce uncertainty was the theory of cognitive dissonance (Spink and Cole 2004). Blythe (2013) described cognitive dissonance as feelings of unease or uncertainty as to whether the right decision had been made in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making process. He claimed that the level of dissonance would depend on the divergence between the expected and actual outcome, the importance of the discrepancy to the individual, the degree to which it could be corrected and the cost of the purchase in terms of time, money and risk.

Figure 2.2 shows that one option for the individual to try to reduce dissonance was to change their beliefs by acquiring new information that would increase consonance (consistency).

Figure 2.2 Cognitive Dissonance Theory



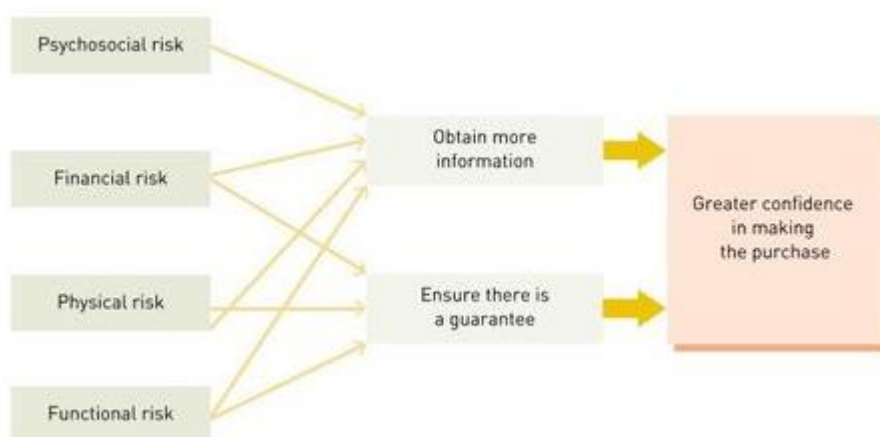
Source Ganser 2017

When acquiring new information to reduce dissonance, Festinger (1962) found that individuals paid attention to other people or information that supported their beliefs and so increased consonance. They ignored information that increased dissonance.

As the purchase of a postgraduate education was a high cost purchase there was a greater likelihood of a student experiencing cognitive dissonance in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making process. The need to reassure students that they had made the right decision in order to reduce dissonance is explored in this research.

Another concept of importance when exploring the role of information was the need to gather information when making a decision to reduce perceived risk. According to Blythe (2013) there were four types of risk when needing to come to a decision; psychosocial, financial, physical and functional as shown in Figure 2.3. These types of risk led to a desire to obtain information which gave the consumer greater confidence when making the decision.

Figure 2.3 Reducing Risk



Source Blythe 2013 p.68 Fig 3.8

Purchasing a postgraduate education was classified as a high-risk purchase (Venkatraman 1989). This was because it was an intangible (Levitt 1981) and experiential service as the focus was on the student's experience when

interacting with the university rather than the functional benefits derived from the service (Voss and Zomerdijk 2007). The intensity and length of contact between the postgraduate and the university and the efforts that the postgraduate and the institution needed to make to gain a successful outcome in the form of a degree made education a special type of service and increased the risk when purchasing a postgraduate education (Khanna, Jacob and Yadav 2014).

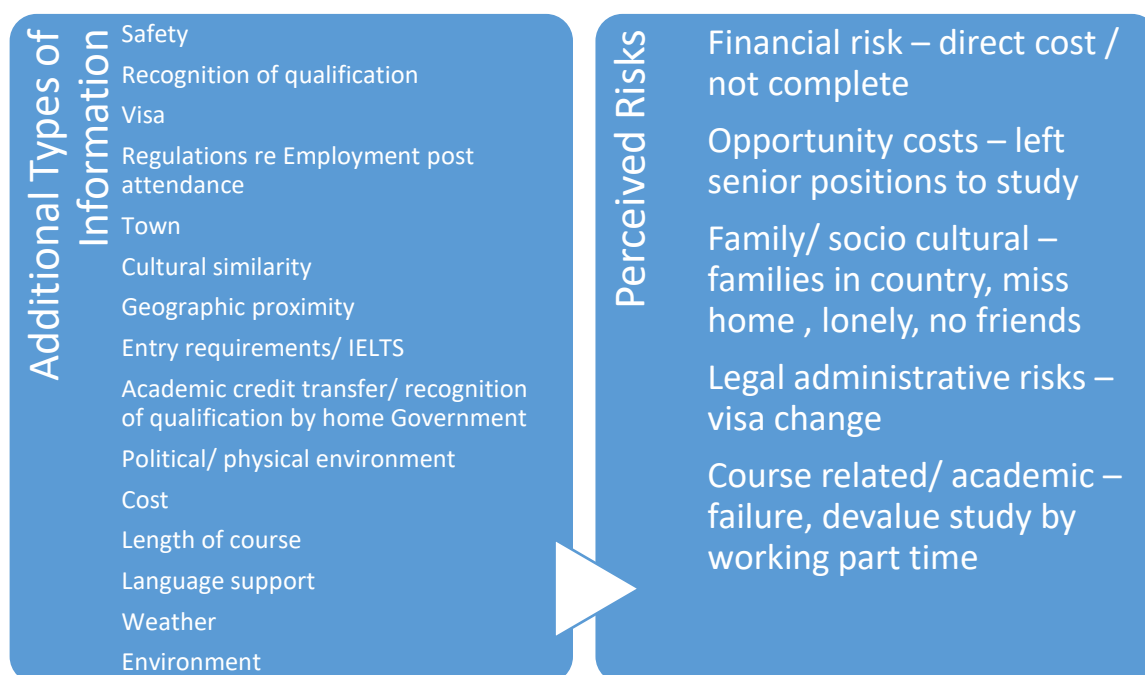
Purchasing a postgraduate course was also described as a high-risk purchase because of its high cost, infrequent purchase, the high personal importance to the student, significant differences between universities and courses and relatively few alternatives. It was also difficult to experience a postgraduate education prior to purchase which increased the risk (Dehne 2000).

The risk perceived by the postgraduate student tended to be higher if they were self-funding because the risk of making the wrong selection regarding the course chosen or the institution could be costly due to the fees being paid (Moogan et al 2001).

As the purchase of a postgraduate education was a high risk purchase prospective postgraduates would search for information to inform their decision whether to purchase the qualification (Murray 1991). International students perceived that the risks of studying in a foreign institution were higher than home students (Maringe 2007). The risks they perceived and their additional information requirements are shown in Figure 2.4.

The high level of risk involved in the purchase of a postgraduate qualification meant that it was classified as a high involvement purchase in the consumer behaviour literature. This has implications for the information searching and decision making processes of international postgraduates which are explored in this study.

Figure 2.4 International Student Information Requirements and Perceived Risks



Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Maringe 2007, Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño 2006, Teng 2015, i-graduate 2013

## 2.2 Information Behaviour Models

Many scholars have developed models to illustrate information behaviour: Ellis 1989, Kuhlthau 1993a, Leckie 1996, Johnson 1997, Gorman 1999, Ingwersen and Jarvelin 2005, Wilson 1981, Wilson 1996, Wilson 1999, Krikelas 1983, Bystrom and Jarvelin 1995, Savolainen 1995, Johnson 1993, Williamson 1998, Foster 2004, Shenton and Hay Gibson 2011, Robson and Robinson 2013, Freund 2015.

Those models created by library and information studies (LIS) scholars tended to focus on information seeking behaviour and the information seeker rather than looking at the role of information in the process of making a decision. They did not consider how information was used by the information seeker which is explored in this study.

Many of the previous information seeking models including Kuhlthau's (1993a) model were sequential linear models and some LIS scholars have critiqued them

for this reason. They argued that in reality the information seeking process might be a non-sequential, back and forward process (Foster 2004, Godbold 2006, Niedzwiedzka 2003). Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain (1996) suggested that information seeking was an iterative process and Shenton and Hay Gibson (2011) agreed that this was the case. They found that children and young people in their study often revisited previous stages if they were having difficulties. Robson and Robinson (2013) argued that the Wilson model was too sequential and did not take into account the fact that typically information searching tended to go backwards and forwards. Marcella and Baxter (1998) proposed a cyclical model to represent the provision and use of information by the citizen and the government. The Government/ Citizen Interchange model had outer wheels that moved backwards and forwards to demonstrate the many different facets of information need and use.

Todd (2017) claimed that hundreds of information literacy, information seeking, and information search models had been developed and that, in his opinion, was too many. The models lacked relevance as they were often derived from small scale studies and they were not further tested with different populations to establish their authority. Few of the models provided a framework to help understand individuals' information search experience. However, Kuhlthau's (1993a) model was an exception to this. The author acknowledges Todd's (2017) comments regarding a surfeit of information behaviour models but she perceives that there is an opportunity to create a new model which illustrates the role of information in the decision making cycle.

The author proposes a model of the decision making cycle which builds on Kuhlthau's Information Search Process model in the inner ring. It is a circular model which reflects the iterative nature of the decision making and information searching processes. She feels that this new model is a useful addition to the models already provided as it is a research based model which provides a framework that can be used to explore information searching behaviour within the context of making decisions pertaining to the purchase of goods and services.



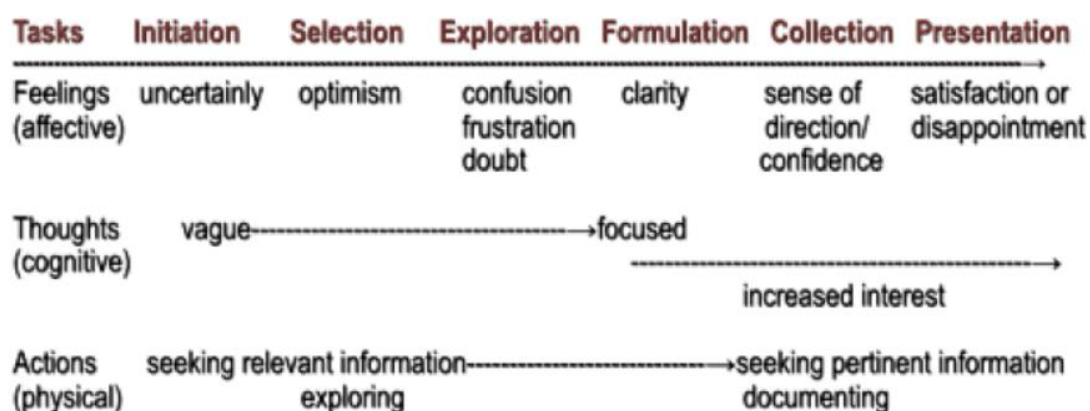
Kuhlthau's (1993a) model of the Information Search Process (ISP) is now discussed and justification provided for why the model has been chosen by the author for development in her proposed new model.

Kuhlthau's (1993a) ISP model had its origins in the work of the educational theorists Kelly (1955, 1991), Dewey (1929) and Bruner (1986). Kelly (1963) had the idea of attaching feelings (affective) to cognitive stages with the feeling of uncertainty at the beginning which led to anxiety. Dewey classified the stages of cognition and Bruner identified the actions associated with both cognitive and affective stages (Wilson 2004).

Prior to Kuhlthau's 1983 study only a few researchers such as Wilson (1981) and Dervin (1983) had looked at affective aspects during information seeking which meant that the experience of the information searcher was not fully understood (Savolainen 2015). Scholars looking at information behaviour had traditionally focused on cognitive dimensions and affective factors had been of secondary consideration (Case 2012).

Kuhlthau conducted research amongst secondary school students searching for information whilst undertaking an assignment, and she published the findings in her 1983 doctoral dissertation and 1985 book. Her model of the Information Search Process was based on this research (Kuhlthau 1993a). The model showed the process of searching for information as a series of stages or phases and considered the physical actions, affective (feelings) and cognitive (thoughts) aspects at each stage of the process (Ford 2015). The six stages in the Information Search Process were named after their primary task; initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation. She later added a seventh stage to the model called reflection and self-assessment (Kuhlthau 2004) but it is the original model which has been tested by herself and other scholars. Figure 2.5 shows Kuhlthau's original model and Table 2.2 provides more detail of the stages.

Figure 2.5 Kuhlthau's Model of the Information Search Process (ISP)



Source Kuhlthau 1993a p.343

Table 2.2 Kuhlthau's Information Search Process stages

Stage	Appropriate task and description	Feelings (Affective)	Thoughts (cognitive)	Actions (physical) in stages
Initiation	Recognise: lack of knowledge of topic	Uncertainty	General and vague	Seek background information
Selection	Identify: topic and approach to take	Optimism		Seek relevant information
Exploration	Investigate: information on general topic	Confusion, Frustration, Doubt		
Formulation	Formulate: explore information on focused topic	Clarity	Narrowed /clearer	Seek relevant or focused information
Collection	Gather: information on focused topic	Sense of Direction, Confidence	Increased interest	
Presentation	Complete: search and use findings	Satisfaction or disappointment	Clearer or focused	

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Kuhlthau (1991), Kuhlthau (2004 p.82), Kuhlthau 2005 and Ford (2015 p.84)

Kuhlthau's model was based on constructivist learning theory. She claimed that information seeking was a process "in which a person is actively constructing a new understanding from the information encountered" (Kuhlthau 1999 p.15). She found that students constructed new knowledge, by incorporating new

information that had been found, with prior knowledge. The student tried to make sense of the information they had found by comparing it with what they already knew (Kuhlthau 2004).

The stages in Kuhlthau's are now described. Initiation was the first stage in the process when an individual became aware of a lack of knowledge of a topic and recognised a need for information. Individuals would seek background information and tended to feel apprehensive and uncertain. Thoughts were ambiguous and vague and concentrated on understanding the task, contemplating the problem and relating it to prior knowledge and experience (Kuhlthau 1993a).

During the Selection stage the individual identified the topic or the problem and decided on the approach they would take to seeking information. Individuals would often feel optimistic and ready to begin the search at this stage, rather than feeling uncertain. Typical actions were to confer with other people and make an initial search of the information available by looking for relevant information. Thoughts were focused on evaluating possible topics based on the information and time available, personal interest and the requirements of the assignment. Individuals chose the topic and approach that they thought would have the greatest chance of success (Kuhlthau 1991).

In the third stage of Exploration the task was to investigate information on the general topic to improve an individual's understanding of it. As individuals came across conflicting and inconsistent information, they increasingly had feelings of confusion, uncertainty, frustration and doubt (Kuhlthau 1993a). This could lead to individuals finding themselves feeling overwhelmed and 'in the dip' of confidence (Kuhlthau 2005 p.4). Some individuals wanted to prematurely abandon the search at this stage. Actions taken were to find and read information on the general topic and relate the new information to that which was known already. Individuals would make lists of facts and reflect on the ideas that they had to form new constructs. Their thoughts were centred on becoming adequately informed about a topic to achieve a focus or their own viewpoint (Kuhlthau 2005).

Later research by Kuhlthau (2008) amongst students found that they were less optimistic in the Exploration stage and began to realise that information seeking was a demanding process that was not clear cut and required analytical decisions. They had difficulty in sorting through the information, finding a focus and choosing relevant information because of the volume of information involved. Students were anxious and disappointed throughout the project, but these feelings increased slightly at this stage so at the mid-point of the project the students felt the most negative feelings. The main feeling was frustration (Kuhlthau 2008).

During the Formulation stage individuals explored information to achieve a more focused perspective. This was the turning point in the process when feelings of uncertainty lessened, confidence started to rise, and a sense of clarity was achieved (Kuhlthau 1993a). Some students in Kuhlthau's (2008) later study felt uncertainty and confusion in the formation stage due a lack of knowledge and insecurity on how they should proceed. However, these feelings decreased as the project continued. Other students felt optimistic and confident. Thoughts involved the identification and selection of ideas from the information in order to gain a focus. This focus could occur suddenly, but it was more likely to develop progressively as constructs became clearer.

The fifth stage was Collection when individuals gathered relevant and focused information on the topic. They had a clearer sense of direction and as interest and involvement in the topic grew, individuals felt less uncertain and more confident. Thoughts revolved around defining the focus of the topic and finding information to support this (Kuhlthau 1991).

The final stage of Presentation involved the completion of the search, presenting or using the findings and resolving the problem. Individuals felt satisfied and relieved if the search had been successful. They would experience disappointment if this was not the case. Individuals' thoughts centred around finishing the search and achieving understanding of the topic or problem. If searching continued at this stage, it tended to result in redundant information being found (Kuhlthau 1993a).

In summary, individuals felt confused, frustrated and uncertain in the early stages of the search process as their thoughts about the topic or problem were vague and unclear. As they gained more knowledge and a clearer focus, they felt more confident and less uncertain. Understanding of the topic developed from being more factual to more analytical as they approached the end of the search. Then feelings of relief and satisfaction were common (Kuhlthau 1993a).

Kuhlthau's (2008) later research found that students tended to approach the information search process in different ways and not all of them progressed through all the stages. Some searched for information and then analysed it. They tended to experience more negative emotions mid-way through their information search and had more positive feelings of satisfaction at the end. Others collected information and skipped stages, so they did not attempt to build explanations or analyse the information. They tended to have more negative emotions throughout their search and were frustrated at the end.

In her later article Kuhlthau (2008) argued that in the digital age her model was still relevant and valuable regardless of whether the information was digital or printed. However, she acknowledged that students tended to skip the first four stages of the searching process and go straight to information collection because they were used to accessing information easily and would be satisfied with the first information they found. Only a few students built up their background knowledge by reading a number of sources and identifying a point of focus formulation (Bilal 2002).

From her research Kuhlthau proposed the concept of zones of intervention for services and systems and developed the principle of uncertainty as discussed in section 2.1 (Kuhlthau 1993b).

Kuhlthau (1991) acknowledged that formal organised sources of information would be used by information seekers alongside sources from everyday experiences such as WOM sources however the model did not consider the types of information sources used (Case, Given and Mai 2016). Similarly, the role of the information provider and a person's information needs were not evaluated as part of the model (Robson and Robinson 2013). The contextual factors of the

search that led to the person recognising that they had a need for information, for example the demands of work or school, were also not included in the model (Case, Given and Mai 2016).

The current author's study considers the postgraduate student's information needs in terms of the sources and types of information required (see sections 2.5, 2.6, 2.8) and the contextual factors that impacted on the search for information (see section 2.3).

The author has decided to choose Kuhlthau's (1993a) model to explain the information searching process of prospective postgraduates when deciding where to study their postgraduate qualification and then when they are looking for information whilst at university. The stages of Kuhlthau's ISP model are placed in the inner ring of the author's proposed new decision making cycle model. There are multiple reasons why the author chose to use Kuhlthau's model.

Firstly, Kuhlthau is one of the most influential and cited authors in the field of information behaviour (Wilson 2004). Kuhlthau (2008) claimed that her ISP model was ground-breaking as it provided a holistic picture of the interplay between affective, cognitive and physical dimensions of information seeking and looked at uncertainty during the search process.

Secondly, since the initial research, Kuhlthau has verified her initial findings in a diverse range of studies in different environments, using both qualitative and quantitative analysis with small and large samples so the model is considered to have some reliability (Kuhlthau 1988a,1988b,1999,2001,2008).

Thirdly, Kuhlthau's model of the Information Search Process has been used in a variety of contexts with students of different ages and a wide range of occupational groups. The results have supported the behaviour Kuhlthau predicted in her model (Wilson 2004). It has been used as a framework to understand the process of information seeking in the fields of librarianship and information science (Kuhlthau, Heinström, Todd 2008) and to research adult information seeking in a work situation (Byström and Hansen 2005, Byström and

Jarvelin 1995). It has been utilised in studies of school librarians (Harada 2005), women searching for health information (Warner and Procaccino 2004), lawyers (Kuhlthau and Tama, 2001), a securities analyst (Kuhlthau, 1999) and students (Gross 2001, Hyldegård 2006, 2009, Beheshti et al 2015).

Kuhlthau's 1993a article which pictures the model has been cited in studies concerning refugees (Lloyd 2016), migrants (Bronstein 2019), nursing (Craske et al 2017), health information retrieval (Lu et al 2017), lawyers (Adewale et al 2017), children (Crunkhorn et al 2017, Foss and Druin 2014, Martens 2012, Foss et al 2012), financial professionals (Chaudhry and Al-Ansari 2016), music retrieval (Lee, Cho and Kim 2016), school students (Cole et al 2015), the stock market (Lopes and Valentim 2014), pregnant women (Kim et al 2013), librarians (Bronstein and Tzivian 2013, Fourie 2013), architects (Makri and Warwick 2010), medical staff (Salajegheh and Hayati 2009), film creators (Lee 2008), engineers (Montesi and Navarrete 2008), carers (Harland and Bath 2008), web travellers (D'Ambra and Wilson 2004) and newspaper journalists (Attfield and Dowell 2003) in journals focusing on library, information science, information processing, information management, documentation, computing and some medical topics.

Fourthly the model offers the opportunity to look at the information searching process of postgraduates from different perspectives; that of cognitive (thoughts), affective (feelings), actions (physical) and behaviour (tasks) dimensions.

The final reason her model has been chosen is because Kuhlthau's work has not been cited in peer reviewed marketing or consumer behaviour journals or used by authors looking at the decision making process for goods or services. The consumer research which has considered information seeking when making a purchase such as Hauser et al (1993) and Mata and Nunes (2010) and research covering browsing in store (Bloch et al 1989, Xia 2010), buying houses (Savolainen 2010) and sense making in advertising (McCracken 1987) has not referred to Kuhlthau's work. Additionally, there has been little attempt previously to combine information behaviour and marketing or consumer behaviour models together.

The author perceived that there was an opportunity to undertake research which embraced the disciplines of LIS, marketing and consumer behaviour. The author wanted to build on the research surrounding Kuhlthau's ISP model and marketing and consumer behaviour scholars' model of consumer decision making to develop a new theoretical model, which unlike other models, included both information seeking and decision making theory. This study therefore extends the information behaviour research outside LIS in line with more recent studies and helps to answer LIS scholars' criticism that LIS research fails to build on existing theory and creates new models that are not useful (Todd 2017). Combining well-known models together reflects the work of current information behaviour scholars and other researchers who have successfully achieved this, for example Godbold (2006). The author's proposed new model of the decision making cycle is discussed in section 6.9 linked to objective 7 of the research.

In line with current researchers the author is also taking a more holistic approach and focusing on the perspective of the person, which was previously referred to as the user, rather than use of the system which referred to the use of the media (Case, Given and Mai 2016). The study focuses on the international non-EU postgraduate student and their information needs when selecting a business qualification and whilst studying at university.

It is hoped that the new model will more effectively explain the decision making cycle of consumers purchasing a high risk and complex product such as a postgraduate education and will be of practical value to those that provide information. An understanding of the links between the information searching and decision making processes will give information providers, such as universities communicating with prospective postgraduates, a better understanding of how consumers seek and use information and the types and sources of information required at different stages in the decision making cycle.

### [2.3 Factors Impacting on Information Behaviour](#)

Increasingly information behaviour research has considered the context or situation in which the information seeking took place and explored the factors that impacted on information behaviour (Case, Givern and Mai 2016). Robson



and Robinson (2013) reviewed a number of information behaviour and communications models in order to develop an information seeking and communication model. During the process they identified the factors that impacted on information behaviour which are presented by the author in Table 2.3. None of the previous models had included all of these factors.

Table 2.3 Factors impacting on Information Behaviour

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Elements of Factor</b>
Context	Location, social influences, culture, finance, technology, activity related factor, work related factor
Demographics	Information actor's gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity
Expertise	Information actor's knowledge, training, education, expertise in subject area, task or information source, specialism in career or interest and career stage
Psychological Factor	Personality and mental processes: Self-perception, self-efficacy, perception of the knowledge gap, cognitive dissonance or cognitive avoidance, perceptions of information provider, perception of information user, perception of risk, ability to cope with stress, thoughts and feelings while searching for information
Information User need, want, goal	Internally or externally prompted, recognised or unrecognised, anticipated or unexpected, cognitive or affective
Information Provider need, want, goal	Prompting the provider to communicate information
Motivating and inhibiting factors	Encourage or discourage information behaviour
Features of the information seeking process	Activities, feelings and thoughts experienced by an individual when looking for information
Characteristics of information and sources	Utility: usefulness, relevance, timeliness, accessibility, ease of use of information or of a source Credibility: trustworthiness, authority, reliability, lack of bias in information provided and information source

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Robson and Robinson (2013)

Burdick (1996) found that gender impacted on information searching behaviour. Females tended to investigate information and formulate whereas males preferred to gather information and complete the task. The amount of time available to search for information was found to impact on the degree of information searching (Towers and Towers 2018) as discussed in section 2.14. Kuhlthau (1991) identified certain factors that impacted on the choices made during the information searching process such as prior knowledge and experience, interest, information available, time and the requirements of the problem. Kuhlthau did not however explore the influence of these factors in her

research. The author perceived that this would be an interesting area to research, and she explores the factors that impacted on postgraduates' information searching behaviour

## 2.4 Credibility of Information Sources

Robson and Robinson (2013) classified information sources as either information providers such as a publisher or library or the information products they produced including books and websites. They argued that information seekers looked for sources of information that had utility and were credible. Utility related to sources that were useful, easy to use, relevant, timely and accessible. Credible sources were trustworthy, reliable, authoritative, lacked bias and were perceived to produce credible messages (Rieh and Danielson 2007). Sources that were homophilous such as the user's community tended to be perceived to be more credible (Rogers 2003). The idea that information seekers evaluated information sources to ascertain whether they were credible links to Bronstein's (2013) research.

Bronstein (2013 p.174) analysed US politician's campaign messages by analysing 'the Aristotelian language of persuasion used to convince audiences'. There were three elements of the political appeals that were examined as shown in Table 2.4; ethos (ethical), pathos (emotional) and logos (logical).

Table 2.4 Bronstein's Appeals and Realms

<b>Appeals</b>	<b>Description of appeal</b>	<b>Rationality of appeal</b>	<b>Realm</b>
Ethos	an ethical appeal meant to convince an audience of the author's credibility	Rational	Critical
Pathos	an emotional appeal meant to create fear or to invoke sympathy	Emotional	Affective
Logos	an appeal to reason or logic	Rational	Cognitive

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Bronstein (2013 p.174)

The appeals that were made were either emotional (pathos) or rational (ethos, logos). Messages were classified as rational if they were perceived by the audiences to be credible, trustworthy, authoritative and believable.

Marcella, Baxter and Walicka (2019) considered Scottish citizens' responses to Bronstein's affective, cognitive and critical political appeals. They found that when individuals received factual information, they firstly attempted to make sense of it and relate it to information they already knew, which was a cognitive response (logos). They would use WOM sources alongside their own knowledge and took a rational or emotional approach to evaluating the information received. Citizens also had a critical response (ethos) to the source of the information and decided how persuasive the source was on that basis. Independent non-party sources of information were perceived to be more credible and trustworthy and consequently persuaded the voters more. There were few affective responses (pathos) to the messages received and if individuals expressed an emotional reaction it tended to be a negative feeling such as disquiet.

In this study it is interesting to explore whether messages that are perceived to be from a more credible, trustworthy, authoritative and believable source elicit a different response from postgraduates compared to messages that are perceived to come from a less credible source.

### [2.5 International Postgraduates' Information Sources Pre Purchase](#)

This section considers the sources of information used by international postgraduates when deciding on a country, city, course and university to attend in the need recognition, evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making process. Full details of the studies undertaken are reported in appendix 2.

Table 2.5 shows a comprehensive list of possible sources of information international postgraduate students could use when making their decisions. The author analysed and synthesised material from a diverse range of authors to produce the table. Higher Education Provider (HEP) controlled sources of

information are those that the university manages whereas non-HEP controlled sources refer to sources that the HEP does not have direct control over (Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis 2005). However, the HEP may try and influence these sources through some form of payment such as giving commission to an independent educational agent in an overseas market. Sources of information are also divided into personal or word of mouth (WOM) sources of information and impersonal sources.

Previous research has often reported the information sources used by both postgraduates and undergraduates together as shown in Table 2.5. Yet researchers have found that there were differences between the information sources used by undergraduates and postgraduates, the number of sources used, and the perception of which sources were useful (Renfrew et al 2010). Postgraduates were less influenced by their parents and league tables (i-graduate 2011).

Table 2.5 International Postgraduates' Information Sources

Info Type	Information Sources	Info Type	Information Sources
<b>Word of mouth communication – HEP controlled information sources</b>	Staff of the HEP in home country: academic and	<b>HEP controlled information sources contd.</b>	Printed directory
	Staff of the HEP in host country: academic and		A printed document/guide
	HEP Education agent		Email
	Student Ambassador		Blog
	Online chat arranged by HEP		Newspaper or magazine advertisement
	Chat room arranged by HEP		TV or radio advert
<b>Word of Mouth communication - Non-HEP controlled information sources</b>	Teacher/tutor/lecturer at previous education		Billboard
	An employer/ sponsor		Pay per click / Adwords
	Current or previous students who studied at the		Digital advertisement
	Current or previous students with previous		Home country government advisory service/ British Council*
	A friend(s)		Another organisation representing the UK *
	Family		Host country official postgraduate course
	Family/ friends with previous international		Online university/course comparison website
	Independent Education agent/ consultant		Host Government Education and Learning website
	Informal agencies operating in home country		Official Websites e.g. Chinese Ministry of Education
	Careers Advisor		Online reviews
	Home country government advisory		League tables or rankings
	British Council		Newspaper or magazine article
	Another organisation representing the host country		Organic search
	Student Chat room/ forum		Branded search
	Professional Association		Student website/ blog/ student opinion
<b>HEP controlled information sources</b>	Website of the higher education provider		Blog – influencer
	Education host country website		Microblogging e.g. Weibo
	Campus open day/evening on site or visit		Professional Association website
	Virtual Campus open day/evening		Social media (Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter)
	Education postgraduate exhibition/ fair in host		
	Education postgraduate exhibition/ fair in home		* included in more than one category

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Moogan 2020, Towers and Towers 2018, Bonnema and Van der Walldt 2008, Simões and Soares 2010, Wiese, Jordaan and Van Heerden 2010, Slack et al 2014, Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis 2005, Goff 2004, Renfrew et al 2010, Diamond et al 2015, Teng 2015, Kiley and Austin 2000, Jepsen and Varhegyi 2011, i-graduate 2013, Gomes and Murphy 2003, Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott 2014, Hobsons 2013, Bodycott 2009; Manns and Swift 2016; Leng 2012; Hazelkorn 2015; Chen 2008; Chung 2009; Belanger, Bali and Longden 2014; Yang and Mutum 2015; Krezel and Krezel 2017; Briggs and Wilson 2007.

Table 2.6 below shows that Moogan (2020) and Manns and Swift (2016) were the only studies to focus specifically on international postgraduate students who had made the decision to study in the UK and the sources of information they relied on.

Table 2.6 Studies on Postgraduates' Information Sources prior to University Enrolment

<b>Author</b>	<b>Student Type</b>	<b>Host Country</b>	<b>Home Country</b>
Moogan 2020	Postgraduate MBA	UK	Various
Towers and Towers 2018	Postgraduate PhD Undergraduate	UK	UK, EU International
Manns and Swift 2016	Postgraduate	UK	China
Subramaniam, Yusoff and Othman 2014	Postgraduate	Malaysia	Malaysia International
Bodycott 2009	Postgraduate Undergraduate	Various	China
Chung 2009	Postgraduate Undergraduate	New Zealand	China
Renfrew et al 2010 (HEFCE)	Postgraduate Undergraduate	UK	Various
Diamond et al 2015 (HEFCE)	Postgraduate Undergraduate	UK	Various
i-graduate 2013 (HEFCE)	Postgraduate	UK	Various
Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott 2014 (HEFCE)	Prospective Postgraduate	UK	Various

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Manns and Swift (2016) identified the influential sources of information during the decision making process of international Chinese postgraduate students deciding to come to the UK to study. Recommendations from home university lecturers were the most trusted and influential source of information. Lecturers from the foreign university presenting in the home university allowed students to experience the teaching quality and style which helped them to decide which country and university to study in. Chinese authorised agencies were used to decide on the university and the city rather than the choice of country. Overall students preferred personal recommendations. The internet was only used as a source of information on cities.

Moogan (2020) investigated the information sources used by international postgraduate students when deciding to study an MBA in the UK. The most important sources of information were the Internet, agents, advertisements and social media such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. WOM and electronic WOM (eWOM) sources such as friends, family and partners were the most credible, impartial and relevant sources of information when deciding to attend a UK university. Postgraduates were increasingly using digital sources of information to help them make their choice of university. The university website, online rankings, review websites and internet searches were the most frequently accessed sources. Prospective students expected prompt communication by email.

The need to do further research on the information requirements of international and UK postgraduates was acknowledged by Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott (2014) and the Government bodies who commissioned research on this topic. This research indicated that UK and international postgraduates found it hard to obtain the information they needed to compare university courses in different countries (i-graduate 2013). As a result, HEFCE (2014a) issued new guidance to help universities provide postgraduates with the types and sources of information required. Moogan (2020) and Manns and Swift (2016) found that the sources of information used by international postgraduate students were often different from those used by postgraduate students living in the host country. The current author's study adds to the body of knowledge concerning the sources of information used by international postgraduates as a group of students with distinct information needs.

The significance of WOM and eWOM information sources to prospective students will now be reviewed. WOM information and recommendations from family members, agents, friends, classmates, employers, academic staff, current students, alumni, bloggers and reviewers to prospective students regarding host countries, institutions, cities and courses were increasingly important as acknowledged by many researchers (see for example Yang and Mutum 2015, Balroo and Saleh 2019). This was due to a number of factors. Firstly, the Millennial generation were increasingly digitally connected and influenced by

their peers (Euromonitor 2019). Digital media such as social media and blogs were encouraging eWOM communication and recommendations (Jansen et al 2009) and prospective students had a growing reliance on online reviews and ratings from their many 'friends' (Towers and Towers 2018).

Secondly the decision to undertake postgraduate study was a high risk decision. Students were purchasing an intangible service and were involved in a complex decision making process. Typically, WOM information sources were relied on as they were perceived to be more credible, impartial and relevant when making such a decision (Maringe and Carter 2007) and more persuasive than a range of factual information (Case, Givern and Mai 2016).

Lastly prospective students were more trusting of the opinions of themselves and their peers and were becoming more wary of university generated messages. They therefore relied more heavily on personal sources of information and WOM recommendations from current students and alumni than they did on formal marketing communications media when choosing a university (Yang, Yen and Balmer 2019). Positive WOM recommendation from international students was found to increase the reputation of the institution and attract their peers to join (Moogan 2020). WOM communication therefore became key as a promotional and sales tool to a university (Woodall 2014).

Agents were increasingly becoming an important source of WOM communication that influenced the decisions of prospective students as to where they should study. QS (2019g) found that agents had had a significant impact on two-fifths of prospective international students when choosing a country and university. These students wanted agents to help them throughout the decision making process until they started at the university. They most wanted help with their university and visa applications. Times Higher Education figures suggested that agents had enrolled one third of the international students who came to study at all levels in UK institutions in 2013 (Havergal 2015). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) suggested that private agents who had graduated from a particular institution and had had a good experience were likely to become advocates for the institution.



Current students and alumni not only provided WOM recommendations concerning universities to their peers but also added to the pool of information available for current and future students (see for example Greenacre et al 2014, Teo and Soutar 2012). International postgraduate alumni of a university were a valuable source of testimonials so it was important to maintain a relationship with them through regular newsletters and inviting the alumni to graduation ceremonies in their home country (Gatfied and Chen 2006). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) claimed that the more satisfied alumni from an institution in the home country were, the more powerful potentially was the WOM referral.

The importance of social networks of friends and peers in the decision to study overseas was recognised by Beech (2015). These networks often led prospective students to view studying abroad as accepted practice and so could become the driving force behind the decision to study overseas. Stuen and Ramirez (2019) looked at the impact of social networks on the flow of international students. They found that a 1% rise in the share of students from a particular host country would encourage students of the same nationality to study in the country and this would lead to a 2.6% increase in enrolments five years later.

Online sources of information such as university websites, rankings, search engines, online reviews and staff blogs were becoming increasingly important to prospective postgraduates when deciding on a university (Towers and Towers 2018, Royo-Vela and Hünermund 2016). Course finder websites and the online prospectus would also be used and shown to parents (QS 2019g). Email was the most popular channel of communication in Hobsons' (2017) study and a speedy and personalised response was expected. Hobsons (2017) also claimed that 80% of prospective students used social media when researching a university to attend. Galan, Lawley and Clements (2015) identified the social media used by European postgraduates when deciding to study in Australia as follows: Facebook, YouTube, blogs, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram.

Rankings were perceived to be an important source of information by international students especially those from Asian and African countries. However, they were only the eighth most important type of information when deciding on an institution, with quality of teaching the most important choice

factor (Souto-Otero and Enders 2017). Teichler (2011) found that Asian students did not have the interest or energy to interrogate rankings tables in a meaningful manner.

In conclusion it is important for universities to keep up to date with the information sources used by prospective international postgraduate students in this digital era so they can choose the most effective and credible channels of communication. They also need to be aware of the influence of WOM information sources on prospective postgraduates and how they can influence them. This study adds to the research previously undertaken by focusing on the current information sources used by international postgraduates.

## 2.6 International Postgraduates' Types of Information Pre Purchase

The types of information used by prospective international postgraduates pre purchase are explored in this section.

The types of information required by prospective postgraduate students were often different from those of undergraduates because they were often older with more specialised interests (i-graduate 2011) and a range of types of information were used (Diamond et al 2015). Prospective international postgraduates required more types of information than postgraduates who remained in their home country to study and might be less mobile and part of family, friend and career networks (Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott 2014).

HEFCE (2010) identified three core questions that prospective postgraduate students would need to ask when deciding on an institution in Table 2.7. These questions then impacted on the types of information required.

Table 2.7 Questions and Types of Information for Postgraduate Students

<b>Questions posed</b>	<b>Types of Information required</b>
Am I going to get a job?	Employment outcomes
Is it value for money?	Cost
Am I going to enjoy the experience?	Teaching quality/ student satisfaction/ testimonials/ employment opportunities

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Renfrew et al 2010

Table 2.8 shows the types of information required by prospective postgraduate students when choosing a university and course.

Table 2.8 Types of Information required by Prospective International Postgraduate students

Type of information	Veloutsou Lewis Paton 2004	Maringe 2006	Igraduate 2013	Mellors - Bourne 2014	HEFCE Renfrew et al 2010	House of Commons 2009
University's age	X					
University's reputation						
Department's reputation	X					
Content of specific courses	X					
Accreditation of the course			X			
Recognition of course by professional bodies					X	
Course as a learning experience	X					
Degree classification structure	X					
Title of the degree awarded	X					
Entry requirements			X			
Cost of course			X			
Type and amount of contact with staff	X					X
Class sizes lectures, tutorials		X				
Percentage of graduates gaining employment in 1 year	X				X	
Guaranteed opportunities for part time work	X					
Opportunities to find full time employment afterwards	X					
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards			X			
Opportunities to do a placement during/after study			X			
Opportunities to study abroad	X					
Average earning of the graduates	X					
Development of business contacts when studying	X					
Companies recruiting the department's graduates	X			X		
Employer's views of graduates			X			
Male/ female ratio within the university	X	X				
Activities in the university	X					
Guaranteed accommodation provided by the university	X					
Existence of private flats nearby	X					
Excellent physical facilities			X			
Satisfaction of students with the IT facilities	X					
Satisfaction of students with the library facilities	X				X	
Sports facilities			X			
University unions	X					
University campus	X					
Cost of living in the area	X					
Night life in the city/ social life	X					
Friendliness of people living in the area	X					
Size of the area	X					
Activities in the area	X					
Weather in the area	X					
Transport in the area	X					

Table 2.8 Types of Information required by Prospective International Postgraduate students contd

Type of information	Veloutsou Lewis Paton 2004	Maringe 2006	Igraduate 2013	Mellors - Bourne 2014	HEFCE Renfrew et al 2010	House of Commons 2009
Safety/security in campus	X					
Safety/security in the area	X					
Local sights and activities	X					
Shopping in the area	X					
Contact with counselling services / student support	X					
Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)			X			
Ranking in in university league tables			X			
Contact with doctors throughout the university	X					
Mode of assessment				X		
Expected workload				X		
Study modes available				X		
Support for disability				X		
Geographical location				X		
Racial diversity		X				
Tutors credentials		X				
Graduate profiles		X				
Flexibility in payment		X				
Ease of getting a visa to study in the UK			X			
Loan availability			X			
Quality of research			X			
Student dropout rates			X			
Length of course			X			
Weekly hours of teaching contact time					X	X
Extent of teaching by graduate students						X
Satisfaction of students with the support/guidance					X	X
Different types of learning (lectures, seminars, tutorials)						X
Availability of new and emerging technologies						X
Satisfaction of students with feedback on assessment					X	
Satisfaction of students with the standard of teaching					X	
Proportion of the assessment that is by coursework					X	
Student satisfaction rates			X			
Language support			X			

Source Author's Analysis 2020

This section explores the types of information required by prospective postgraduates when deciding on a country to study in. Table 2.9 synthesises from a number of studies the factors influencing undergraduate and postgraduate students' decision to select a host country which indicates the types of information they required. Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study of choice factors amongst international students was used as a starting point in the development of Tables 2.9 and 2.10.

Table 2.9 Factors influencing Students' Decision to Choose a Host Country

<b>Factors influencing host country choice</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Knowledge and awareness of host country</b>	
Easy to obtain information on host	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002
Knowledge of host country	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008
Quality of education/tuition in host	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Wilkins et al 2012, Bodycott 2009, Li and Bray 2007, Mpinganjira 2012, Rudd, Djafarova and Waring 2012
Reputation of institutions	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Zhou 2015, Chen 2007, Williams and Van Dyke 2008, Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012
Host qualifications recognised	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003, Mpinganjira 2012
Similar education system	Chen 2008
High ranking of country's institutions	Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012
Strong economic and political ties and cultural links between source countries and host country	Chen 2008, McMahon 1992
Level of Development / advanced economy	Manns 2016, Singh 2016, Calikoglu 2018
<b>Recommendations</b>	
Parents/relatives recommended	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012, Shanka, Quintal and Taylor 2006, Gatfield and Chen 2006, Mpinganjira 2012
Agents recommended	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012, Gatfield and Chen 2006
Friends/ academic staff /other non-family	Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012, Singh 2016
<b>Cost factors</b>	
Lower fees	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Gatfield and Chen 2006
Lower travel costs	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002
Lower cost of living	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Shanka, Quintal and Taylor 2006, Gatfield and Chen 2006, Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka 2010, Lee and Sehoole 2015, Singh 2016
Availability of financial support (e.g., scholarships)	Kondakci 2011, Lee and Seehole 2015, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, McMahon 1992, Mpinganjira 2012
Free higher education/no-tuition policy	Calikoglu 2018, Wiers-Jenssen 2019.
<b>Environment</b>	
Comfortable climate	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010
Exciting place to live	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008
Quiet-studious environment conducive to learning	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Joseph and Joseph 2000
Safe (low crime) environment	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012, Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka 2010, Gong and Huybers 2015, Manns 2016, Singh 2016, Wiers-Jenssen 2019.
Quality of life and healthy and clean, natural environment	Chen 2008, Joseph and Joseph 2000, Wu 2014

Table 2.9 Factors influencing Students' Decision to Choose a Host Country contd.

<b>Factors influencing host country choice</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Social Links and Geographical proximity</b>	
Friends/ relatives study there	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010
Friends/ relatives live there	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010, Mpinganjira 2012, Lee and Sehoole 2015
Social experience/ make international friends	Li and Bray 2007, Foster 2014, Calikoglu 2018
Number of International Students	Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010
Established population of overseas students	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002
Similarity of religion	Singh 2016
Low racial discrimination/ multicultural	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Mpinganjira 2012, Singh 2016
Geographic proximity / close to home	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Chen 2008, Shanka, Quintal and Taylor 2006, Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka 2010, Mpinganjira 2012, Lee and Sehoole 2015, Manns 2016
<b>Ease/ Accessibility of obtaining information</b>	Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010
Information in home country	Chen 2008
Information from internet	Chen 2008
Information from agents	Chen 2008
Information from educational Fairs	Chen 2008
<b>Other Factors</b>	
Length of course	Souto-Otero and Enders 2017
Job opportunities	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Calikoglu 2018, Chen 2008, Souto-Otero and Enders 2017
Entry qualifications accepted	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002
Institutions are Government run	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002
Ease and speed of visa process	Chen 2008, Lee and Sehoole 2015, Singh 2016
Possibility of applying for immigrant status	Chen 2008, Bodycott 2009

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The types of information required when deciding on a university, course and city are now investigated linked to the factors that influenced students' choices and presented in Table 2.10.

Table 2.10 Factors influencing Students' Decision to Choose a Host Institution, Course and City

<b>Choice Factor</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Reputation and Image</b>	
Reputation for quality of institution	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Pimpa (2005), Gatfield and Chen (2006), Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010), Wilkins and Huisman (2011a), Hemsley-Brown (2012), Gong and Huybers 2015, Rudd, Djafarova, and Waring (2012), Singh (2016), Calikoglu (2018), Liu (2010), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Souto-Otero and Enders (2017), Nicholls (2018), Towers and Towers (2018)
Reputation for quality of course	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka (2010), Wu (2014), Singh (2016), Calikoglu (2018), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Souto-Otero and Enders (2017), Nicholls (2018)
Reputation for quality and expertise of staff/ prominence	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka (2010), Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010), Dahari and Abduh (2011), Liu (2010), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Wu (2014), Towers and Towers (2018)
Reputation for being responsive to students' needs	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Rankings	Wilkins and Huisman (2011a), Gong and Huybers (2015), Singh (2016), Wu (2014), Nicholls (2018)
Well known innovation in research/ teaching	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Image of institution	Imenda, Kongolo and Grewal (2004)
Strong advertising and promotion	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
<b>Course and teaching</b>	
Course content	Bonnema and Van der Waladt (2008), Towers (2018)
Broad range of courses and programmes	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Pimpa (2005)
Teaching quality	Pimpa (2005), Maringe and Carter (2007), Hemsley-Brown (2012), Singh (2016), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Wu (2014), Souto-Otero and Enders (2017), Nicholls (2018)
Quality of supervisors	Baguley, Findlay and Kerby (2015)
Accreditation	Pyvis and Chapman (2007)
Convenient timetable	Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017)
Opportunity to do academic research	Lee and Sehoole (2015)
<b>Entry and timing</b>	
Duration of the programme	Singh (2016), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017)
Entry requirements / not demanding	Liu (2010), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Callender and Jackson (2008)
Recognises previous qualifications	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Flexible entry throughout year	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
<b>Social links and awareness</b>	
Links to institutions known to student	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Large number of international students enrolled	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Strong alumni through which student learnt of institution	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Well known to student	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Friends study there	Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006)
Opportunities to mix with other students	Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Previously studied at institution	Liu (2010)
Recommendation from friend, family, faculty, agency	Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Wu (2014)

Table 2.10 Factors influencing Students' Decision to Choose a Host Institution, Course and City contd.

<b>Choice Factor</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Facilities</b>	
Excellent facilities	Pimpa (2005), Pyvis and Chapman 2007, Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010), Dahari and Abduh (2011), Mpinganjira (2012), Rudd, Djafarova and Waring (2012), Manns (2016), Singh (2016), Liu (2010), Towers and Towers (2018)
Accommodation	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Manns (2016)
Latest IT used	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Syllabus and programme resources	Pyvis and Chapman (2007), Hemsley-Brown (2012)
Library facilities	Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka (2010)
Large campus	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Superior use of technology	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
<b>Socio cultural opportunities</b>	
Socio-cultural development opportunities	Li and Bray (2007), Calikoglu (2018)
Social life opportunities and diversity in city	Calikoglu (2018), Baguley, Findlay and Kerby (2015)
Developing social skills and problem solving abilities	Wu (2014)
Range of international cooperative activities	Wu (2014)
Opportunity to build (academic) networks	Wu (2014), Calikoglu (2018)
Support for developing independence	Baguley, Findlay and Kerby (2015)
<b>Application</b>	
Ease of admission / application	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007), Wu (2014)
Quick response to application	Imenda, Kongolo and Grewal (2004)
<b>Cost</b>	
Cost: tuition fee, living expenses	Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka (2010), Dahari and Abduh (2011), Mpinganjira (2012), Singh (2016), Liu (2010), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Wu (2014), Souto-Otero and Enders (2017), Nicholls (2018), Towers (2018)
Scholarship availability / financial aid	Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Imenda, Kongolo and Grewal (2004)
Fear of debt	Callender and Jackson (2008)
<b>Employability</b>	
Qualifications recognised by employers/ employment prospects/ percentage of graduates obtaining employment	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Hemsley-Brown (2012), Manns (2016); Liu (2010); Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008), Towers (2018)
Placement	Rudd, Djafarova and Waring (2012)
Employment during study	Maringe and Carter (2007)
Suitability for career	Manns (2016)
<b>Location and environment</b>	
Location	Liu (2010), Saiti, Papa and Brown (2017), Wu (2014) Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008), Towers (2018)
Proximity to Chinatown	Rudd, Djafarova and Waring (2012)
Convenient transport	Wu (2014)
Safety	Imenda, Kongolo and Grewal (2004), Souto-Otero and Enders (2017), Nicholls (2018)
Lifestyle/ experiential benefits	Callender and Jackson (2008)
Quality learning environment	Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010), Hemsley-Brown (2012)

Source Author's Analysis 2020



Table 2.10 Factors influencing Students' Decision to Choose a Host Institution, Course and City contd.

<b>Choice Factor</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Other factor</b>	
Football team	Rudd, Djafarova and Waring (2012)
Financially stable	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Administrative efficiency	Imenda, Kongolo and Grewal (2004)

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Previous research found that postgraduates needed more qualitative rather than quantitative types of information regarding the personal, social and pastoral side of the educational experience, work placements and employment prospects (HEFCE 2016a, i-graduate 2013). Prospective postgraduates wanted to speak directly to current postgraduates and academic staff and take part in simulated class sessions, email discussion or online chat rather than engage with university controlled media (QS 2019g, Hall 2018).

This section focuses on the types of information required by specifically international postgraduate students when deciding on a country and a university.

Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño (2006) studied the factors that influenced the choice process of undergraduate and postgraduate international students through a very thorough review of the literature. They identified five main factors with sub categories that determined students' choice of country and institution and impacted on intention to purchase a programme: personal reasons (advice, personal improvement, ethnocentrism), country image effect (cultural proximity, social and academic reputation, socioeconomic level), city effect (city dimension, city image, cost of living, environment), institution image (quality of professors, institution's prestige, international recognition, communication, facilities on campus) and programme evaluation (programme recognition, suitability, specialisation, costs and finance).

Table 2.11 shows the studies that have been carried out since 1992 on international postgraduates and undergraduates' choice factors when deciding on a country and institution to study in. The authors in Table 2.11 have been linked to the types of information required by all students in the previous two tables.

Table 2.11 Factors that influenced International Students' Choices of Country and/or Institution

Author	Host Country	Source country	Student Type	Choice Factors
McMahon (1992)	US	Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Economic and cultural links between source countries and host country, availability of scholarships, other assistance.
Joseph and Joseph (2000)	Various	India	Prospective Undergrad	Course and career information, necessary resources available, environment conducive to learning, reputable degree programme, clean and safe environment, costs.
Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)	Australia	China, India, Indonesia, Taiwan	Postgrad Undergrad	Knowledge about host country, personal recommendations, safety, cost issues, social factors, reputation, quality of institution.
Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)	UK	Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Quality of education, qualifications gained recognised, easy admission, employment during and after study, cost issues, accommodation, safety, culture
Pimpa (2005a)	Australia	Thailand	Prospective Postgrad Undergrad	University reputation, variety of courses offered, teaching quality, employment after study, good facilities at university for international students.
Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006)	Australia	Various	Students	Proximity to home, quality and variety of education, cost of living, where friends study, family recommendation, safety.
Gatfield and Chen (2006)	Australia, United Kingdom, United States	Taiwan	Postgrad Undergrad	Recommendations from family, friends and agents, employment prospects, quality and reputation of institutions, tuition fees and costs of living.
Pyvis and Chapman (2007)	Australia branch campus	Malaysia	Postgrad	Cost, career-path, syllabus and programme resources, accreditation, university and campus reputation
Li and Bray (2007)	Hong Kong, Macau	China	Postgrad Undergrad	Academic ability, social and cultural experience, economic income, ability in employment market, quality of education, internationalisation factors.

Table 2.11 Factors that influenced International Students' Choices of Country and/or Institution contd.

Author	Host Country	Source country	Student Type	Choice Factors
Maringe and Carter (2007)	UK	Africa	Postgrad Undergrad	Recognition of gained qualification, easy admission, quality teaching and learning environment, employment during study.
Chen (2007a, 2007b)	Canada	(a) China, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan (b) Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Safe place, studious environment, multicultural environment, quality of life, future employment prospects, degree valued in home country, ease of visa process, quality and reputation of institution/programme.
Bodycott (2009)	Various	China	Prospective Postgrad Undergrad	Employment after study, social and academic support, programme availability, accommodation on site, relatives/friends in area, English-speaking environment.
Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka (2010)	Australia	Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Quality of course, quality of lecturers, cost of course, safety, library facilities, range of courses, opportunities to mix with other students, recommendations, cost of living, proximity to home.
Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun (2010)	Malaysia	Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Quality learning environment, use of English language, quality of staff, university reputation, influences from family, friends and media, funding, costs, facilities at institution.
Wilkins and Huisman (2011a)	UK	Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Improve employment prospects, experience different culture, improve English, quality of education, reputation of university, quality and content of programme, rankings.
Dahari and Abduh (2011)	Malaysia	Various	Postgrad	Programme offered, tuition prices, facilities, academic staff prominence
Hemsley-Brown (2012)	UK	Various	Postgrad	Reputation, teaching quality, teaching resources, environment for study, employment prospects
Rudd, Djafarova and Waring (2012)	UK	Chinese	Postgrad Undergrad	Academic reputation of host country, experience Western culture, facilities at the institution, image and reputation of the Business school, external factors related to the destination city, safety, football team

Table 2.11 Factors that influenced International Students' Choices of Country and/or Institution contd.

Author	Host Country	Source country	Student Type	Choice Factors
Mpinganjira (2012)	South Africa	African	Postgrad	Cost of course, cost of living, modern and technologically advanced facilities, English language, host country qualifications recognised at home, reputation of country qualifications, close location, scholarship, personal recommendations, multicultural society, family and friends in host country
Wu (2014)	UK	Chinese	Postgrad	Cultural experience, natural English environment, career aspirations, English language, quality of academic programmes, campus networking opportunities, developing social skills and problem solving abilities
Lee and Sehoole (2015)	South Africa	Various	Postgrad Undergrad	Career prospects, opportunity for academic research, experience culture, close location, friends or family living in host country, lower cost of living, get away from home, easier visa process
Gong and Huybers (2015)	Various	Chinese	Prospective Postgrad Undergrad	Destination safety, university ranking, academic reputation, English language
Foster (2014)	UK	Brazil	Prospective Postgrad Undergrad	Improving English language, experience being abroad, academic research, improved job opportunities in home and host country, higher earnings, make international friends
Manns and Swift (2016)	UK	Chinese	Postgrad	Social life, cultural activities, country and programme reputation for quality education, safety, level of development, location, social status, suitability for career, percentage of graduates obtaining employment, facilities, accommodation
Singh (2016)	Malaysia	Various	Postgrad	Socio-economic factors: cost of study, ranking and reputation of the university, quality of the programme, duration of programme, teaching approaches, facilities. Environmental factor: similarity of religion, political stability, safe environment, multicultural society, low cost of living, simplified immigration procedures, level of development, English language. Personal factors: limited places in host country universities, restricted opportunities in host country, recommendation by current university, follow spouse or siblings to new country

Table 2.11 Factors that influenced International Students' Choices of Country and/or Institution contd.

Author	Host Country	Source country	Student Type	Choice Factors
Ahmad and Hussain (2017)	UAE	Africa	Postgrad Undergrad	Learning environment, comfortable climate, economic and political stability, safety, living and travel costs, geographic proximity, key influencers, career opportunities.
Singh and Jack (2017)	Malaysia	Various	Postgrad	Contribution to home country on return, enhanced employability, academic and professional growth, language
Calikoglu (2018)	Finland	Various	Postgrad	Academic: University reputation and programme quality, lack of study opportunities in their home country for their field, need for building academic networks. Financial: Free higher education/no-tuition policy, an advanced economy, potential job opportunities. Socio-cultural and personal: Socio-cultural development opportunities, social life opportunities, diversity present in the selected city
Nicholls (2018)	US	China Various	Undergrad Postgrad	Expected quality of education, reputation/ranking of the university and individual departments/programmes, safety/security, cost/affordability
Zhu and Reeves (2019)	Various	China	Postgrad	Financial and time costs, employment prospects, postgraduate education as a cultural adventure, English language, visa issues, admissions, climate, influence of referents, academic image and reputation.
Moogan (2020)	UK	Various	Postgrad MBA	Cost (tuition fees, living in the area), university ranking, teaching quality (AMBA accredited), geographical location (English speaking), ethnic diversity (location in a multicultural region), internship opportunities, political stability, local student population, personal recommendations via social media.

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 2.11 shows that the majority of studies conducted since 1992 on international student choice have considered undergraduate and postgraduate students to have the same choice factors and requirements concerning the types of information needed. Very few studies have focused solely on the types of information required by international postgraduate students. Previous research has also considered the decisions as to which country, city, institution and course to choose at the same time, so there has been no real appreciation of the types of information required by prospective international postgraduates when making these separate decisions. This study investigates these topics and so adds to the body of research.

### 2.7 Breadth and Depth of Information Search Pre Purchase

This section reviews the literature on the breadth and depth of information search when deciding where to study a postgraduate qualification. The breadth of information search refers to the number of different sources and types of information used by the information searcher. The depth of the search is the time that had elapsed from when the individual first started looking for information to help inform their decision, to the point that they made their decision.

In terms of the breadth of information search, information behaviour scholars have found that individuals were limited in the amount of information that they could cognitively process. Information overload could occur if the number of alternative choices or attributes was greater than ten. When this happened, individuals tended to try and reduce the amount of information they had by disposing of some of it and so taking a shortcut to the decision (Case, Given and Mai 2016). This suggested that if the number of universities under consideration or the number of sources and types of information to be processed was high then information overload could occur.

The amount of time available to search for information and being under time pressure also impacted on the breadth of information search (Case, Given and Mai 2016). In order to reduce the time it took to search for information

individuals adopted less reliable and simpler rules such as deciding amongst alternatives based on one attribute. For example, deciding between universities based on one type or source of information (Ozanne, Brucks and Grewal 1992).

Warwick et al (2009) found that individuals were prone to choose the first acceptable solution to their problem, or answer to their question, which was known as 'satisficing'. This meant that at some point they would stop searching as they were satisfied that they had enough information to make a decision. This led to people not optimising their searches by obtaining the most accurate, complete and comprehensive information available. Different individuals had diverse requirements concerning how thorough the information search should be to satisfy them (Case, Given and Mai 2016).

According to Dehne (2000) universities tended to present themselves in their promotional media as being outstanding. If the universities looked very similar, potential students would adopt a search satisficing strategy by choosing a university that satisfied some of their major needs. They would spend less time searching because there were so many features and benefits to evaluate and they could not judge the differences easily.

In terms of the timing of the start of the information searching process Towers and Towers (2018) suggested that the decision making process of prospective postgraduates and hence the information search might start a long time before the student enrolled in the institution.

Little research has been carried out on the breadth and depth of the information searching process undertaken by prospective international postgraduates when deciding where to study their degree or their level of informedness during the process of making a purchase choice. This study explores these topics and so fills a gap in the research.

## 2.8 Post Application and Pre Arrival Information Needs

Lillyman and Bennett (2014) discussed the importance of reassuring international students once they had completed their application to a foreign university. Gray, Fam and Llanes (2003) emphasised the importance of communicating with those international students who had purchased a degree through representatives from the host country institution such as agents and previous international students, to help to prepare them for studying overseas (Gray, Fam and Llanes 2003). Practical information on accommodation, finance and food also helped to relieve student anxiety at this time (Bartram 2008).

There is therefore little research that has been undertaken on the sources and types of information required by international postgraduates after they applied to institutions to enable them to make a choice between competing courses. Similarly, after postgraduates had purchased a postgraduate degree and up to their arrival at the university there was little research on their information needs. This study adds to the body of knowledge on this topic.

Once international postgraduates arrived at the foreign university they had information requirements, and there have been many studies undertaken on international students' information needs (Liu and Winn 2009) and postgraduates' information seeking behaviour (Catalano 2013) linked to gaining information whilst at university. However, these studies have mainly focused on academic information and library resources (Yi 2007, Jackson 2005, Liao, Finn and Lu 2007, Song 2004, Safahieh and Singh 2006, Halder, Roy and Chakraborty 2017).

The study of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) has increasingly been researched since Savolainen (1995) introduced his framework, however research into international students was rare (Sin 2015). The studies that had been carried out had found that that these students had difficulty in obtaining relevant and trustworthy information (Sin 2011 et al 2011, Sin and Kim 2013, Given 2002, Jeong 2004, Head and Eisenberg 2011). Jeong (2004) interviewed international postgraduate students and their spouses and found that certain important everyday life information was missed due to language barriers.



Alzougool et al (2013) ran focus groups amongst international undergraduates and postgraduates and found that they required information on everyday living such as social activities, health, accommodation, entertainment and news from online and offline sources.

Sin (2015) surveyed 112 international undergraduate and postgraduate students at an American university and analysed their use of 11 information sources when searching for everyday life information. The results are shown in Table 2.12.

Table 2.12 Frequency of Source Use for ELIS amongst Postgraduate Students by Gender

Source	Overall mean	Postgraduate male mean	Rank	Postgraduate female mean	Rank
Web search engines	4.75	4.82	1	4.89	1
Social Networking Sites (SNS)	4.02	4.11	2	4.16	2
New friends	3.85	3.96	3	4.05	3
Print resources	3.37	3.30	6	3.72	4
Traditional mass media	3.29	3.38	5	3.58	7
Old Friends	3.26	3.72	4	3.49	8
Family members and relatives	3.21	3.26	8	3.60	6
Libraries	3.21	3.30	6	3.64	5
Social Q&A sites	3.19	2.65	9	3.49	8
Professionals	2.42	2.57	10	2.81	10
Microblogs	2.31	2.40	11	2.31	11

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Sin 2015 p.468 Table 1 p.470 Fig 1

Both male and female postgraduates used web search engines and social networking sites most frequently to obtain ELIS, followed by new friends who they met after they arrived in the university city. Males used old friends and traditional mass media more frequently compared to females who used print resources and libraries to access everyday life information. Personal sources of information from friends and family ranked highly with WOM sources accounting for four of the 11 sources used.

These findings agree with those of Head and Eisenberg (2011) who found that American students used the internet frequently to look for everyday information. The increased importance of social networking sites, as a source of daily information, has also been acknowledged in recent research (Kim, Sin and Yoo-Lee 2014).

In 2011 Sin et al (2011) surveyed 188 international students to ascertain the level of difficulty they found when searching for different types of information. They concluded that these students had more difficulty finding career, work, housing, health and financial information than educational information. In Sin's (2015) study, respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of finding information in fourteen everyday information domains. The level of difficulty of finding academic information with a mean of 2.52 was compared to finding information in the other domains.

Table 2.13 Level of Difficulty with Information Domains amongst Postgraduate Students by Gender

<b>Information domains</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Postgraduate Male mean</b>	<b>Male rank</b>	<b>Postgraduate Female mean</b>	<b>Female rank</b>
Legal information	3.45	3.27	1	3.67	1
Financial information	2.96	2.87	2	3.03	2
Personal development	2.76	2.57	6	2.67	3
Interpersonal relationships	2.72	2.70	4	2.44	5
Housing	2.68	2.67	5	2.50	4
Culture and norms	2.60	2.80	3	2.24	8
Academic information	2.52	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Family-related information	2.42	2.57	6	2.38	6
Health and wellness	2.38	2.34	8	2.32	7
Transportation	2.16	2.07	10	2.05	10
News about home country	2.08	2.13	9	2.08	9
Entertainment and hobbies	1.97	1.87	14	1.97	11
Local news	1.91	2.00	11	1.95	12
Food and drink	1.89	1.90	13	1.64	13
Shopping	1.83	1.93	12	1.69	14

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Sin 2015 p.470 Fig 2

Legal and financial information, information on personal development, interpersonal relationships, housing, culture and norms were perceived to be more difficult to find than academic information for all respondents and also for male postgraduates as a group. Female postgraduates did not perceive that finding information on culture and norms was more difficult than finding academic information.

The author is interested in further investigating the information needs of international postgraduates whilst at university, researching the importance of friends as an information source and any gaps in information provision to add to the body of research.

## 2.9 Influence of Information Provision on Satisfaction and Expectations

In this section the literature on student satisfaction and the influence of information provision on satisfaction and expectations is reviewed.

Satisfaction amongst international postgraduate and undergraduate students has been researched by many scholars as shown in appendix 2. International postgraduate student satisfaction was found to be based on the experiences that the student had whilst at university and their experiences in the external environment outside the university. The postgraduates' experience of the quality of the educational services at university was one of the key determinants of satisfaction. Satisfaction was measured in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) (2019) which included questions on teaching, learning, engagement, assessment, dissertation support, organisation of the course, resources and skills development. Other internal factors which impacted on satisfaction were the reputation and image of the institution, the marketability of the degree after study and the availability of adequate information (Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair 2006).

Factors in the external university environment that contributed to students' experiences and their satisfaction included social relationships, accommodation, lifestyle, safety, transport, availability of jobs, food and weather. Satisfaction

depended on the country of origin of international postgraduates as this influenced their values such as self-efficacy and hedonism (Arambewela and Hall 2011).

A comprehensive review of the factors that impacted student satisfaction was undertaken by the current author by comparing academic research with the National Student Survey (NSS) and PTES surveys and the results are presented in Table 8.9 in appendix 2.

The literature on the influence of information provision on expectations and satisfaction is now discussed. Many studies have acknowledged the role of information in structuring expectations (for example Gronroos, 1984, Webster, 1991). Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) found that the information contained in WOM communication and external communications influenced consumers' expectations. However, much of the literature covering the influence of information provision on experiences, expectations and satisfaction has focused on medical patients (see appendix 2).

Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) recognised the role that information provided by universities played in informing the expectations of students about a course and their satisfaction levels. Sam (2001) found that international students' satisfaction with life at university was significantly affected by the information they received prior to attending university. Arambewela and Hall (2011) similarly acknowledged the importance of the promotional material received by international postgraduate students in structuring expectations and influencing satisfaction.

The satisfaction of international postgraduate students from different countries was analysed by Arambewela and Hall (2006) who adapted the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman Berry and Zeithaml (1988). They measured the gap between postgraduates' expectations of the quality of a university's educational services, their perceptions of the university as a study destination once they had arrived and their satisfaction levels. There were 36 service quality variables in the instrument which related to five dimensions. Of these variables four related to the provision of adequate and appropriate

information under the reliability and empathy dimensions as outlined in Table 2.14. Their study found that information provision played a role in postgraduates' satisfaction levels.

Table 2.14 Service Quality Measures used related to the Provision of Information

<b>SERVQUAL Dimension</b>	<b>SERVQUAL variable</b>
Reliability	Adequate information available to students via internet
	Adequate information available to students compared to other universities
Empathy	Adequate information and guidance through Australian embassies and other official agents
	Overseas agents and consultants who provide appropriate information and guidance

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Arambewela and Hall (2006)

The author is interested in investigating the sources and types of information that structured international postgraduates' expectations and impacted on their student experience and satisfaction levels to add to the body of research in this area.

## Decision Making Process of International Postgraduates

This section explores the literature and models concerning the decision making process of international postgraduates, the decision making unit, the breadth, depth, timing and sequence of decisions taken and the factors impacting on the process. Justification is provided for choosing to build on the marketing and consumer behaviour model of the consumer decision making process in the author's proposed new model.

### 2.10 International Postgraduates' Decisions

Postgraduate courses were an expensive service in terms of money and time and an infrequent purchase so they would be classified as a high involvement

purchase (Nicholls et al 1995). As there were significant differences between brands, buying behaviour was classified as complex as illustrated in Table 2.15.

Table 2.15 Buyer Decision making Matrix

	<b>High Involvement</b>	<b>Low involvement</b>
<b>Significant differences between brands</b>	Complex buying behaviour	Variety-seeking behaviour
<b>Few differences between brands</b>	Dissonance- reducing buying behaviour	Habitual buying behaviour

Source Assael (1981)

A prospective international postgraduate student needed to make six decisions before studying at an overseas university; whether to study a postgraduate qualification, whether to study abroad, which country, institution and city to study in and which course to choose (Pimpa 2003b, Manns and Swift 2016). The decision making process was therefore more complex than that of a prospective postgraduate student who remained in their home country to study (Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott 2014, Soo and Elliot 2010). The fact that international postgraduates were offered many different study options in terms of countries, institutions, programmes, delivery modes and levels of study and they needed to consider additional factors including culture, safety, visas, entry requirements, cost, learning environment and lifestyle when selecting a university, added to the complexity of the decision making process (Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño 2006).

For prospective international postgraduates the choice of course was one of the most important decisions they would make (Lei and Chuang 2010). Yang, Yen and Balmer (2019) claimed that the selection of a university degree for these students was more than a high involvement purchase. It was a once-in-a-lifetime purchase (OLIP) which involved extensive information search and high social pressure.

In theory complex buying decisions involved extended decision making processes whereby the potential postgraduate spent time at each stage of the process (Dibb et al 2012) and rigorously looked for information in the

information search stage (Solomon et al 2013). In practice researchers have found that the student decision making process and information search may not be extensive (Hemsley-Brown 2016).

Equally such high risk, high involvement or OLIP purchases did, in theory, lead to rational decision making (Kotler et al 2016, Solomon et al 2013). However, there has been a debate in the literature as to how rational students' decision making was in practice (Hemsley-Brown 2016).

The current author is interested in exploring the rigour with which prospective postgraduates progressed through the stages of the decision making process on the way to purchase and the rationality of the process.

### 2.11 Decision Making Unit

When more than one decision maker was involved in a purchase, such as that of a postgraduate qualification, scholars referred to a Decision Making Unit (DMU) or buying centre. Webster and Wind (1972) classified organisational decision maker roles and these are related to an international student purchasing a postgraduate qualification in Table 2.16.

Table 2.16 Decision Making Unit Roles for Postgraduate Qualification Purchase

<b>Roles in Decision Making Unit</b>	<b>Description of role related to the purchase of a postgraduate qualification</b>
Initiator	Those members who first recognise the problem or opportunity to obtain a postgraduate qualification
User	Those members who enrol in the university to study a postgraduate qualification
Buyer	Those members who pay for the cost of the postgraduate qualification
Influencer	Those members who influence the decision process directly or indirectly by providing information and criteria for evaluating alternative postgraduate qualifications
Decider	Those members with authority to choose among alternative buying decisions
Gatekeeper	Those members who control the flow of information into the decision making unit

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Webster and Wind 1972 p.17 and Blythe 2006

Consumer marketing scholars have researched the impact of family as DMU members on purchase decisions (Lee and Collins 2000). Ceja (2006) looked at the influence of Mexican parents and siblings when the school pupil studying in America was choosing a university. Parents have also been found to have an impact on international school students' decisions to study abroad (Wilkins and Huisman 2015). Zhu and Reeves (2019 p 1007) researched the decision to study a postgraduate qualification overseas amongst Chinese students and found that their parents had an influence over their decisions as they were making a 'significant financial sacrifice'. According to Gatfield and Chen (2006) postgraduates increasingly made their own decisions as they got older regarding whether to study a postgraduate qualification and where to enrol. However, their decisions might be influenced by WOM communication from friends and family who then became part of the DMU as influencers.

Little research has been carried out on the composition of the DMU of a prospective international postgraduate student. The information needs of the DMU members have not been investigated. This study explores these topics.

## 2.12 Students' Decision Making Process Models

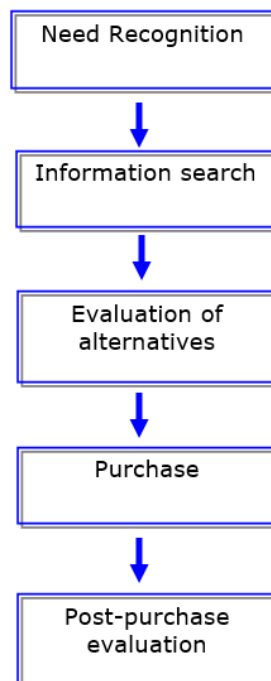
Student decision making is defined by Maringe (2006 p.468) as 'a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices.' Models designed to explain the decision making process of students as they chose where to study their university qualification started to emerge in the early 1980s (Peralt-Rillo and Ribes-Giner 2013). Chapman (1984) was one of the first to look at buyer behaviour theory in relation to students and parents choosing an educational institution or programme. There were three types of models related to undergraduate students' decision to enrol at a university; economic, status-attainment and combined models which are discussed in appendix 2.

The original consumer decision making model of Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968) was revised over time (Darley, Blankson, and Luethge 2010). It influenced the development of five stage linear models of consumer decision making (Cox, Granbois and Summers 1983). Figure 2.6 shows the stages of the



decision making process as agreed by many marketing and consumer behaviour scholars. This model will be hereinafter referred to as the DMP model.

Figure 2.6 Consumer Decision Making process



Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Kotler and Keller (2016)

The DMP model was used in developing the current author's proposed new model of the decision making cycle for a number of reasons. Firstly it is the most widely recognised model of the decision making process and has been utilised over the years by well-known marketing and consumer behaviour scholars (Kotler and Keller 2016, Schiffman and Kanuk 2012). Secondly it is recognised as a simple model that clearly represents the process (Hemsley-Brown 2016). Thirdly, many previous models focusing on the student decision making process have also been developed around the DMP model as shown in Table 2.17 including the current author's previous model (Donaldson and McNicholas 2004). The model has therefore been tested over a period of time and found to effectively represent student decision making.

Table 2.17 shows the most widely accepted models of the consumer and students' decision making and choice processes. Chapman (1984) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) used the DMP model as the foundation of their student choice models (Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott 2014).

Table 2.17 Consumer and Student Decision making and Choice models

Author	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of alternatives Selection	Purchase	Post Purchase evaluation
<b>Consumer Decision making</b>					
Kotler and Keller 2016	Problem Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase Decision	Post Purchase behaviour
Schiffman and Kanuk 2012	Need Recognition	Pre Purchase Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase	Post Purchase behaviour
Cox, Granbois and Summers 1983	Need Recognition and Problem Awareness	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase	Post Purchase evaluation
Blackwell, Miniard and Engel 2001	Need Recognition	Search	Pre purchase evaluation of services	Purchase Consumption	Post consumption evaluation Divestment
<b>Student Choice Process</b>					
Chapman 1984 Undergrad	Pre Search Behaviour	Search Behaviour	Application Decision Choice Decision	Matriculation Decision	
Hanson and Litten 1982 Undergrad	College aspirations	Search process Gathering information	Sending applications	Enrolling	
Jackson 1982 Undergrad	Preference		Exclusion		Evaluation
Hossler and Gallagher 1987 Undergrad	Predisposition	Search	Choice		
Maringe 2006 Potential Undergrad	Pre Search behaviour	Search behaviour	Application Choice Decision	Registration	
Maringe and Carter 2007 Postgrad Undergrad	Pre Search	Search	Application	Choice Making	Post Choice Decision
Sojkin, Bartkowiak, and Skuza 2012 Undergrad	Predisposition		Choice		Evaluation
<b>Student Decision Making</b>					
Kotler and Fox 1985 Students	Problem Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase	Post Purchase evaluation
Moogan, Baron and Harris 1999 Undergrad	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase	Post Purchase evaluation
Donaldson and McNicholas 2004 Postgrad	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase	Post Purchase evaluation

Table 2.17 Consumer and Student Decision making and Choice models contd.

Author	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation Process and selection	Purchase	Post Purchase
<b>Student Decision Making contd.</b>					
Vrontis, Thrassou and Melanthiou 2007 Students	Need Recognition	Information Search	Alternatives Evaluation	Purchase and Consumption	Post Consumption evaluation
Brown, Varley and Pal 2009 Undergrad	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase	Post Purchase evaluation
Al Fattal 2010 Undergrad	Needs and Motives	Information Gathering	Evaluating Alternatives	Decision and Enrolment	Post Purchase evaluation
Peralt-Rillo and Ribes-Giner 2013 Postgrad	Need recognition	Search behaviour	Evaluation of alternatives	Choice and purchase	Post Purchase behaviour
Branco Oliveira and Soares 2016 International undergrad	Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase and Consumption	Post Purchase evaluation

Source Author's Analysis 2020

All the decision making models in Table 2.17 were linear in design and the student or consumer moved sequentially from one stage of the model to another during the decision or choice processes. The assumption was that decision making was a rational process and that a student would move through each stage of the decision making model in order to choose the country, city, institution and programme of study.

It should be noted from Table 2.17 that the models have considered undergraduate students or a mixture of both undergraduates and postgraduates with the exception of Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) and Peralt-Rillo and Ribes-Giner (2013) who solely researched postgraduates. The focus has also been on domestic rather than international students. Section 2.14 discusses the few studies pertaining to the linear decision making process of postgraduates and international students. The current author's study fills a gap in the previous research as she explores international postgraduates' decision making process and proposes a new model.

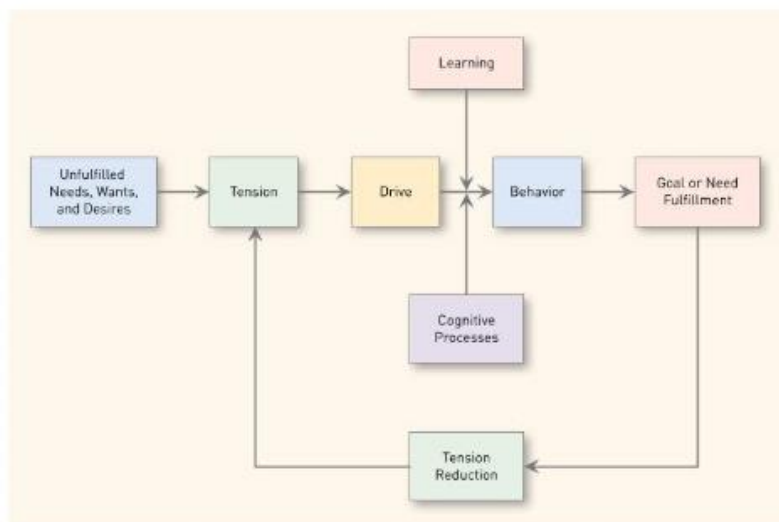
### 2.13 DMP model related to Postgraduates' Decision making Process

The stages in the DMP model are related to international postgraduates below.

Need, or problem recognition, was the first stage in the decision making process model when prospective postgraduates recognised that they had a need for postgraduate study. Need recognition linked to the theory of motivation.

Motivation was described as the 'driving force that impels' consumers to action (Schiffman and Kanuk 2012 p.100). Figure 2.7 shows that unfulfilled needs led to a state of tension which created the driving force for postgraduates to behave in the way that they believed their needs would be fulfilled.

Figure 2.7 Model of the Motivational Process



Source Schiffman and Kanuk 2012 p.99 Fig 5.1

The prospective postgraduate recognised that a gap existed between the ideal state, or the position that the student would like to be in, and the actual state that they were in currently which was, for example, looking for a job (Solomon et al 2016). This gap triggered the need for study to gain the skills to apply for jobs. The individual had to decide whether to purchase a postgraduate qualification to satisfy this need. This was the most crucial stage in the process, as if the student did not perceive that they had a need to purchase postgraduate education, they would not start to evaluate universities (Hemsley-Brown 2016).

Motivations to undertake taught postgraduate study in a UK institution have been researched by scholars and their findings are presented in Table 2.18.

Table 2.18 Postgraduate Motivation to undertake Taught Postgraduate Study in a UK institution

<b>Motivators</b>	Pratt and Hillier 1999 %	Donaldson and McNicholas 2004 %	Soilemetzidis, Bennett and Leman 2014 %	i-graduate 2013 %	Wakeling et al 2015 %	PTES 2012 Bennett and Turner 2012 %	Mellors Bourne et al 2014 HEFCE %	Artess et al 2014 %
As a means of improving my career prospects	54	48	58	61	59	59.5	38	66.8
To study further in a specific field of interest		6			48		42	69.2
I wanted to gain/ update my skills to become more employable	64	14	55	18	34		43	
I wanted to change career		5	21	10	19	20.6	31	57.1
My first degree was not specific enough for any particular job		1						
My ongoing career required further qualifications		4	18		51	19.6		63.6
I would like to work in the education sector								
To acquire knowledge for my current job	65	5	9			10		
Personal satisfaction/interest	87	8	47	67	39	50.2	53	
To enable progression to a research career			38	32	29	37.7	35	
It is a requirement of my current job				18			10	
To gain a theoretical perspective	68	4						
To get a promotion	23			5				
My employer encouraged me to				4			5	
To enhance earnings					22			
To make a greater personal impact on society					23		37	

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Moogan (2020) studied international postgraduate students in a UK university enrolled on an MBA programme. He found that the majority of postgraduates chose the MBA in order to progress their careers. However, Wilkins et al (2018) disagreed that career advancement was the most important motivator amongst

enrolled MBA students in China and the United Arab Emirates. These students perceived that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and intrinsic benefits, such as a sense of achievement, were the most important motivators to study for an MBA. However, the researchers acknowledged that this was due to the fact that the MBA students had worked for a number of years already and had considerable employment experience.

A comparison of the older studies from 2000 and 2004 with the more recent studies showed that there was no change in domestic and international students' motivations to study for a postgraduate qualification. Enhancing employability was the key motivating factor when undertaking postgraduate study. Career centric motivations included progression into an identified career such as into the professions or into research, enhancing or accelerating a current career through gaining the skills and qualifications required or changing career. Postgraduates wanted to develop problem-solving, communication, leadership, technical, teamworking and creativity skills to become more employable (QS 2019g).

Less popular motivations were classified as intrinsic motivations by Mellors-Bourne et al (2015) and comprised personal or intellectual interest, personal satisfaction, the development of one's own capacities or to study further in a specific field of interest. These intrinsic motivations were contrasted with the more popular extrinsic motivations or 'investment motives' associated with careers (Hesketh and Knight 1999).

Information search was considered many marketing and consumer behaviour authors as being the second stage in the decision making process. In this stage prospective postgraduates searched for information on universities to study in, courses to take and the countries and cities that they could choose to live in, in order to make their decisions.

When searching for information postgraduates would firstly undertake an internal search and scan their memories for previous learning or past purchase experiences (Murray 1991). Then they would search for information from external sources (Simoes and Soares 2010). If sufficient information to make

the choice of institution was gained from past experiences or other internal information, then external search would be lessened (Yang and Mutum 2015).

As Table 2.17 shows many researchers, including the current author, have previously considered the information search stage of the decision making process as a distinct stage. Some scholars have included information search within the evaluation of alternatives stage (see Court et al 2009). Other studies have identified certain sources of information that are important at different stages of the decision making process (see Branco Oliveira and Soares 2016, Peralt-Rillo and Ribes-Giner 2013).

The current author now hypothesises that information search takes place throughout the stages of the decision making process from helping to recognise a need, to evaluating alternatives, to applying to universities, to confirming that the right purchase is taking place and then gaining reassurance immediately after purchase in the post purchase evaluation stage. She also argues that the student engages in information search throughout the final post purchase stage whilst studying at university until graduation. This is further discussed in section 6.9 where the author proposes a new model of the decision making cycle.

According to the DMP model, evaluation of alternatives was the third stage in the consumer decision making process. Potential postgraduates would evaluate the options available to them in terms of institutions, courses, cities and countries in order to decide which course would deliver the benefits that they were looking for. They would eliminate certain alternatives regarding countries, cities, universities and courses and move towards making a choice among the few remaining alternatives (Solomon et al 2016).

Postgraduates had an evoked set of university brands that they were aware of and added to this would be alternative options recommended by others. The shortlist of alternative universities and courses formed the choice set of options to be evaluated. Postgraduates would then weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each option on the shortlist before purchasing a qualification (Schiffman and Kanuk 2012).

Universities had to try and ensure that they were one of the evoked set of universities to be considered by potential postgraduate students. Doyle and Lynch (1976) felt that promotion had no impact at all unless a university entered the student's evoked set at the information search stage when students were researching universities.

As Table 2.17 showed some higher education models referred to the 'evaluation of alternatives stage' whereas others named it the 'application stage' (for example Maringe 2006). In the current author's proposed model applications to different universities take place during the evaluation of alternatives stage and the prospective postgraduate then receives offers if they match the criteria of the university they applied to.

The next stage in the DMP model was the purchase stage when prospective postgraduates decided between the offers they had received and purchased a postgraduate degree. With most purchases the consumer could make the choice without constraints. However, the prospective postgraduate might be constrained by entry qualifications or the availability of places on the programme which would limit their choice (Hemsley-Brown 2016).

As postgraduates often applied to more than one university it was important for universities to process their applications as quickly as possible and keep applicants 'warm' between the time that they applied and registration. Maringe (2006 p.469) suggested that universities should try and 'seal a psychological bond' with the applicant at this time. Sargeant (1999) advised universities to respond to any queries promptly during the purchase stage and provide an excellent level of customer care.

Moogan (2020) suggested that the purchase stage lasted throughout the time that the postgraduate was studying in the university. In line with other academics the current author argues that once the prospective postgraduate had purchased a degree they entered the post purchase stage of the decision making process. Postgraduates would evaluate the educational service they had purchased, and this led to a level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard 2013).



Consideration of student decision making process models tended to focus on the first four stages. As a result the post purchase evaluation stage received less attention. Some scholars such as Hemsley-Brown (2016) acknowledged the importance of the post purchase phase in that it provided justification to the student and other members of the DMU for the students' choice decision. Sojkin, Bartkowiak and Skuza (2012) recognised that post purchase evaluation determined student satisfaction and suggested that universities research students' choice factors to further understand satisfaction. Satisfaction in the post purchase phase has also been linked to positive WOM recommendation from current students to prospective students (Towers and Towers 2018).

Maringe (2006) suggested that the purchase phase included the first few days at university as at this point students might turn their offer down if they were not satisfied with the experience. Nemar and Vrontis (2016) argued that the decision making process model should be used to explore students' experiences during the first few weeks of attending a university. Khanna, Jacob and Yadav (2014) recognised that a university should try and satisfy a student from the point of enrolment to the student's graduation. However none of the studies recognised that the post purchase evaluation phase could be classified as the whole of the students' time at university.

Rather than explore the students' post purchase evaluation stage from a successful university application to graduation as part of the decision making process, scholars have devised student life cycle models to assess the student journey. The stages of the student life cycle models were described as; application, admission, teaching, learning and assessment, graduation and finally post qualification experience (Arambewela and Maringe 2012).

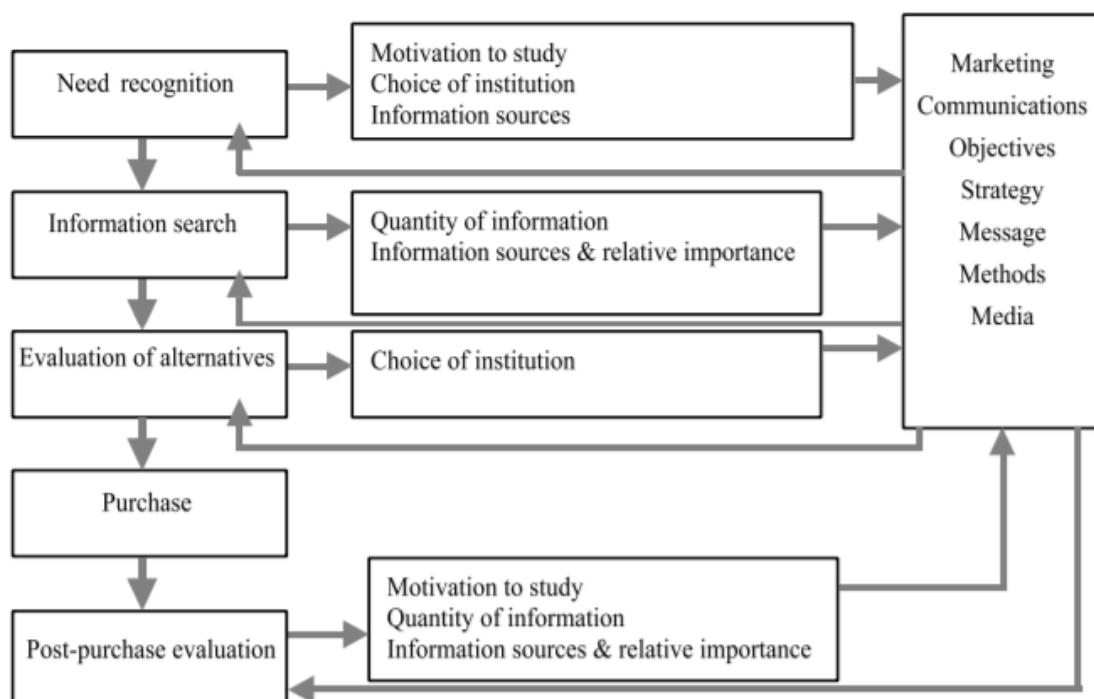
The current author is the only academic to argue that the post purchase stage lasts from the purchase of a postgraduate degree to the point at which the student graduates from the university. Therefore the role of information during this stage, how it contributes to the student experience and satisfaction levels and how students contribute to the pool of information available to prospective and current students should be explored when looking at the decision making process.

The current author perceives that there is an opportunity to develop one model that describes the whole student decision making process and represents the complete student journey from the point at which prospective international postgraduates recognised a need to study a Masters qualification, through evaluating different universities, making applications and purchasing a postgraduate degree to the point that the postgraduate graduated. The author's proposed model is discussed in section 6.9.

### 2.14 International Postgraduates' Decision making Models

In this section models pertaining to the linear decision making process of postgraduates and international students are discussed. In 2004 the current author related the linear DMP model to the decision making process of postgraduates and universities' marketing communications strategy as shown in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8 Model of the inter relationships between the Postgraduate Decision making Process and Marketing Communications Strategy

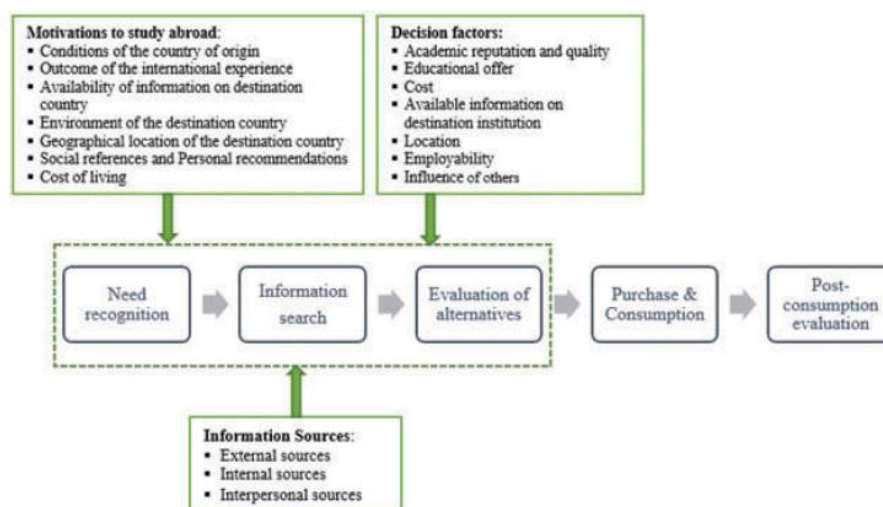


Source Donaldson and McNicholas (2004 p.350)

The current author assumed that postgraduates would primarily search for sources and types of information during the information search stage of the decision making process as identified in the DMP model. She thought that decision making was a sequential process which was criticised by Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott (2014). The author has reflected on the linear approach to the decision making process and the timing of information search subsequent to creating the first model and proposes an alternative cyclical model in section 6.9 which better reflects the decision making process of postgraduates.

Branco Oliveira and Soares (2016) proposed a model for the decision process of international students as shown in Figure 2.9 based on the DMP model. They indicated that information sources would inform the first three stages of the process.

Figure 2.9 Model of the Decision Process of International Students

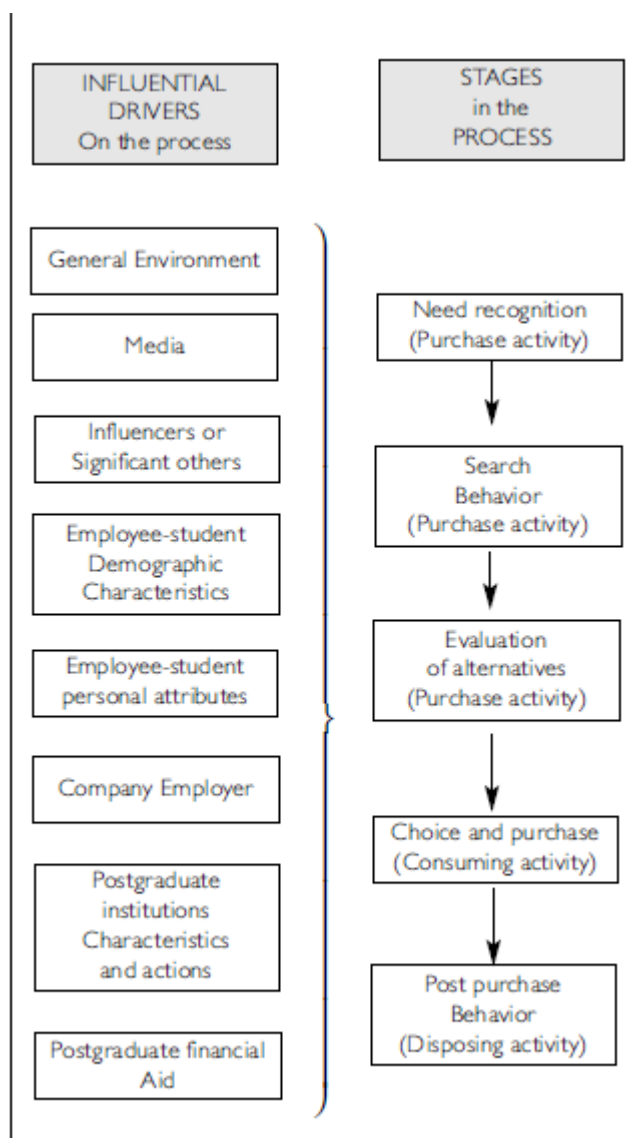


Source Branco Oliveira and Soares 2016 p. 137

Peralt-Rillo and Ribes-Giner (2013) studied the factors impacting on the postgraduate decision making process based on the DMP model and they acknowledged that there too few studies and models concerning the postgraduate decision making process. Their model in Figure 2.10 proposed additional factors that specifically influenced prospective domestic postgraduates' decision making; the company who employed the postgraduate

and the characteristics of the postgraduate as an employee. The current author hypothesises that there are additional factors that impact on the decision making process of postgraduates which are investigated in her study.

Figure 2.10 Postgraduate Decision making Process Model



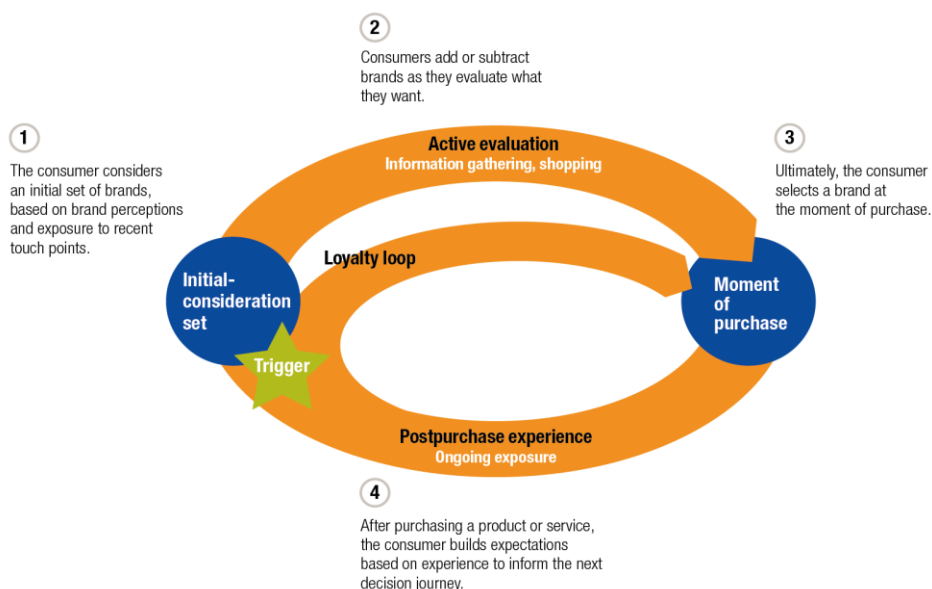
Source Peralt-Rillo, and Ribes-Giner 2013 p.44

Recent developments in cyclical decision making models are now reviewed, starting with models designed to explain the consumer decision making process and then cyclical decision making models linked to postgraduate students.

The Court et al (2009) McKinsey cyclical model of the consumer decision making process was significant as it was the first well publicised model that moved away

from the traditional linear model of decision making and argued that the consumer decision making process was cyclical. It is illustrated in Figure 2.11.

Figure 2.11 The Decision making Process is now a Circular Journey



Source Court et al 2009

The decision making process had four phase; initial consideration, active evaluation when customers researched potential purchases, closure when customers purchased the products or services and post purchase when customers used their purchases. The stages in the model therefore reflected the stages in the DMP model. In this model, information searching took place in the second phase, active evaluation, and the post purchase experience informed the next decision journey so closing the loop.

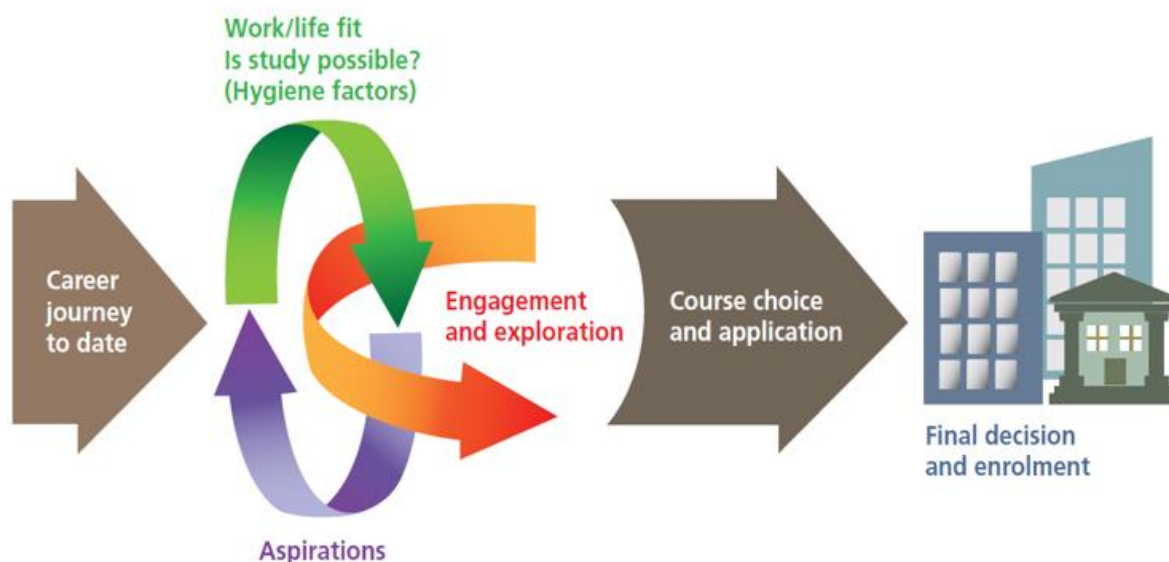
Other scholars have proposed more circular consumer decision making models. They argued that linear models did not reflect the behaviour of people today, especially the Millennial generation brought up in the digital era, and that consumers interacted with each other and brands during a continuous consumer decision journey. Noble (2010) proposed a circular customer life cycle model and Armano (2007) a marketing spiral model to replace the linear marketing funnel. Hudson and Hudson (2013) suggested a consumer decision journey model similar to Court et al's model. Wolny and Charoensuksai (2014) looked at three

shopper journeys which were more circular than linear and emotionally based. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) considered consumer touchpoints at each stage of their circular model. In these last three models information searching was still a distinct stage in the decision making process rather than something that took place during all the pre and post purchase stages.

Scholars have justified the development of new cyclical consumer decision making models due to the increasingly digital communications environment and the vast quantity of available information for consumers to search (Court et al 2009). These factors impacted the number of brands in consumers' initial evoked set and the decisions they made. It was argued that consumers had fewer brands to evaluate initially but brands were added or rejected at a later stage or they made a number of decisions at the same time (Hudson and Hudson 2013). This suggested that consumers moved forwards and backwards within the decision process without a planned or rational approach as identified by Mix and Katzberg (2015). Lye, Shao, and Rundle-Thiele (2005) classified the making of multiple decisions within a single decision process as decision waves. The decision making process was no longer a linear staged process but a sequence of activities which was iterative, so a cyclical model better reflected this process. As discussed in section 2.2 LIS scholars have also critiqued the sequential linear process models in the information behaviour literature.

Circular decision making models were also devised by industry specialists to represent the postgraduate's decision making process. HEFCE's (2014a) decision making model for taught postgraduate students is illustrated in Figure 2.12. The model reflected HEFCE's view that for many prospective postgraduates the decision making process was not linear and they would take a variety of routes through the model.

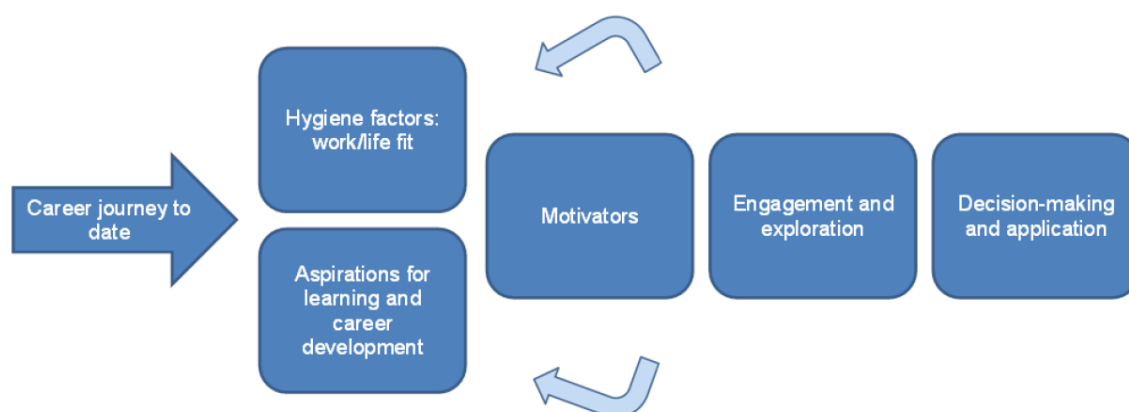
Figure 2.12 How Prospective Taught Postgraduate Students decide whether to Apply for a Course



Source HEFCE 2014a p.2

Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott (2014) amended the HEFCE model to include motivators and illustrated, with the aid of the arrows, the cyclical nature of the prospective postgraduate's decision making process as shown in Figure 2.13. They agreed that the process was iterative rather than linear and that prospective postgraduates would review information they had previously gained and therefore move backwards and forwards during their journey on the way to enrolment.

Figure 2.13 Proposed Model of Postgraduate Decision making

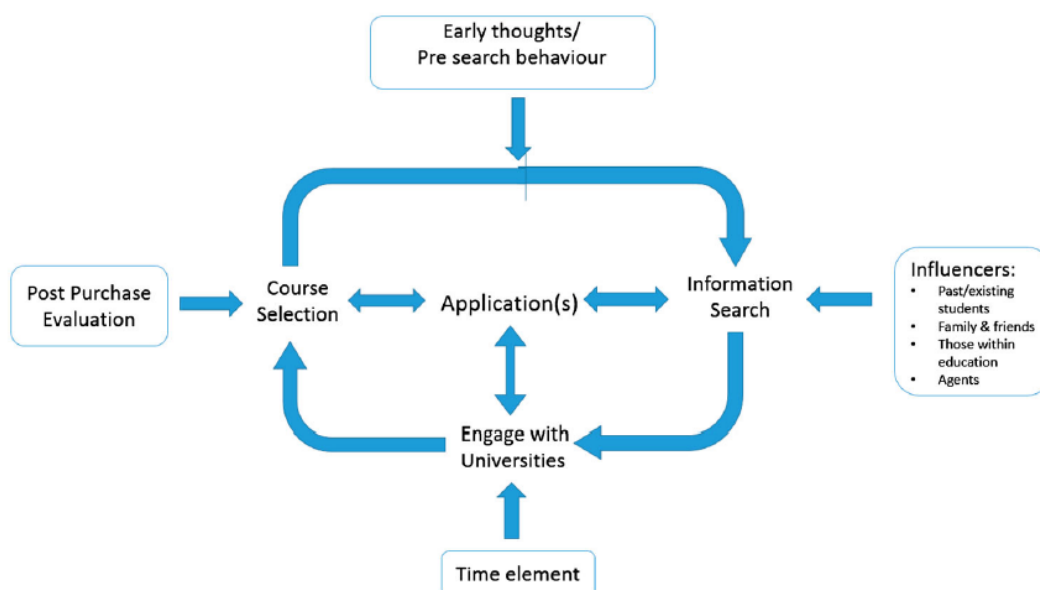


Source Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott 2014 p.54

HEFCE's (2014a) and Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott's (2014) models did not include any reference to information search but they considered it to be an important element in the decision making process.

Recently, Towers and Towers (2018) conducted qualitative research amongst postgraduate students in Bolton University and they suggested that the postgraduate student's decision making process was a cyclical one as illustrated in Figure 2.14. Prospective students would make a decision to apply to a certain university but then due to delays in receiving a reply, or influencers suggesting an alternative university, they would go back again to evaluate additional universities. They would therefore move backwards and forwards through the decision making process and a circular model more accurately reflected that journey.

Figure 2.14 Circular PGHE Decision Making Framework



Source Towers and Towers 2018 p. 13

It is interesting to note that in the model above that pre search behaviour and post purchase evaluation were seen as impacting on the circular decision making framework and were not pictured as stages in the process. The only other factors depicted as impacting on the framework are influencers and time.

Information search and engagement with universities are shown as stages in the



process although Towers and Towers (2018) acknowledged that the potential student engaged with the university throughout the decision making process.

The need for a theoretical model that represented the postgraduate decision making process was acknowledged by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) and it is argued that this is still the case today, especially in the digital era (Hall and Towers 2018). Discussion of the models indicated that there has been a lack of research on international postgraduates' decision making processes and as such there was an opportunity to investigate the potentially cyclical nature of the process further. Towers and Towers (2018) and Moogan (2020) identified several areas of future research, including an examination of the whole decision making process of international postgraduates, and an in-depth analysis of the decisions of individual international postgraduates through qualitative interviews. The current author responds to their requests for further research.

There continues to be a discussion whether the consumer exhibits rational behaviour, in today's online communications environment, as assumed in the linear decision making models (Mix and Katzberg 2015). Lehmann (1999), in a special edition of the *Journal of Marketing* entitled 'How do Customers and Consumers really behave' argued that consumers should not be perceived to be conscious and rational decision makers. He concluded that they should be viewed as unfocused, emotional beings that needed to learn, and that their 'irrational' behaviour should be studied through qualitative research. The author is interested in exploring the rationality of postgraduates' decision making process.

From the review of the literature the current author questions whether the decision making process was more iterative and cyclical rather than linear. She therefore investigates the degree to which postgraduates revisit prior stages of the process again and whether information is gathered during all stages of the process including the post purchase evaluation phase. For the author, linked to the concept of an iterative decision making cycle, is the notion that the cycle is continuous and that the postgraduate learns about decision making from having made the high involvement decision as to where to study. Having learnt from

making one complex decision the postgraduate would then approach the next high involvement decision based on their experiences.

From the evaluation of the literature and her findings, the current author proposes a new cyclical model of the decision making process in section 6.9.

### 2.15 Breadth, Depth, Timing and Sequence of Decision making Process

This section considers the research that has been undertaken previously on the breadth and depth of the decision making process, the timing of the start of the process and the sequence of decisions made.

The breadth of the decision making process related to the number of universities considered by prospective postgraduates which was referred to as the choice set of universities to apply to. Research in North America established that high school pupils considered four to five universities and then applied to one institution (Galotti and Mark 1994). Towers and Towers' (2018) study of home and international postgraduates found that some postgraduates had a wide choice set of universities and then narrowed down those that they applied to. Whereas other students had an initial narrow choice set and they did not expand on it. The number of courses and universities that postgraduate students applied to varied between one and twenty with most students applying to three or four universities.

The depth of the postgraduate's decision making process related to the amount of time that elapsed between the recognition of a need to study and purchasing the degree. This links to the depth of the information searching process discussed in section 2.7 which would be the same time period if information search took place during all the stages of the decision making process.

The timing of the start of the decision making process could be a long time before enrolment and this made the student decision making process special (Moogan et al 2001). Universities needed to be aware when postgraduates started researching so they could make information available to them at this

point. Moogan and Baron (2003) found that prospective undergraduates spent three months gathering information in order to make their choice which impacted on the time the overall decision making process took. Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott (2014) and i-graduate (2013) encouraged institutions to make information available to prospective students a year in advance of the course starting so they could make the investments and changes to lifestyle necessary. In Towers and Towers' (2018) research postgraduates started to think about studying a qualification up to four years before starting the course. For the majority of postgraduates the time period was one to two years.

Towers and Towers (2018) added a time element to their decision making model (see Figure 2.14) as students who started thinking about a postgraduate qualification earlier or later might exhibit different patterns of behaviour (Johnston, Driskell, and Sala 1999). For Hall and Towers (2017), as the length of the postgraduate decision making process increased, there was more use made of individuals to validate the decisions made during the process.

The sequence of decisions for prospective Chinese postgraduates was the country to study in followed by the course, then the university and finally the city (Manns and Swift 2016). QS (2019g), an industry analyst, asked international students in which sequence they made their decisions. Their survey was answered by 23,557 prospective international students of 191 nationalities worldwide who were planning to study in the UK. They found that for the most part international students chose the subject or course, followed by the country and lastly the university to study at. Towers and Towers (2018) identified five different application patterns amongst postgraduate students from the UK and overseas, but the sequence of decisions was not identified. Postgraduates would either make multiple applications to universities in different countries or applications to universities in one country, region or city or a single application to one university.

The breadth and depth of the decision making process, the timing of the start of the process and the sequence of decisions made are interesting areas to further research and are investigated in this study.

## 2.16 Factors impacting on International Postgraduates' Decision Making Process

This section explores the factors that impacted on international students' decision making process as shown in Table 2.19.

Table 2.19 Factors impacting on International Students' Decision Making Process

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Elements of Factor</b>
Personal Attributes	Class rank, academic ability/aptitude, academic performance/achievement, self-image, personal values, benefits sought, motivations, attitudes, personality, knowledge, lifestyle/social context, educational aspirations, level of involvement,
Student Characteristics	Gender, age, socio-economic status, income/resources, ethnicity, religion, dependents, university for undergraduate study, date of graduation from undergraduate study, role in decision making unit, ethnocentrism, time available to search
Parent Characteristics	Parent's education/ university attended, family culture/background, parent's personalities, parental influence on where to find information, parental involvement in choice process, parental finance
Public Policy	Aid (amount and eligibility)
Environment	Occupational structure, economic conditions, cultural conditions, technology
University characteristics	Price/ cost (financial aid), size, programme(s) availability, ambience, control (public/ private), location, reputation, rankings
University actions	Recruitment activities, academic/admissions policies, admittance, aid granted (amount, package), written information, digital information, campus visit, admission/recruiting
Influences/ Media used	Parents, counsellors/ careers advisers, peers/friends, publications, university staff, students, digital and social media, other media
Previous university characteristics	Social composition, quality, curriculum, programmes, size, links to other universities

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Blackwell, Miniard and Engel 2001, Vrontis, Thrassou and Melanthiou 2007, Furukawa 2011, Cremonini, Westerheijden and Enders 2008, Towers and Towers 2018

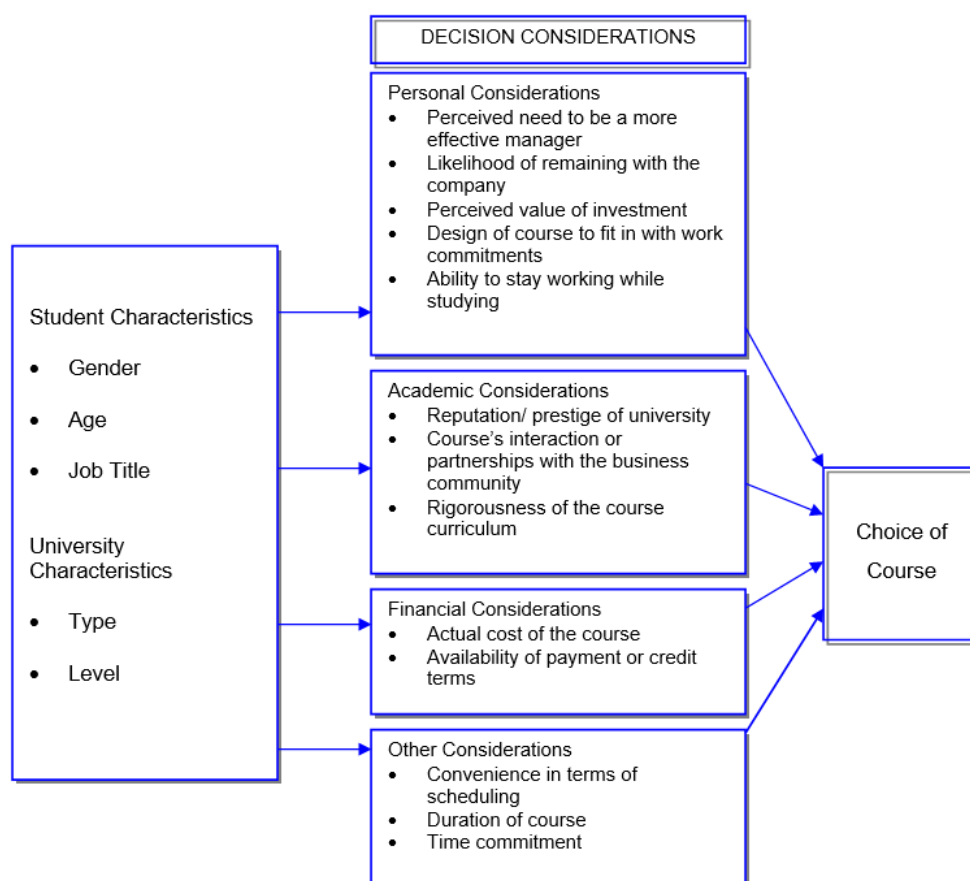
It has been acknowledged that the decision making process of postgraduates, especially those who were working professionals, was impacted by alternative factors when compared to undergraduate students (Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and

Marriot 2014). However, few authors have considered the factors that impacted on the decision making process of international postgraduates.

Peralt-Rillo and Ribes-Giner (2013) studied domestic postgraduates in Spain and the factors that impacted on their decision making process (see section 2.14).

Carrel and Schoenbachler (2001) in the US also researched domestic postgraduate students and identified the factors that impacted on their decision to study an executive MBA as shown in Figure 2.15. The postgraduates were experienced, working professionals, who wanted to complete an executive MBA quickly and with minimal interruption to their work. As a result, many of the factors that influenced their decision were unique to this group of students.

Figure 2.15 Decision Consideration Model for MBA students



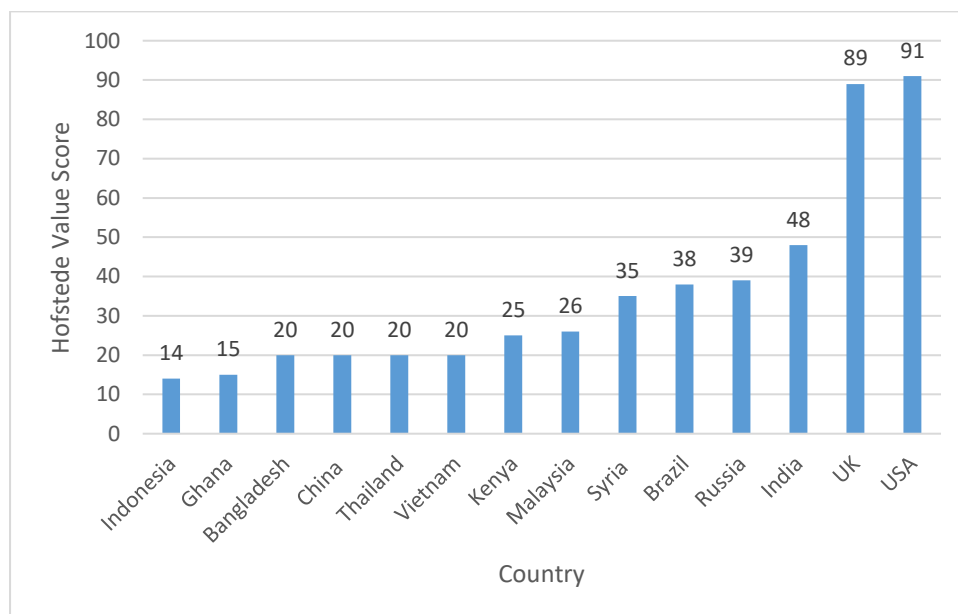
Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Carrel and Schloenbachler 2001

One factor that was found to impact on the decision making process of international students and their experiences whilst at university was cultural norms (Blackwell, Miniard and Engel 2001, Pyvis and Chapman 2005).

Hofstede's framework for assessing culture on six dimensions was one of the most commonly used in research (Jian et al 2010). The individualism dimension reflected whether individuals in a country acted alone and focused on their own needs or collectively as a group (Hofstede 2005).

Figure 2.16 shows Hofstede's individualism value score by country based on the countries of participants in the current author's qualitative study. The index score of 100 indicates individualism whereas zero is collectivism. The lower the score the more collectivist was the culture in that country.

Figure 2.16 Hofstede Individualism Value Score by country



Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Hofstede Insights 2019

Figure 2.16 shows that countries with collectivistic cultures included Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Kenya and Malaysia. In these countries the decision to go to university was often made collectively with the aim of helping the whole family rather than the individual. Students also listened more to advice from others when choosing a university and reliance on WOM sources in countries in Asia and the Middle East was a cultural norm (Wilkins and Huisman 2015).

The opposite was true of students from individualistic cultures such as the UK and USA. They made their own decisions as to which university to attend, based on their individual interests and goals (Jian et al 2010).

Consumers from collectivistic cultures formed a commitment to a group and built strong relationships with that group. Each group member took responsibility and cared for fellow group members receiving loyalty from them in return (Hofstede Insights 2019). In the classroom students from these countries would only speak up when selected to do so by their group (Hofstede 2005).

There is an opportunity for the current author to fill a gap in the research and investigate the factors, including cultural norms, that impacted on both the decision making and information searching processes of international postgraduates. These factors are shown to influence the author's proposed new model. The placing of 'context' outside the model is in line with modern research such as Niedzwiedzka (2003).

#### 2.16.1 Summary

In this chapter the literature on the role of information within the decision making cycle of international postgraduates as they passed through the stages of need recognition, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post purchase evaluation when selecting a business qualification has been reviewed. Gaps in knowledge have been identified and based on these gaps the research questions in Table 2.20 have been formulated. Each research question provides an opportunity for the current author to add to the body of knowledge in these areas.

Table 2.20 Objectives of the Study linked to Research Questions

Objectives	Research Questions
Objective 1 Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	RQ 1: What were the sequence of decisions taken before enrolling at university?
	RQ2: To what extent were the decision making and information searching processes iterative and cyclical?
	RQ3: To what extent was the approach to the decision making cycle and information searching process rigorous and rational?
	RQ13: What have postgraduates learnt about the decision making process that will inform future decisions?
	RQ14: How did the postgraduates' experiences of information searching affect future information searching behaviour?
Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	RQ4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?
	RQ5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?
	RQ6: What sources of information were accessed in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?
	RQ7: What types of information were required in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?
Objective 3 Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	RQ10: Were there any gaps in information provision during the stages of the decision making cycle?
	RQ11: To what extent did the information provided structure the expectations of postgraduates?
	RQ12: How did the information provided influence the level of postgraduate satisfaction?
	RQ15: How informed were postgraduates during the process of making a purchase choice?
Objective 4 Assess the factors that influence the information searching process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates	RQ8: What factors influenced the information searching and decision making cycle of postgraduate students?
Objective 5 Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decisions and studying at university	RQ9: How did postgraduate students contribute to the pool of information throughout the cycle?

Source Author's Analysis 2020



Objective 1 and research questions 1,2,3,13, and 14 focus on filling gaps in previous research. The sequence of decisions taken by international non-EU postgraduates, the iterative and cyclical nature of the information searching and decision making processes and the rigour and rationality with which they were approached, are researched in the current author's qualitative study in line with objective 1 and research questions 1,2 and 3. Linked to the cyclical nature of the decision making process is the concept that international postgraduates learn from the high involvement decision they make and use this knowledge when searching for information in the future to make their next decision. This is explored in line with research questions 13 and 14.

Gaps in knowledge have been identified concerning the sources and types of information required by international non-EU postgraduates in the pre and post purchase stages of the decision making cycle and the information needs of influential members of the decision making unit. These topics are investigated in line with objective 2 and research questions 4,5,6 and 7.

The literature indicated that there was a lack of knowledge on whether there were any missing sources, and types of information, that were required by international non-EU postgraduates in the different stages of the decision making cycle. The role of information in structuring the expectations of this segment of students, and the influence of information provision on student satisfaction whilst studying at university are topics that have not been fully explored. Lastly there has been little research carried out on the breadth and depth of the information searching process and the subsequent level of informedness of prospective international postgraduates as they made their decisions concerning which country, city, university and course to choose. Objective 3 and research questions 10,11,12 and 15 will be answered to help to fill these knowledge gaps.

Previous research has not investigated the factors that impacted on both the information searching and decision making processes of international postgraduates. Objective 4 and research question 8 are linked to this topic and will enable the current author to add to the body of knowledge.

The importance of WOM recommendations to future recruitment of students is acknowledged in the literature. Specific research on the WOM recommendations and information provided by postgraduates as current students or alumni and how they add to the pool of information for prospective and current postgraduates through the stages of the decision making cycle has not been undertaken. This study will fill this gap in the literature in line with objective 5 and research question 9.

Conclusions are drawn in chapter 6 on the objectives and research questions related to objective 6. It is important for universities to keep up to date with the information sources used by prospective international postgraduates in this digital era so they can choose the most effective and credible channels of communication. They also need to be aware of the influence of WOM information sources on prospective postgraduates and how they can influence them. In order to position the university to appeal to prospective postgraduates, universities need to understand the types of information required and the timing of need recognition so they can send out effective promotional messages. Lastly segments of prospective international postgraduates should be identified along with influential members of the DMU who can then be targeted by university communications. Recommendations are made to universities in section 7.1.

Finally, the current author proposes a new model of the decision making cycle in section 6.9 in line with objective 7. The review of the information behaviour, consumer behaviour and marketing literature identified an opportunity to create a new model. The current author's proposed model is a valuable addition to the decision making process models available to scholars as it builds on the insights from Kuhlthau's ISP model and marketing and consumer behaviour scholars' model of consumer decision making to develop a new theoretical model, which unlike other models, includes both information seeking and decision making theory. It is a cyclical model which can be used to effectively explain the decision making and information searching processes of consumers when making high involvement, high risk and complex decisions.

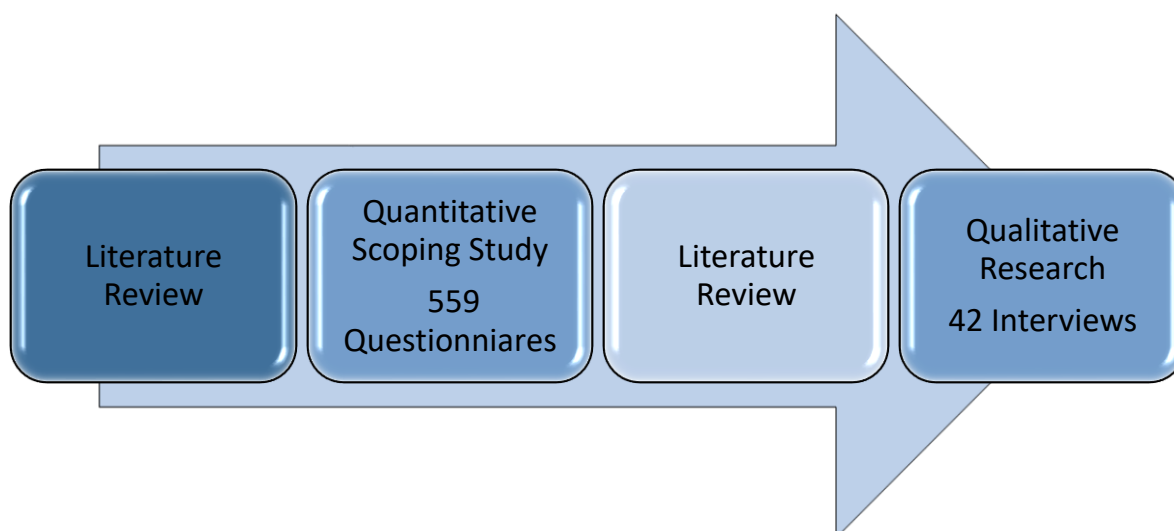
In chapter 3 the methodology for the study is discussed.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the philosophical approach and data collection techniques adopted in the research and so provides a theoretical and practical foundation for the study. Details are provided of the search for literature, research philosophy, research approach, quantitative scoping study and qualitative data collection procedures. Sampling, method of analysis, ethical practice, cultural reflexivity, reliability, validity and limitations are also discussed.

The current author first began exploring this topic in 2000 with a positivist philosophy which evolved into an interpretivist philosophy as she realised that to gather the rich data she required to give her an in-depth insight into the role of information in the decision making cycle of international non-EU postgraduates, she would need to undertake qualitative research. The research design for this study is illustrated in Figure 3.1. The author conducted a literature review and then a quantitative scoping study obtaining 559 questionnaire responses from UK taught postgraduates. This was followed by another literature review and the carrying out of 42 qualitative interviews amongst international non-EU postgraduates studying a business qualification at the University. From this study she evolved a new model of the consumer decision making cycle which is discussed in section 6.9.

Figure 3.1 Overview of Research Design



### 3.1 Literature Search Process and Findings

The current author conducted a systematic search of the literature which led to the decision to undertake a quantitative scoping study. The focus of the first search was to look for literature on motivation to study a postgraduate qualification and the sources and types of information prospective postgraduates used to find out about potential universities and courses. This was linked to the original aim and objectives in appendix 3. After the scoping study the current author performed a second review of the literature pertaining to the revised aim and objectives as stated in section 1.3. This showed the gaps in the research which are reported in the literature review in chapter 2 and resulted in the author carrying out qualitative research.

In order to find the literature to review, extensive searches were undertaken of relevant business management, LIS and education databases namely: EBSCO (Business Source Complete), Emerald, Science Direct, British Education Index and JSTOR. Google internet searches were also undertaken to identify reports, secondary data and additional publications by authors found in the original searches.

The search process was carried out in a systematic way and tracked. The search strategy was to identify thesaurus terms which were then used as keywords. Table 3.1 shows the topics and concepts used as keywords in the literature search. Searches were also performed on key scholars in the field to find related links to these authors and their work.

Table 3.1 Keywords in Literature Search

Topic	Concepts		Concepts
Decision making process	Decision making process	<b>&amp;</b>	Student Postgraduate International student Masters Foreign student Chinese student Asian student Graduate education Higher education Institution Adult Professional University Business School Model
	Decision making		
	Decision		
	Choice		
	Choice factor		
	Selection		
	Risk		
Motivation	Motivation		
	Need		
	Benefit		
Role of information	Role of information		
	Information		
	Information behaviour		
	Information search		
	Information seeking		
	Information source		
	Kuhlthau		
Communication	Communication		
	Word of mouth		
	Digital		
	Marketing		
	Promotion		
	Image		
	Preference		
	Brand perception		
	Channel of communication		
	Communication media		
	Social Media		
Student population	Recruitment		
	international mobility		
Student experience	Experience		
	Adjustment		
	Expectation		
	Challenge		
	Satisfaction		
	Acculturation		
	Educational attainment		
	Transition		

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The first review of the literature showed that the majority of research that had been conducted since the author's Masters research in 2002 were quantitative studies and that many changes had taken place. The market for postgraduate

education had grown significantly with more prospective students coming from overseas to study in the UK and other countries. Postgraduate education was increasingly the topic of research by academics and government departments who sought to attract more students to study a postgraduate qualification (see section 1.7). Digital technology had impacted on the sources of information available to universities and the searching behaviour of potential students. Lastly the review indicated that there was variation between undergraduate and postgraduate students and home and overseas students in the reasons why they decided to study a degree, and the sources and types of information they required. However, there was a lack of research which focused on international non-EU postgraduates as a specific group of students.

### 3.2 Quantitative Scoping Study

Following the first review of the literature the author wanted to conceptualise her research and decide on the topic to select and the specific research problem to focus on. Undertaking a pilot project or scoping study to collect primary research was recommended as a way of working out the direction of the project and deciding on the data collection instrument (Aurini, Heath and Howells 2016).

The current author's previous Masters research in 2002 was underpinned by a positivist philosophy. She employed a quantitative questionnaire to gather data on motivation to study a postgraduate business qualification, sources of information used by UK postgraduate students when finding out information about the Robert Gordon University (RGU) Business School and the factors that attracted them to study at the business school. The results of the survey were published in 2004 (Donaldson and McNicholas 2004).

The author decided to undertake a quantitative scoping study based on her previous research as an exploratory framework to help design the next stage of data collection. The scoping study would provide a lens to help her decide on the areas she would investigate.

The quantitative scoping study was based on the author's original aim and objectives which are stated in appendix 3. The goal of the questionnaire in appendix 4 was to identify the relative importance of both the sources and types of information used by prospective home and international postgraduates when deciding where to study a postgraduate qualification and the course they should study. The author was interested in finding out if there were any differences between the information requirements of UK, EU and international non-EU students. The questionnaire also had questions on information searching behaviour, motivation to study a postgraduate qualification and the country of origin of respondents. Table 3.2 shows how the questionnaire questions related to the objectives of the study, the questions asked, and classifies those questions by type.

Table 3.2 Questionnaire Question Types linked to Objectives

Objective	Topic	Question	Type of question
4. To analyse the impact of country of origin and motivation to study on the information sources used and the types of information sought	Profile of respondents	Q16. What is your country of origin?	Open
		Q18. What is your continent of origin?	Multiple choice
		Q14. What gender are you?	Dichotomous
		Q15. What is your age?	Open
		Q17. What is your hometown?	Open
	Educational background	Q1. Which institution and country are you studying a postgraduate qualification in?	Open
		Q2. How are you studying your postgraduate qualification?	Multiple choice
		Q3. What Postgraduate qualification are you studying?	Open
		Q4. Please state the previous educational institution you attended before studying a postgraduate qualification and the country.	Open
		Q8. When did you complete the course that led to your highest qualification so far?	Open
1. To examine the information searching behaviour of postgraduate students when researching a university course	Information searching behaviour	Q6. How many higher education providers did you visit before selecting a specific Higher Education provider (HEP) for your postgraduate study?	Open



Table 3.2 Questionnaire Question Types linked to Objectives contd.

Objective	Topic	Question	Type of question
1. To examine the information searching behaviour of postgraduate students when researching a university course	Information searching behaviour contd.	Q7. How many Higher education providers did you request information from prior to the enrolment decision in a postgraduate qualification?	Open
		Q13. I was satisfied with the quality of information I received from the HEP before I started	Likert scale
		Q13. The HEP choice decision was important to me	Likert scale
		Q13. I had enough information about HEPs before making the choice decision	Likert scale
4. To analyse the impact of country of origin and motivation to study on the information sources used and the types of information sought	Motivation	Q5. How important were the following factors in motivating you to study for a postgraduate qualification?	Likert scale
2. To identify the information sources used by potential students when researching postgraduate study up to enrolment	Sources of information	Q9. Please indicate how important were the following sources of information when researching where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study?	Likert scale
		Q10. Please select the ONE source of information that was the most important when researching where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study?	Multiple choice
3. To examine the types of information that postgraduate students search for up to enrolment	Types of Information	Q11. Please indicate how important were the following types of information when deciding where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study?	Likert scale
		Q12. Please select the ONE type of information that was the most important when deciding where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study?	Multiple choice

The structured questionnaire in appendix 4 was based on a thorough analysis of the literature on motivations, information sources and types. It was tested in a pilot on ten postgraduate students (McDaniel and Gates 2013). An amendment was made to the options regarding types of information after the pilot, to include the option of financial aid as a type of information.

The sample population was based on the original aim and objectives and comprised UK, international EU and non-EU postgraduates who were currently studying a taught business qualification full or part time at a UK or overseas university.

The method of distribution was email and face to face (Burns and Bush 2014). The sampling method was non-probability sampling (Babin and Zikmund 2015) due to the difficulty of obtaining a sampling frame and a random sample of postgraduates at competing universities (Aaker et al 2013). Students at the university where the author worked obtained responses to the questionnaires through a mixture of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling techniques as questionnaires were passed from one contact to another (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). The limitations of the non-probability sampling method and the method of distribution were acknowledged by the author as they could impact negatively on the reliability, generalisability and representativeness of the findings (Gobo 2007). However, for the purposes of the scoping study, such limitations were acceptable when eliciting themes and research questions in line with Groves and Lyberg's (2010) concept of a sample being 'fit for purpose.' As Fan (2011) stated researchers should 'devise samples capable of giving responses that are less than truly representative but that are still within the researcher's tolerance.' A total of 559 complete questionnaire responses were obtained. The author manually entered the questionnaire data into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) which allowed frequency, cross tabulation and mean testing to be carried out (Janssens et al 2008). The key findings are presented in chapter 4.

The findings of the quantitative scoping study reflected many of the studies that had been undertaken since 2002 by academics and Government sponsored researchers, the majority of which were quantitative in nature (see appendix 1).

The author queried whether continuing with the original aim and objectives would actually fill a gap in the research.

The scoping study indicated that there were differences in information requirements between UK, EU and international non-EU students. The author decided to fill the gap in the research that she had identified in the literature review and focus on studying international non-EU prospective postgraduates as a specific group of students with distinct information requirements.

She also reflected on the fact that the quantitative questions used in previous research and the author's scoping study presented respondents with a wide range of motivations, sources and types to choose and respondents could not provide their opinions on the importance of each item when deciding to apply to a specific UK university. Respondents could have been introduced to motivations, sources and types of information that they had not considered were important and asked to rate them. Lastly, the quantitative study did not investigate the individual decision making process of students and ascertain their motivations or which sources and types of information were important to them at each stage of the process.

After the scoping study the author had many unanswered questions regarding how postgraduates went through the decision making process, the information searching process they undertook, how the sources and types of information were used, their relative importance at different stages of the decision making process and if there were any gaps in information provision. Table 8.19 in appendix 6 shows the information that the researcher felt was missing from the quantitative research.

Overall the author was dissatisfied with the lack of insight gained from the quantitative questionnaire as to how postgraduates made their decisions. Knowing the sources and types of information they used when researching universities only provided part of the picture. She realised that rather than continue with the original positivist aim and objectives she wanted to fill a gap in the research and fully explore the decision making process of postgraduates and the role of information in this process. Her philosophy evolved from a positivist

to an interpretivist philosophy and she now understood that in order to gain an in-depth insight into postgraduates and their decision making process she needed to undertake qualitative research (Davis, Drey and Gould 2009).

The author undertook a second review of the literature on motivation to undertake study, choice factors and the decision making process by using a systematic step by step process. Based on an evaluation of the objectives and research questions keywords were identified as outlined in Table 3.1 and combined together when searching for relevant literature. Key authors were found and their publications searched for. Lastly the reference lists of academic sources were checked for additional references.

The review of the literature led the author to acknowledge that reasons for making the choices might also lead to information requirements, and that these information requirements might not have been considered to be types of information by postgraduates. She realised that the factors impacting on each stage of the decision making process, such as aspects of the respondent's life and hygiene factors might also impact on information sources and types as highlighted by Mellors-Bourne (2014). Many postgraduate students were part of a DMU (Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick 2012), and the author thought that it would be useful to look at the information requirements of these members.

The importance of the role of information in the post purchase evaluation stage had been acknowledged in the author's previous research (Donaldson and McNicholas 2004). Following the scoping review she became interested in information provision in the post purchase evaluation stage once students arrived at university. She wanted to explore how current students might add to the pool of information for current and future students and the influence of information provision on international postgraduates' expectations and satisfaction.

Having reviewed the literature on information behaviour and the missing information from the quantitative scoping study she identified gaps in knowledge concerning the breadth, depth and rationality of the information searching and decision making processes and the affective, cognitive and task aspects of

information search. The author decided that there was an opportunity to build a new conceptual model based on the marketing, consumer behaviour and LIS literature, the quantitative scoping study and the author's proposed qualitative research. The new model would therefore contribute knowledge to both the marketing and LIS disciplines.

The author also examined the literature on the postgraduate student's decision making process and information needs whilst deciding where to study and when studying at university. She found that little qualitative research had been undertaken on this topic and that no study had explored the role of information within the decision making process of specifically international non-EU postgraduate students.

The author concluded that she had identified gaps in the literature and the quantitative scoping study. She felt that there was an opportunity to extend the research beyond that which was already known and produce an interesting and meaningful study and a new model which would contribute to the body of research in this area. She formulated a new aim, objectives and research questions for the qualitative study as stated in sections 1.3 and 1.4.

### 3.3 Interpretivist Philosophy and Approach

As discussed, the author's philosophy evolved from a positivist to an interpretivist philosophy. The author's research goals became exploratory in nature as she felt that she knew little about the decision making and information searching processes of individual postgraduate students. In order to find the answers to her research questions, and in line with her interpretivist philosophy, she decided to take an inductive research approach and conduct qualitative research (Aaker 2013). Kuhlthau (1993a) argued that qualitative research was the best method to use when building a new conceptual model based on a user's experiences which is what the author wanted to do.

Empirical interpretivist research was undertaken as she investigated postgraduates in their natural setting (Pickard 2013). The author saw that, in

relation to postgraduate student research, reality was relative and there were multiple realities (Hudson and Ozanne 1988) which depended on other systems for meanings (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This made the research more difficult to interpret (Neuman 2000). The resulting knowledge gained from the research was not therefore objectively determined but socially constructed (Hirschman 1985). The challenge for the author was to enter the social world of the postgraduates and understand the world from their point of view (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016).

The author acknowledged that each postgraduate student was unique as they came from different cultural backgrounds and made their decisions and searched for information under different circumstances and at different times. They therefore created different meanings as they experienced different social realities (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). However, these postgraduates did share motivations, needs, challenges and anxieties (Creswell 2014).

The author adopted an empathetic stance as she wanted to create new and richer interpretations and understandings of the decision making and information searching processes of individual postgraduates as they lived through the experiences of deciding where to study a postgraduate qualification and studying at university (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016).

The study adopted a case study approach in a single university because it gave the opportunity to gain in-depth insights into the unique nature of the experiences of individual postgraduates as they made the decision to attend the university and then while they were studying there (Yin 2014).

The university was chosen as the case study institution as it was a large post-92 university in England located on three campuses with 30,732 students and 3692 staff (The University 2020a). The selected university is hereinafter referred to as 'The University'. The University rose nine places to 28<sup>th</sup> position in the Guardian League Table 2020 and achieved 91% postgraduate student satisfaction in 2019 to be ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the UK (The University 2020c). The University had a diverse student population with students from 140 countries and a large cohort of 7,685 taught postgraduate students. Of the 4,405 international students 70% were

international non-EU students (The University 2020a). There was therefore a large cohort of international non-EU postgraduates from which to take the sample. The University had made significant investment in the provision of a range of postgraduate business qualifications, investing £55 million in a new purpose built Business School in 2017 to provide an optimal learning environment (The University 2020d). The postgraduate programmes offered by the Business School achieved satisfaction scores of 84% to 100% in the 2019 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) (The University 2020c) and the author thought that it would be interesting to explore the influence of information on these satisfaction levels.

The author adopted a reflexive approach to the research whereby she viewed the interviews as both a resource for gaining detailed information from interviewees and a topic of investigation as she studied the interaction between herself and the interviewee (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2017, Seale 1998). She believed that it was important to embrace both a naturalist approach to research as she sought 'rich descriptions of people as they exist and unfold in their natural habitats' alongside a constructivist approach which concentrated on 'how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997 p.6).

The author reflected on her subjective position within the research at all stages (Yow 2006) and her role as interviewer in the process of collecting the qualitative data (Mishler 1999). Throughout the process she considered her motivations for undertaking the research, her assumptions regarding the topic, her feelings about the interviewees and her emotional, theoretical and experiential connections to the research and the effect this would have on her approach (Bold 2011, Haynes 2012).

The author used Alvesson and Sköldbberg's (2017) approach to look self-critically at her own authority as an interpreter and author as she went through the decisions she had to make to achieve the research study. She reflected on each stage of the process and looked 'inwards' at herself, her research community, the cultural and intellectual conditions and traditions. She was careful when

interpreting the participants' responses to reflect on her assumptions, the language used and her pre-understanding (Haynes 2012).

The author's reflections on how her role as a university lecturer and her cultural and ethical awareness impacted on the research are discussed in section 3.5.

### 3.4 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research amongst postgraduates was undertaken to enable the author to gather detailed descriptions of postgraduates' experiences and the meanings made of those experiences (Elliot 2005). Qualitative research enabled the collection of rich data which provided in-depth insights into the prospective postgraduates' whole decision making cycle and the role of information at each stage of the cycle (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). It allowed postgraduates to provide their own explanation of their motivations to study for a postgraduate qualification, the sources and types of information used at each stage of the decision making process, the iterative nature of the process and their experiences and perceptions when going through the process (Silverman 2013). Postgraduates could also highlight any information that was missing and how they contributed to the pool of information available to other postgraduates.

Qualitative research could also explore the factors that influenced the international postgraduates' decision to study abroad, the contribution that members of the DMU made to postgraduates' decisions and the information DMU members required (Creswell, 2002). Whilst gathering the missing information through qualitative interviews the author gained a more complete picture of the postgraduate decision making cycle.

The qualitative data was gathered by using a narrative style. Bell (2009 p8) defined narrative as:

*'a sequence of ordered events that are connected in a meaningful way for a particular audience in order to make sense of the world or people's experience in it...This definition assumes one action is consequential for the next, that a narrative sequence is held together with a 'plot' and that*



*the 'plot' is organized temporally and spatially..More than a list or chronicle, a narrative adds up to 'something...'*

The author chose to undertake experience-centred narrative research which allowed the participants' internal thoughts and feelings to be expressed externally through the narrative (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou 2008 p1). This was particularly appropriate as the author wanted to explore the affective and cognitive responses of participants aligned to Kuhlthau's model (see section 2.2). James (2018) similarly chose to use narrative inquiry to understand the experiences of Latin American postgraduate students.

The author asked the postgraduates to tell the stories of their experiences pre enrolment and while they were studying. As the postgraduate's story unfolded the author asked prompting questions to fully explore their experiences and get them to voice their opinions (Bold 2011). This narrative style approach therefore encouraged the postgraduates to more openly express their opinions and individual experiences. Narrative inquiry also allowed the author to understand the chronological connections and sequencing of events and gain postgraduates' interpretation of these events. Thus, it enabled the author to evolve a better understanding of postgraduates' decision making and information searching processes by seeing 'different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other' (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou 2008 p1).

#### 3.4.1 Qualitative Interviews

The author conducted one to one interviews face to face with postgraduate students rather than focus groups. Interviews were chosen as they allowed the full exploration of each postgraduate's unique decision making and information searching processes rather than obtaining the partial views of a group of postgraduates (Kent 2007). Interviews allowed the author to gain an authentic insight into individual postgraduates' experiences and encouraged participants to open up and share their stories with the author (Silverman 2016). Probing questions were used to gain in-depth answers in terms of exploration, explanation and depth (Ritchie et al 2013). The narrative style interviews

produced rich and meaningful data as the author created an atmosphere that fostered 'reciprocal and empowering interaction' (Cohn and Lyons 2003 p41).

Focus groups were not chosen as they could have the disadvantage of being perceived by participants to be intimidating especially if they were dominated by a small number of individuals. Participants might not contribute in these situations so their views would not be gathered, or they might feel under pressure to agree with the dominant view. There could also be irrelevant discussion or disagreements which distracted from the focus of the qualitative research (Cresswell 2014).

Qualitative interviews allowed more detailed questions to be asked and achieved a higher response rate. The majority of participants had English as a second language and the author was able to tailor the questions so that they were understood by participants and to clarify any ambiguities. She was also able to follow up on misunderstood questions or incomplete answers and encouraged participants to respond more fully to the topic (Walliman 2011).

The impact of participants' cultural norms on their interview behaviour is discussed in section 3.5. For example, Asians were modest and polite, with a courtesy bias when answering questions and did not perceive the need to provide detailed responses. For the author it was important that she undertook one to one interviews with such participants so she could adapt her questioning strategy to gain the best understanding of their experiences. It was also the case that some participants would be less self-conscious in a one to one interview than a focus group due to their culture or weaker language skills.

Semi structured interviews were carried out as this framework enabled the author to focus on interacting with the participants and to be responsive to their answers. It gave her the flexibility to ask the open-ended questions in the order that she deemed fit to encourage the participant's narrative to flow freely. This type of interview encouraged the participants to open up and express themselves through their narratives (Rossman and Rallis 2003). It also allowed her to pursue any topic that the participant brought up and probe where appropriate to gather further pertinent information on a topic (McIntosh and

Morse 2015). Participants had the time to narrate their experiences and the author did not interrupt them unless they were moving to a topic that was not included in the research objectives (Silverman 2016)

### 3.4.2 Sampling and Recruitment

The sample population for the qualitative research was taught international non-EU postgraduate students studying a business qualification at the University in England.

The author chose international non-EU postgraduates as her sample population for a number of reasons. Firstly there was a lack of previous research on the decision making cycle of this distinct group of students and their specific information requirements. Secondly these postgraduates were making a high involvement and high-risk purchase which could result in a complex decision making process as they had to choose between a plethora of options concerning which home or overseas country, city and university to study at and which course to choose. The author was interested in exploring postgraduates' information searching and decision making processes and if culture had an impact on these processes. Thirdly, the attraction of international postgraduate students to UK universities was a priority for the UK Government and universities and an understanding of the information requirements of international non-EU postgraduates would help both these interested parties.

The author decided to interview different postgraduate students at different stages during their time at the University as shown in Table 3.3. This decision resulted in her gathering a much broader and richer range of experiences.

The sample size in terms of the number of qualitative interviews to be undertaken was not determined beforehand. Interviews were conducted until saturation occurred and no new findings were observed (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This suggested that a satisfactory level of saturation had been reached which is discussed further below (Morse 2000). Saturation tables are provided in appendix 18.

Table 3.3 shows that 42 interviews were conducted amongst 39 participants; 24 joint interviews where both interview guide 1 and 2 were used, eight interviews using interview guide 3, six interviews with interview guide 1 and four interviews with interview guide 2.

Table 3.3 Qualitative Interview Schedule

<b>Interview number</b>	<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
Interview 3	Postgraduates completing their studies	August – September 2018	Role of information in postgraduates' whole course experience	8
Interview 1	Postgraduates recounting their decision making cycle	September 2018 – July 2019	Role of information in pre arrival decision making process	6
				24 joint 1 & 2 interviews
Interview 2	Postgraduates in semesters 1, 2 and 3	October 2018 – July 2019	Role of information in postgraduates' experiences at university	4

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The reason for undertaking joint interviews, where interview guides 1 and 2 were used, was due to the fact that the participants had agreed to spend 30 minutes being interviewed and if interview guide 1 had been fully explored the author asked questions from interview guide 2. The author realised once she started interviewing postgraduates at the University using interview guide 1, that many of them had not gone through the decision making process with much rigour, so they did not have much to say about the decision they had made. Some of the participants from collectivist cultures, with English as a second language, were unable or reluctant to express their feelings as they went through the decision making process. This is further discussed in section 3.5. This again meant that there was less for the author to explore with them. The author therefore made the most of the time available to her and asked questions to participants from both interview guides 1 and 2.

The author found that saturation occurred after 8 interviews in stage three, 14 interviews in stage two and 15 interviews in stage one. However the author

carried out 16 more interviews which helped to verify the saturation. The author has learnt from conducting the qualitative research that, in future, she would transcribe and analyse the interview data as she carried out the interviews in order to ascertain themes and have a clearer idea of when saturation occurred. As the author was conducting interviews alongside her teaching she did not start to transcribe and analyse the data until the 42 interviews were complete.

Non-probability volunteer and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the postgraduates to interview. This ensured that the sample reflected the cohort of international non-EU postgraduates who had lived through the experience (Goulding 2005). The majority of the sample were recruited by volunteer sampling where participants self-selected to take part in the research. This technique was used as it ensured that postgraduates from different countries did not feel coerced into taking part in the study and were happy and willing to participate (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016).

In order to recruit volunteer participants, the author went into classes of postgraduate students. She understood the importance of obtaining participants from different cultures, such as Asian participants, with direct face to face contact rather than by email. This also helped to start to build a relationship with them (Tuan and Napier 2000). She made a short presentation on her PhD and invited the international non-EU postgraduates to volunteer to take part in the research by signing a piece of paper. Emails were then sent out to those that had volunteered containing the participant information sheet (see appendix 12) and consent form (see appendix 11). Participants were asked in the email if they were still happy to participate and, if so, to indicate when they were available to be interviewed.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the non-probability sampling technique that was most commonly used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was also used to select participants who met certain criteria in terms of gender, course studied and ethnicity to ensure that the sample reflected the postgraduate population in the University's Business School. The author used her judgement and approached those participants who best enabled her to answer her research questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2015). These

students were emailed from alternative class lists and asked if they were willing to take part in the study.

The sampling techniques used enabled the author to access a large sample of participants from different countries and courses. Previous student qualitative studies had not used such a large and diverse sample. A total of 39 students were interviewed from 15 countries, studying seven different courses, and with a relatively even split of male and female participants. The profile of participants is further discussed in section 5.1.

### 3.4.3 Interview Procedure

The semi structured interviews lasted from 25 minutes to one hour, were conducted in English and took place in the University meeting rooms. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and a transcript of the interviews was prepared. Twenty hours of interviews were transcribed. The transcripts included any pauses, hesitation, evidence of discomfort, humour and so on to provide a complete picture of the participant's decision making cycle (Bold 2011). A sample transcript is included in appendix 15.

In terms of the interview schedule, the author interviewed postgraduates throughout the academic year; when they first arrived at university, in semesters one, two and three and then at the end of the course as shown in Table 3.3 above. In this way their information requirements during the whole decision making cycle, and as they were transitioning in and out of study could be explored.

The decision making process of postgraduates when choosing which country to study in and which university and course to attend was fully appraised in interview one. The role of information in postgraduates' experiences whilst at university was examined in interviews two and three. Interview three took place in August and September 2018 as postgraduates were finishing their course and it enabled them to reflect on the whole experience of their degree, their level of satisfaction and the role that information had played whilst studying at the university. Interview 3 informed interviews one and two which were carried out

from October 2018 to July 2019 during the time postgraduates were studying and taking assessments in semesters one, two and three.

There were three semi structured interview guides developed based on the extensive review of the literature and the findings of the quantitative scoping study as shown in appendices 7,8 and 9. They were based on the series of research questions identified in section 1.4 and reflected the narrative style of interviewing. The author thought carefully about the structure of the interview guides and the questions she should ask to elicit participants' narratives of their experiences (Bold 2011).

Interview guide 1 was pilot tested on two RGU international postgraduates and interview guide 3 was tested on a postgraduate student at the University. The pilot studies enabled the author to test the sensitivity and response of students to the interview process, ensure that the questions were easy to understand and to make sure that the data obtained was adequate and accurate (Curwin and Slater 2008).

The pilot process for interview guide 1 was very useful for the author as it demonstrated that the information that was gathered was rich and meaningful and she learnt the value of letting the participant answer in their own time and not jump in too quickly with probes (Bold 2011). The author decided to use this interview guide during her future research but add in additional questions at the end to explore the role of the postgraduate student in creating word of mouth communication to inform prospective applicants.

The pilot study of interview guide 3 indicated that the interview guide was effective in gathering the required information. A small change was made whereby a question was added asking participants to describe a situation where they were in desperate need for information in order to ascertain the most important information requirements.

The guides contained structured and unstructured sections with open ended and standardised questions (Walliman 2011). Tables 8.21, 8.22 and 8.33 in appendix 10 show the links between the objectives and the interview guide questions.

Participants were asked at the beginning of each interview to provide their demographic details, the educational background of themselves, their parents and other members of the decision making unit.

Interview guide 1 had a question regarding participants' reasons for studying a postgraduate qualification. Then they were asked to describe their experiences and how they felt as they progressed through the decision making process before purchasing a postgraduate qualification at various stages; the point at which they first started thinking about studying a qualification, the time that they made the decision to investigate studying a qualification, and each of the next steps they took. They were also asked to reflect on their experiences of providing information to other students and how they felt at the time.

Interview guide 2 included questions on participants' motivations to study a postgraduate qualification and their experiences and feelings when they looked for information pre arrival, on arrival and during their time at the university so far in semesters one, two and three. They were asked to talk about their feelings regarding providing information to current and prospective students, receiving information from other students, their student experiences, expectations and satisfaction and the impact of their experiences on future decision making.

Interview guide 3 followed the same structure as interview guide 2. The only difference was that participants were asked about their experiences and feelings when they looked for information during their whole course.

#### 3.4.4 Analysis

The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and then transcribed so no information was lost. The transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software NVivo version 12. The software was used to organise and analyse the large amount of data and look for emerging patterns in the data. The method of analysis was the six-stage thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). A thematic approach was chosen as it was one of the methods recommended by Riessman (2008) to interpret narratives. It was a suitable method of analysis as the author had a clear purpose for the research from the start, a large sample of participants was planned, and the research



questions led those being interviewed into providing the information that was sought (Bold 2011).

The thematic approach benefited from insights from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the author tried to understand the participant as a rounded human being and looked at their culture and their behavioural approaches to the decision making cycle, information searching process and student experiences (Smith, Jarman and Osborn 1999). IPA helped to build a deeper understanding of how different perspectives influenced respondents and informed the author as she analysed around the narrative (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008). The two methods of analysis were used together which allowed the author to gather a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. Using IPA allowed the exploration of each individual participant's unique decision making and information searching processes, their experiences at university and the factors that impacted on these processes and experiences. Thematic analysis was then used to focus on the analysis of patterns of meaning across the entire data set from the different participants to elicit key themes from the data which were common to the participants (Braun and Clarke 2019).

The thematic analysis was undertaken in six stages; familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes and produce report. In stage one all the transcripts were typed up and then read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. The transcripts were compared to the original recording to ensure accuracy. Notes were made after reading each transcript, identifying meanings and patterns in the data. A list of ideas about what was interesting in the data was developed which led to an initial set of codes being identified in stage two. The codes were developed inductively from participant's responses and based on the past literature (Braun and Clarke 2006).

In stage three these codes were entered into NVivo and the transcripts uploaded. As the transcripts were read again in NVivo the participants' statements were attached to the codes and new codes were assigned (Braun and Clarke 2006). Having coded all the data, themes were sought out and identified

within the narratives and the findings were presented under thematic headings and subheadings into a thematic map (Simkhada 2008).

In stage four the coded data extracts attached to the themes were reviewed and then the data set was read again in order to ascertain whether the thematic map reflected the meanings found in the entire data set. In stage five the themes were defined and refined to determine what data each theme captured and the 'essence' of the theme (Braun and Clark 2006 p. 92). The analysis was then reported in stage 6. The extracts from the interviews are presented in the analysis section without editing in order to accurately represent what was said. Themes that emerged from the analysis are shown in Table 3.4. A full list of codes is found in appendix 16.

Table 3.4 Themes and Sub Themes in Qualitative Analysis

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
Decision making process	need recognition, evaluation of alternatives, application, purchase, post purchase, rational, rigour, time, choice set, cyclical, iterative
Decision making unit	users, initiators, buyers, influencers, deciders and gatekeepers
Information search	systematic, breadth, depth
Kuhlthau information search process stages	initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation
Types of information	pre purchase: country, city, course post application and post purchase
Sources of information	pre purchase: WOM, online, social post application and post purchase
Pool of information	WOM recommendation, post purchase
Gaps in information provision	pre purchase, post purchase
Need recognition	motivation to study postgraduate, motivation to study subject
Entrepreneur	parent, own business
Student experience	challenge, adjustment
Impact of information on satisfaction	expectations, positive factors, negative factors
Factors impacting on the decision making process	age, gender, country of origin, work experience, role in DMU, source of income, perceived risk, experience of studying abroad, personality, experience of travel, cultural norms, parental education, siblings' education, family members location, family role in DMU, WOM influencers
Information search process	pre purchase and post purchase

Source Author's Analysis 2020

### 3.5 Ethical practice

The author ensured that throughout the study she adhered to ethically appropriate practice. She acknowledged the ethical issues identified by Campbell and Groundwater-Smith (2007) and the principles of ethical research from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2015) and the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011). Ethical approval was gained from the Research Ethics committees at the University where participants studied and at the university where supervision took place.

The author sought to ensure that her values did not inappropriately or unduly influence the data collection or the results. The study was guided by four ethical principles when dealing with participants; to make participation voluntary, not to deceive participants or to cause them harm and to treat data confidentially (Case, Given and Mai 2016).

Participants were advised that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse consequences to themselves or the research (BERA 2011). Participants volunteered to take part in the research by signing a sheet in class and responding to an email from the author. They were given details of the research through a presentation and receipt of the participant information sheet and consent form prior to the interview. The participant information sheet outlined the purpose of the research, research procedures, criteria for participants and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study.

There was no attempt to deceive the participants. They were fully informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of the questions being asked through the presentation and the participant information sheet (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2001). Participants gave their informed consent to take part in the research by signing a copy of the consent form at the start of the interview. Signing the form indicated that they had read the participant information sheet, that they were willing to take part in the research and accepted that the interview would be recorded. It also showed that they knew that their opinions would not be used for any other reasons other than the study, that they could

withdraw and that they had the opportunity to ask questions as required (Miller et al 2012).

In order to ensure that participants were protected during the research and that they suffered no harm, the author considered any possible psychological discomfort which could be caused to them (Hammersley and Traianou 2012). She recognised that when participants agreed to being recorded they might reveal personal, sensitive or even embarrassing details about themselves or others. The author recognised that this was a potential harm and sought to mitigate the risk as much as possible by not asking questions that would encourage the participant to divulge such details. She was also careful during the analysis stage not to report any details which would cause discomfort to participants (McGivern 2013).

The potential participants were advised that participation in the research would be completely confidential and that their names would remain anonymous during the research (Wiles 2012). The information provided by research participants was anonymised by the allocation of a number to each participant and their interview recording. Look-up tables for pseudo anonymisation were produced so no links could be made between the recordings and the identity of the participant. If the participant had withdrawn then the audio recording would have been deleted immediately. Care was also taken to make sure that the individuals were not identifiable when reporting on the interviews.

The anonymity of the case study institution was preserved by referring to it as 'The University' and redacting the name when necessary. Similarly, the city where the University was located was either redacted or referred to as 'the University city'. Other universities were anonymised by being given a code which was used throughout, for example SO University or Thai University 1.

Any data collected was stored and accessed in a confidential manner through various information management procedures (Miller et al 2012). Electronic data, printed information and recordings were securely stored in password encrypted drives and locked cupboards. The study complied with the Data Protection Acts,

the General Data Protection Regulations and the University's data security procedures.

When conducting qualitative interviews amongst international students it was very important that the author ensured culturally appropriate practice in all stages of the study. She chose interviewing methods that were culturally competent and sensitive and paid careful attention when analysing the data (Irvine et al 2007).

The author reviewed the literature on conducting cross-cultural qualitative studies and reflected on her role within the process, her cultural awareness and knowledge. She was cognisant of the need to understand different cultures in order to conduct meaningful research (Suh, Kagan and Strumpf 2009). She knew that she needed to possess the ability, flexibility and openness to encourage participants to engage with the interview process and to adapt the interview to accommodate individual participants (Suh 2004).

The author was well placed to interview international students as she had extensive experience of spending time overseas and learning about the background of different countries from a cultural, historical and ethnic point of view. She had travelled to sixty-five countries worldwide, had visited eleven of the fifteen participants' countries and all of the continents from which they came. Teaching international postgraduate students for thirty one years had been an interesting and fulfilling experience for the author which had enhanced her cultural understanding.

The need for interviewers to build a relationship with Asian participants, such as those from Vietnam, had been acknowledged in previous research (Bonnin 2010). The author was able to build a relationship with the participants as she recruited them through direct personal contact, and she taught some of them. The author acknowledged that there was a risk that the teacher and student relationship might encourage some participants to provide the author with the answer they perceived she wanted. She therefore adapted her interviewing style to accommodate the relationship that she had with the participant as discussed

below. Overall the author felt that she added value to the interviewing process due to her experience and the relationships she had with the participants.

Researchers have found that in Asian collectivist cultures people valued group customs and group solidarity. When responding to questions individuals were inclined to reflect the thinking of the majority of their elders rather than have their own personal opinions (Suh, Kagan and Strumpf 2009). Individuals also wanted to appear to be knowledgeable (Nguyen 2015). This meant that they tended to have a desire to please an interviewer with the answer that they thought the interviewer wanted to hear rather provide their own views (Strumpf et al 2001).

The author wanted to avoid participants responding with socially desirable answers and wanted to put participants at their ease. At the start of the interview she reassured them that there were no right or wrong answers, that she was interested in their personal opinions, not their knowledge, and wanted them to be honest. She was aware of the emphasis in some Asian cultures of modest and polite attitudes (Ortim 1998) and started the interview introducing herself and her study to the participant, handing over her business card and having a brief discussion with participants about their journey to the interview to build a relationship with them from the start (Brislin, Worthley and Macnab 2006).

During the interview the author paid attention to the verbal and non-verbal cues she was giving to participants. She would use gestures and words that showed sympathy with the participant and understanding of what they were saying such as nodding in agreement and responding in the affirmative (Nguyen 2015).

The author made sure that she was sensitive to detect any cues that were emerging and adjust her questions and questioning technique to adapt to these changes. She was aware that she should not ask questions that were perceived to relate to sensitive aspects which participants would find difficult to talk about. Some participants found it difficult to articulate their feelings due to English language comprehension and others were reluctant to express their emotions which led to the author adapting the questions she asked, and employing

different questioning techniques to make sure that the participants felt comfortable during the interview (Nguyen 2015).

Nguyen (2015) found that Vietnamese interviewees felt that it was not necessary for them to provide detailed responses to certain questions because the issue was obvious, or they assumed that there was not much they could talk about. They needed to be encouraged to elaborate and provide clarification if their responses were not detailed enough. The author's questioning strategy therefore was to ask open questions, listen actively and probe if the responses lacked clarification (Irvine et al., 2007).

At the end of the interview the author presented the participants with a gift of a document that would help them with their studies to thank them for taking part in the interview (D'Souza 2003).

The fact that the author was a lecturer at the University and taught some of the students did impact on some of the participants' responses. There were some participants that apologised for critiquing a module or a lecturer or for going through the decision making process quickly and with little rigour (P20).

The author reassured these participants that she wanted them to be truthful, that their responses did not have any impact on the lecturer and that all their answers were good answers.

Some participants blamed any dissatisfaction with the University on their own shortcomings rather than the actions of the University staff and so provided higher satisfaction ratings than they would have done if they had held the University accountable for their negative experiences.

### 3.6 Reliability and Validity

The author was aware of issues of reliability and validity when undertaking qualitative research and paid attention to the trustworthiness, stability and scope of the findings (Elliot 2005). Recording the interview and making an exact

transcript increased the validity and reliability of the interview (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2008).

The reliability and validity of the research was assessed with reference to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Lincoln, Lynham and Guba's (2011) criteria; dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability.

The research was dependable or reliable as notes were written whilst coding, analysing and interpreting the data to record changes made whilst going through the process so there was a clear audit trail (Cresswell and Miller 2000). A reliable account of the focus of the research that emerged from the study could therefore be comprehended and evaluated by other researchers. The data was gathered over the period of a year and some participants returned for interview so the findings could be deemed to be dependable (Case, Given and Mai 2016).

The data had credibility or internal validity as participants recounted their personal view of reality (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) and confirmability as the data reflected participants' views rather than the author's beliefs about what individuals believed (Pickard 2013). The author's own perspective became a part of the design and helped with the analysis of the data. She acknowledged that participants' thoughts did change over time as they experienced life at the university and that the views and experiences of participants varied. However over the period of a year she built up relationships and gathered enough views to be able to conduct analysis that reflected these multiple realities, the results that changed over time and the different situational contexts in order to draw conclusions (Case, Given and Mai 2016, Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Triangulation was achieved as international non-EU postgraduates were part of the sample population of both the quantitative scoping study and the qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman 2014). The author adopted Alvesson and Sköldbberg's (2017) reflexive approach throughout the research process as discussed in section 3.3 and reflected on how her role as a university lecturer and her cultural and ethical awareness impacted on the research in section 3.5. This approach and awareness helped to support the credibility and confirmability of the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016).



With regards to the transferability or external validity of the research the author has provided comprehensive details of the research design, questions, evaluation and conclusions so a future researcher could replicate the data collection techniques (Pickard 2013). It could be argued that the sample size of 42 interviews was large enough so that the data could be transferable across similar populations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016).

### 3.7 Limitations and Strengths

The author acknowledges that there were limitations involved in interviewing postgraduates about their decision making process once they arrived at university as the author was asking them to reflect back on their previous experiences, which may have occurred a long time before arrival (Kent 2007). However data saturation occurred and the same themes emerged from the interviews which confirmed that the findings were valid.

Postgraduates from one institution were interviewed which could be a limitation. However the rationale of conducting a case study have been discussed. There is an opportunity to undertake future research in a number of different universities to obtain a broader insight into the decision making cycle of postgraduates.

The interviews were conducted in English which was a challenge for some of the postgraduates whose English language skills were weaker. In the future native language speakers could be used to interview postgraduates however they do not have the experience of the author and her relationship with the postgraduate students.

Volunteer sampling could be unrepresentative as a certain type of postgraduate selected themselves to take part in the research. There was however a mixture of volunteer and purposive sampling used to recruit students.

The model developed is analytically generalisable rather than statistically generalisable. There is an opportunity to test the model with further courses and nationalities. Recommendations for future research are made in section 7.2.

The strengths of the study are that it extends the research beyond that which is already known and fills many of the gaps in the research identified in the research questions. The scale of the literature review, the amount of data collected in the qualitative study and the study's reliability and validity are strengths. There were forty two interviews conducted with thirty nine international non-EU postgraduates studying a range of business qualifications. Participants were from fifteen different countries with a variety of demographic and prior education profiles. Twenty hours of interviews were transcribed and analysed. The author's reflexive approach was also an advantage as it meant that she evolved the methodology and made many changes to the way she conducted the research as she progressed through it.

This study is significant as the author has evolved a new approach to thinking about the interaction between information and purchase and consumption. The author has confirmed the existence of a decision making cycle and developed a new model of the decision making cycle with information searching in the inner ring. This model contributes to the body of research in the areas of LIS, marketing and consumer behaviour research which is further discussed in chapter 6.

In chapter 4 the quantitative research findings are presented.

## CHAPTER 4 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

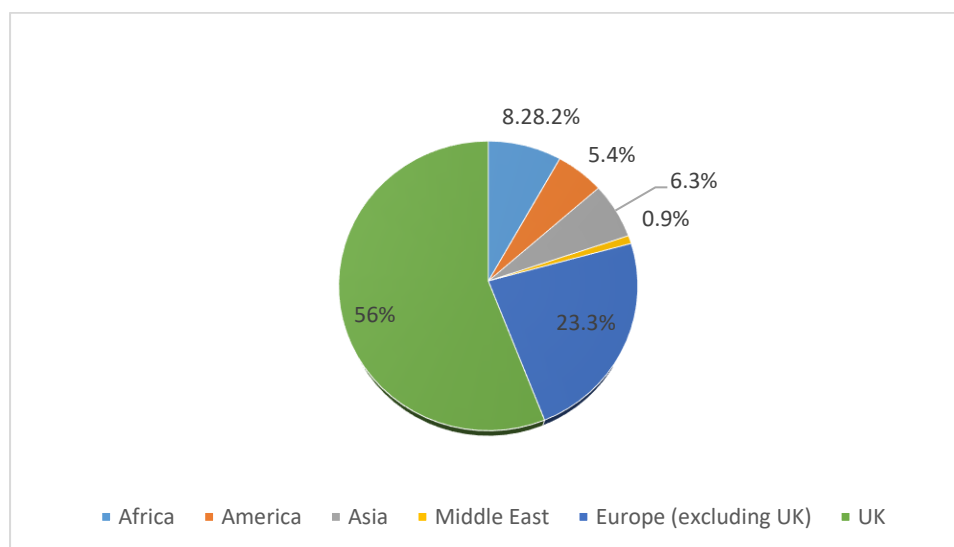
For the quantitative scoping study 559 UK and international postgraduate students who were currently studying a taught postgraduate business qualification full or part time at a UK or overseas university returned completed questionnaires. International non-EU postgraduates were found to have information needs which were different from UK and EU postgraduates and the focus of this chapter is on their motivation to study a postgraduate qualification and the sources and types of information they required.

### 4.1 Demographic Profile and Educational Background of Respondents

There was a relatively even gender split of respondents with 51.3% female and 48.7% male. Respondents were aged from 20 to 55 years, with 61% of respondents aged 22 to 25 years. The full breakdown of their ages is in Table 8.12 in appendix 5.

Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of UK, European and international non-EU postgraduates by continent of origin. 20.7% of the sample were international students from Africa (8.28%), Asia (6.3%), America (5.4%) and the Middle East (0.9%).

Figure 4.1 Country and Continent of Origin of Respondents



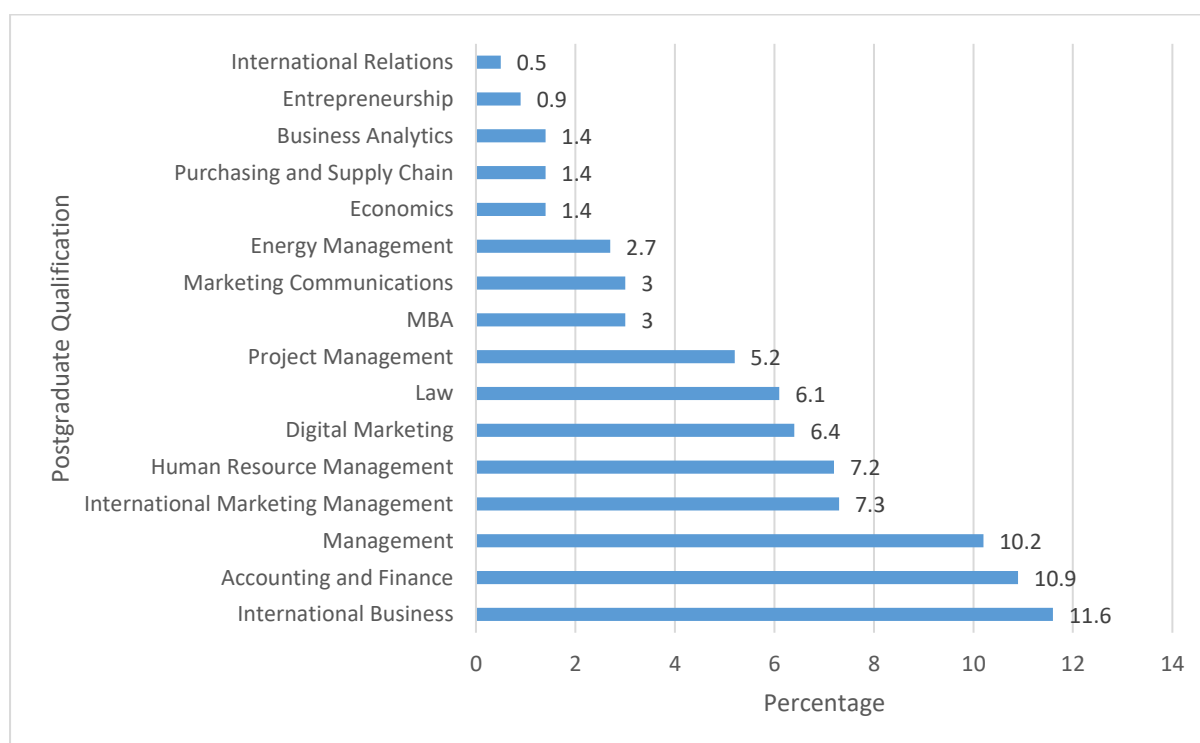
Source Author's Analysis 2020

Respondents were from 45 countries and Table 8.11 shows the full breakdown of the country of origin of respondents.

Respondents were currently studying a taught postgraduate qualification in 16 different countries and at 77 different universities as listed in Tables 8.13 and 8.14. There were 159 institutions where respondents had previously studied (Table 8.15). 89.4% of respondents were studying a postgraduate course full time, and 6.8% and 3.8% studied part time and online respectively.

Figure 4.2 shows the range of postgraduate business qualifications that were being studied by respondents who stated their qualification. 11.6% of the sample were studying International Business, 10.9% Accountancy and Finance, 10.2% Management and 7.3% International Marketing Management.

Figure 4.2 Postgraduate Business Qualification studying

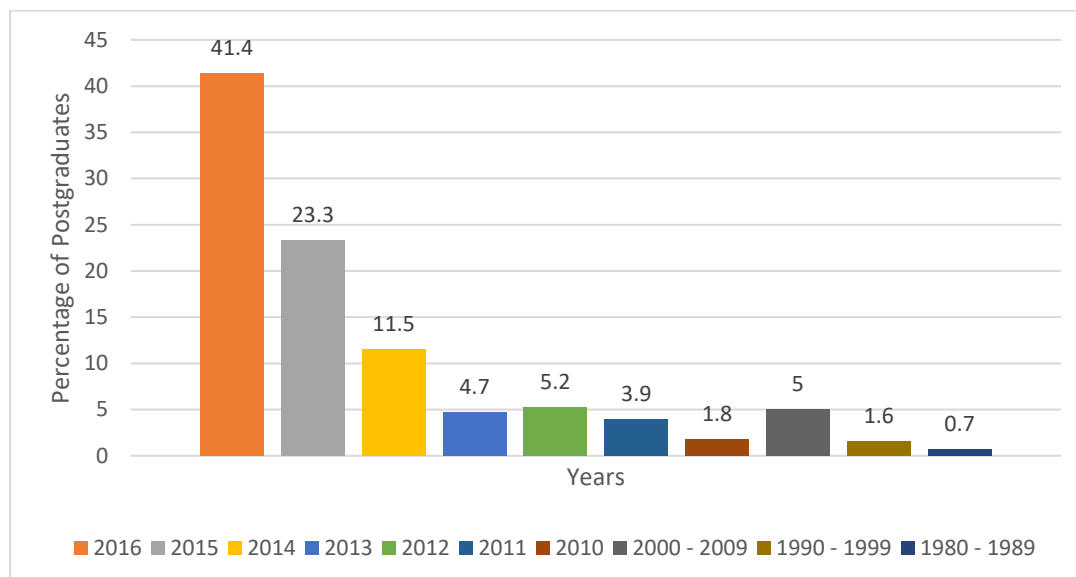


Source Author's Analysis 2020

Figure 4.3 shows the year that the respondents completed their highest qualification prior to postgraduate study. 41.4% of postgraduates had completed their studies in 2016 and gone straight on to study a postgraduate qualification

and 23.3% had a gap of one year before starting a postgraduate degree. 22.9% of the sample had spent two years or more after gaining their highest qualification before undertaking a postgraduate degree.

Figure 4.3 Year Completed Highest Qualification



Source Author's Analysis 2020

## 4.2 Motivation to Study

Respondents were asked what motivated them to study a postgraduate qualification and the most popular motivations are highlighted in Table 4.1 in grey. A Likert scale was used to assess importance from 1 for 'extremely unimportant' to 7 'extremely important'. Mean analysis was carried out, and the nearer the mean was to 7 the more students considered it to be an important motivation.

For international postgraduate students the most important motivation was to improve career prospects (mean of 6.81), followed by to gain or update skills to become more employable (6.06), to study further in a specific field of interest (5.94), an ongoing career requiring further qualifications (5.19), or personal satisfaction (5.06). Asian students also wanted to improve their English and obtain further qualifications (5.29).

Table 4.1 Motivation to Undertake Postgraduate Study

Mean	Overall	UK	Europe	Inter-national non-EU	Asia	Africa
As a means of improving my career prospects	6.22	6.18	6.00	6.81	6.60	6.36
To study further in a specific field of interest	5.65	5.75	5.89	5.94	5.57	5.59
I wanted to gain/ update my skills to become more employable	6.01	6.07	5.78	6.06	6.37	6.07
I wanted to change career	3.40	3.46	2.67	3.81	4.20	3.53
My first degree was not specific enough for any particular job	3.90	3.87	3.56	3.81	4.46	3.93
My ongoing career required further qualifications	4.27	4.31	3.17	5.19	4.86	4.31
I would like to work in the education sector	2.57	2.51	2.11	3.81	3.49	2.87
To acquire knowledge for my current job	3.58	3.44	3.33	4.06	4.34	3.31
Personal satisfaction	5.32	5.32	5.67	5.06	5.51	4.64
To enable progression to doctoral research	3.05	2.92	2.44	4.00	4.24	3.80
It is a requirement of my current job	3.01	2.85	2.00	4.40	4.11	3.04
To improve my English and obtain further qualifications	3.04	2.83	3.71	4.06	5.29	3.84

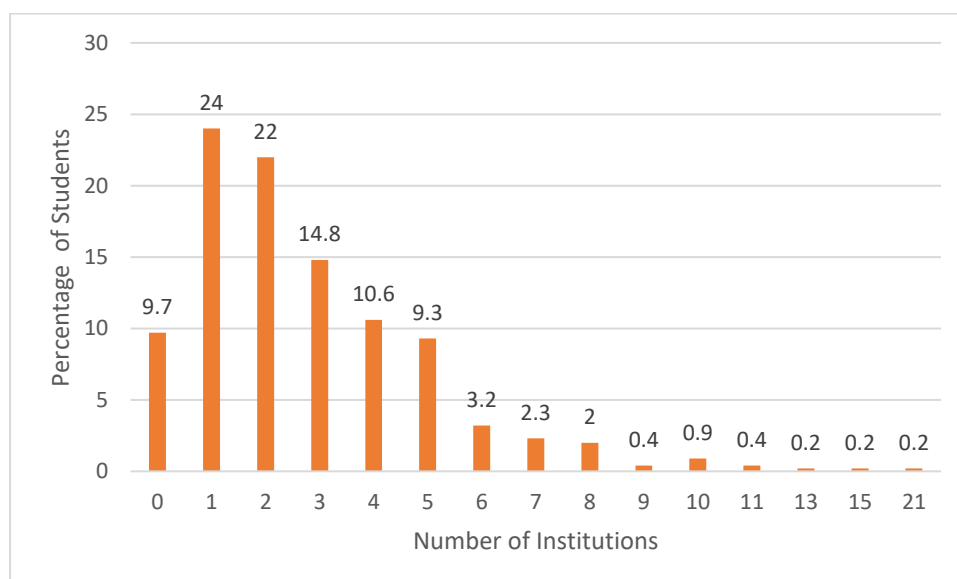
Source Author's Analysis 2020

### 4.3 Information Behaviour and Sources of Information

The information search behaviour of postgraduates was assessed by responses to questions on requesting information and satisfaction with the information obtained.

Respondents were asked the number of institutions that they requested information from and the results are presented in Figure 4.4. 9.7% of students had requested no information and 46% had requested information from 1 or 2 institutions.

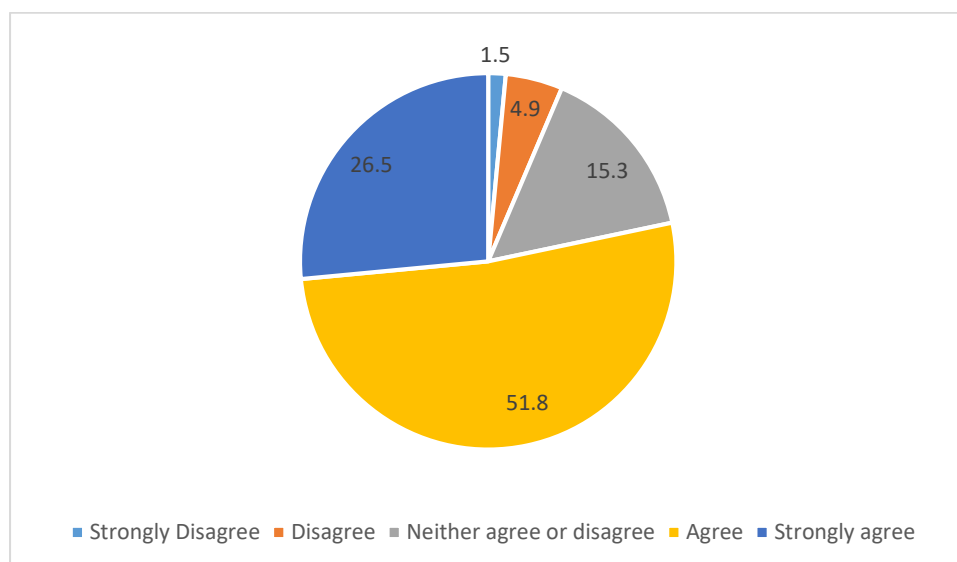
Figure 4.4 Number of Institutions requested Information from



Source Author's Analysis 2020

Respondents were asked whether they felt that they had enough information about Higher Education Providers (HEP) when making the choice decision. Figure 4.5 shows that 78.3% agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case.

Figure 4.5 Satisfaction with Level of Information about HEPs before making the Choice Decision



Source Author's Analysis 2020

To ascertain the most important sources of information for postgraduates when deciding on a postgraduate course and university to enrol in, respondents were

given a list of sources of information and asked to select the one source of information that was the most important to them when researching where to study their postgraduate qualification and what they should study. Table 4.2 on the following page provides an overview of the most important source of information chosen by international non-EU respondents compared to other groups. The most important sources are highlighted in a darker grey colour and then the next most important sources in a lighter grey colour.

The most important sources of information for international non-EU postgraduates were the HEP website (21.8%), lecturer at previous institution (12.5%), employer (9.8%), rankings (8.5%), student chat room, forum, website or blog (7.2%), agent (6.8%), course comparison website (5%) staff at the HEP (4.8%) current or previous students (4%) and family (3.5%). Seven of the top ten sources were WOM sources. Social networking sites, online chats, virtual open days and printed media were not chosen as important sources of information.

Middle Eastern postgraduates were the only respondents to rely on course comparison websites. Asian postgraduates chose students that had studied at the university as an important WOM source (8.6%), along with staff of the HEP (11.45) and agents (8.6%).

Legend for Table 4.2:

	Most important sources of information
	The next most important sources of information



Table 4.2 Most Important Information Source by Continent

%	Teacher/ tutor/ lecturer at previous education institution	An employer/ sponsor	Current or previous students that studies at this	Staff of the Higher Education Provider	A friend (s)	Family	Education agent/ consultant	Website of the Higher Education Provider	Email of the Higher Education Provider	Education UK website	Course compariso n website	League tables or rankings	
Africa	10.9	6.5	4.3	4.3	2.2	4.3	8.7	32.6	2.2	0	0	13.0	
America	13.3	10.0	3.3	3.3	0	6.7	10.0	20.0	0	0	0	6.7	
Asia	5.7	2.9	8.6	11.4	2.9	2.9	8.6	14.3	2.9	8.6	0	14.3	
M East	20.0	20.0		0	0	0	0	20.0	0	0	20.0	0	
<b>Int't Average</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8.5</b>	
Europe	8.6	5.5	10.9	6.3	4.7	4.7	3.9	28.9	0	0	4.7	8.6	
UK	16.7	7.7	7.1	7.4	4.8	6.4	1.0	17.4	1.0	0.3	3.5	9.0	
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>9.4</b>	
%	Student chat rooms/ forum/ blog	Online chat arranged by university	Social networking site	Campus open day/ evening on site or visit	Virtual Campus open day	Education postgrad exhibition/ fair in UK	Education postgrad fair outside UK	Printed directory	A printed document /guide from HEP	Home country government advisory service	British council	Newspaper or magazine article	<b>Total</b>
Africa	0	0	0	2.2	0	0	4.3	0	2.2	2.2	0	0	100
America	3.3	0	0	3.3	0	3.3	0	0	10.0	6.7	0	0	100
Asia	5.7	0	0	5.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.7	0	100
M East	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
<b>Int't Average</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>
Europe	1.6	0.8	1.6%	5.5	0.8	0.8	2.3	0	0	0	0	0	100
UK	0.3	0.3	1.6%	10.9	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.3	2.3	0.3	0	0.3	100
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.3 below summarises the data on the most important sources of information from Table 4.2 and compares international, EU and UK postgraduates.

Table 4.3 Most important Sources of Information by Postgraduate Group

<b>Postgraduate group</b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>
All students	Website	HEP Staff	WOM* student	WOM family	WOM lecturer
UK	Website	Ranking	HEP Staff	WOM family	WOM student
Europe (excluding UK)	Website	Ranking	WOM student	WOM friend	WOM family WOM lecturer
International (exclude Europe and UK)	Website	WOM lecturer previous HEP	Employer	Ranking	WOM Student chat room, forum, website, blog

Source Author's Analysis 2020

For international non-EU postgraduates, rankings were of lesser importance and they were the only group to choose student chat rooms, forums, websites and blogs as an important source of information.

#### 4.4 Types of Information

Respondents were given a list of types of information and asked to select the one type of information that was the most important to them when deciding where to study their postgraduate qualification and what to study. The most important types of information for international postgraduates are shaded in grey in Table 4.4 and were in order of importance: percentage of graduates gaining employment within one year (18%), university reputation (17.9%), content of specific courses (12.1%), accreditation of the course (11.9%), department's reputation (10.2%), companies recruiting the department's graduates (5%) and cost of the course (4.7%). Asians wanted information on safety and security in the area and entry requirements.

Table 4.4 Most Important Information Type by Continent

%	University Age	University reputation	Department reputation	Course Content	Accreditation of the course	Course as a learning experience	Degree classification structure	Entry requirements	Cost of course	Contact with the lecturers	Class sizes	% employment	Opportunity to find part time jobs
Africa	0	23.9	8.7	17.4	6.5	0	0	4.3	6.5	0	0	19.6	0
America	0	13.3	3.3	16.7	6.7	6.7	0	3.3	6.7	0	0	26.7	0
Asia	0	34.3	8.6	14.3	14.3	2.9	0	5.7	5.7	0	0	5.7	0
M East	0	0	20	0	20	0	0	0	0	20	0	20	0
<b>Int'l Average</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>
Europe	0	25.6	8.5	25.6	6.2	4.7	1.6	0.8	2.3	0.8	1.6	6.2	0
UK	0.3	17.7	11.6	13.2	10.9	4.5	1.3	1.6	9.6	1.9	0.3	8	0.6
Overall Average	0.2	20.7	10.1	16.5	9.5	4.1	1.1	2	7.2	1.4	0.5	9.5	0.4
%	Opportunity stay in the country	Opportunity for placement	Opportunity to study abroad	Average earning graduates	Develop business contacts	Companies recruiting graduates	Accommodation provided	Computer facilities	Library facilities	University unions	University campus	Cost of living in the area	Nightlife in the city
Africa	0	4.3	0	4.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.2	0	0
America	3.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.3	0	0	3.3	0	0
Asia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.9	0	0	0
M East	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Int'l Average</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Europe	4.7	0.8	1.6	2.3	0	1.6	0.8	0	0	0	0	0.8	0
UK	0	1.3	0.3	2.6	1.3	3.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	0	1.9	1.3	1
Overall Average	1.3	1.3	0.5	2.3	0.7	2.5	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2	1.4	0.9	0.5

Table 4.4 Most Important Information Type by Continent contd.

%	Friendliness of people living in the area	Safety/security in the area	Local sights and activities	Contact with counselling services / student support	Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)	Ranking in university league tables	Legend
Africa	0	2.2	0	0	0	0	Most important types of information
America	0	0	0	0	6.7	0	
Asia	0	5.7	0	0	0	0	
M East	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Int'l Average</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0</b>	
Europe	0	0	0	0	3.9	0	
UK	0.6	1	0.3	0.3	1.3	0.3	
Overall Average	0.4	1.1	0.2	0.2	2	0.2	

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 4.4 shows that Americans were interested in financial aid, the campus, computer facilities and 'opportunities to stay in the country afterwards'. Africans sought information on opportunities to do placements, entry requirements and graduate earnings.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each type of information on a Likert scale from 'not a source I considered' (n0) to 'extremely important' (n7) to ascertain the relative importance of types of information for international postgraduates. Mean analysis was undertaken by continent of origin and the higher the mean score the more important the type of information to respondents from that continent. Table 4.5 shows the results of the analysis where the dark grey shading indicates the highest mean values and so the most important types of information. The lighter grey shading shows the next most important types of information.

Table 4.5 Type of Information required by Continent of Origin

Mean	Africa	America	Asia	M East	Europe	UK	Int'l Overall
University's reputation	5.98	6.20	5.60	5.80	5.89	5.68	5.90
Department's reputation	5.04	5.60	5.60	5.80	5.60	5.59	5.51
Content of specific courses	5.85	5.83	6.09	6.00	6.02	5.83	5.94
Accreditation of the course	5.52	6.03	5.43	5.20	5.74	5.69	5.55
Course as a learning experience	4.96	4.93	5.23	3.40	5.29	5.13	4.63
Degree classification structure	4.74	5.57	4.94	5.20	4.43	4.74	5.11
Entry requirements	5.41	5.20	5.17	5.20	4.94	4.86	5.25
Cost of the course	5.85	5.59	4.80	1.60	5.15	4.78	4.46
Contact with the lecturers	4.22	3.73	4.69	4.00	4.39	4.51	4.16
Class sizes	4.17	3.50	3.71	3.20	3.85	3.62	3.65
% of graduates gaining employment 1 yr	5.65	5.03	5.17	4.40	4.81	4.85	5.06
Opportunities to find part time jobs	4.20	3.47	4.43	3.00	3.32	3.21	3.78
Opportunities to stay in the country	3.82	3.13	4.51	4.00	3.61	2.01	3.87
Opportunities to undertake a placement	3.98	4.23	4.91	3.20	3.62	3.31	4.08
Opportunities to study abroad	3.63	2.55	3.79	3.00	3.29	2.47	3.24
Average earnings of the graduates	4.13	4.13	4.43	4.40	4.08	4.48	4.27
Development of business contacts during studying	4.46	4.70	4.44	3.20	4.54	4.11	4.20

Legend	
	Most important types of information
	The next most important types of information

Table 4.5 Type of Information required by Continent of Origin contd.

Mean	Africa	America	Asia	M East	Europe	UK	Int'l Overall
Companies recruiting the department's graduates	4.57	4.43	4.74	3.80	4.26	4.39	4.39
Male and female ratio within the university	2.48	1.77	3.32	.80	1.72	1.91	2.09
Accommodation provided by the university	2.89	2.70	3.91	2.00	2.67	2.12	2.88
Existence of private flats nearby	3.48	3.17	4.29	2.00	3.47	2.76	3.24
Computer facilities	4.11	3.30	3.85	3.60	3.32	3.65	3.72
Library facilities	4.52	4.27	4.24	4.60	4.17	4.29	4.41
Sports facilities	3.22	3.40	3.24	2.80	3.15	3.44	3.17
University unions	3.43	2.43	3.38	1.80	2.90	2.57	2.76
University campus	4.07	5.20	4.23	4.40	4.32	3.87	4.48
Cost of living in the area	4.54	4.20	3.94	3.80	4.08	3.43	4.12
Night life in the city	3.15	3.23	3.61	2.60	3.34	3.02	3.15
Friendliness of people living in the area	3.46	3.10	3.91	3.00	3.22	2.73	3.37
University's age	2.84	2.87	3.59	2.20	3.02	2.56	2.88
Size of the area	3.07	3.60	3.26	2.40	3.11	2.54	3.08
Weather in the area	3.31	2.37	3.44	2.80	2.29	2.02	2.98
Safety/security in campus	4.04	3.83	3.82	3.80	3.12	3.21	3.87
Safety/security in the area	3.96	3.70	3.70	5.00	3.47	3.14	4.09
Local sights and activities	3.17	3.27	3.94	3.40	3.28	2.66	3.45
Shopping in the area	3.35	2.97	4.03	4.20	2.51	2.58	3.64
Contact with counselling /student support	3.87	3.73	3.85	2.40	3.16	2.88	3.46
Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)	3.93	3.83	3.88	2.40	3.52	3.84	3.51
Ranking in university league tables	4.67	5.53	5.09	5.20	4.96	4.79	5.12

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 4.5 shows that additional factors of importance for international postgraduates were entry requirements (mean of 5.21), rankings (5.12) and degree classification (5.11).

#### 4.4.1 Summary

The key findings from the quantitative scoping study regarding international non-EU postgraduates were:

- These students had information requirements that differed from home and EU postgraduate students
- The most important motivations to undertake a postgraduate qualification were focused on employability; to improve career prospects and to gain or update skills to become more employable. Asian students also wanted to improve their English and obtain further qualifications
- The most important type of information was also focused on employability as international postgraduates wanted to know the percentage of graduates gaining employment within one year. They also felt that information on the companies that were recruiting the department's graduates was important
- The reputation of the university and the department, the course curricula and the cost of the course were also found to be important types of information
- WOM sources of information from lecturers, employers, online student reviews, agents, students, HEP staff and family were seven of the top ten sources
- The HEP website was the most important source of information
- Rankings were the fourth most important source and the 6<sup>th</sup> most important type of information
- Social networking sites, online chats, virtual open days and printed media were not found to be important information sources

In chapter 5 the qualitative research findings are discussed.

## CHAPTER 5 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter the findings of the qualitative research amongst 39 international non-EU postgraduates studying taught business qualifications at a university in England are described. In chapter six the qualitative results are discussed in relation to theory. This chapter is structured by firstly reporting on the profile of participants, then the qualitative findings on the role of information during the decision making cycle and finally on the decision making process.

### 5.1 Profile of Participants

In this section the profile of participants is reported. The full details of the participants in the qualitative study are contained in Tables 8.23 and 8.24 in appendix 14.

In the qualitative study there were 39 participants of which 18 were male and 21 were female participants. Participants were aged from 22 to 39 years. The majority of participants were aged 22 (n8), 23 (n7) and 24 (n5) years. Nine participants were aged 27 or over.

15 countries were represented in the qualitative sample which accounted for over 1.7 million (36%) of the 4.7 million outwardly mobile students in 2017. 25 participants came from South East Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia) and three from Bangladesh. Two participants came from China and the USA. There was one participant from the following countries: India, Mauritius, Kenya, Ghana, Russia, Brazil and Syria. This reflected the profile of the overall international postgraduate population at the University Business School.

Qualitative participants were enrolled in the following postgraduate qualifications from the University Business school: MBA (n2), International Management (n8), Business Management (n3), Marketing (n16), Marketing Communications (n8) Innovation and Applied Entrepreneurship (n1) and Events (n1). A range of courses were therefore represented in the research.



Participants had studied a range of business and non-business subjects at undergraduate level. Two of them had undertaken a postgraduate degree prior to enrolling on the postgraduate course at the University.

Participants had studied previously in their home countries or overseas. 12 participants had studied undergraduate degrees overseas either in the UK (n10), Japan (n1) or Australia (n1). 13 participants had prior knowledge of studying the University's undergraduate courses as they had previously studied at the University (7) or in partner institutions (6). 23 participants had studied at partner universities including the Thai University 1 (n8) and Vietnamese University 1 (n6). This demonstrates the importance of partner universities providing a pipeline of postgraduates to UK institutions.

23 out of 39 of the participants' parents had studied at university themselves. All the participants' siblings who were old enough to go to university had done so or were currently attending a university.

## Role of Information during the Decision Making Cycle

The first part of this chapter considers the sources and types of information used by the qualitative participants in the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle; need recognition, evaluation of alternatives and purchase and then in the post purchase evaluation stage. Gaps in information provision and the impact of information in structuring expectations and contributing to satisfaction levels are discussed. Lastly the stages in Kuhlthau's ISP Model are related to participants' information search in the pre and post purchase stages.

### 5.2 Sources of Information Pre Purchase

In this section the important sources of information used by participants as they progressed through the pre purchase stages are considered in line with objective 2 and research questions 4 and 6. The contribution that current students and

alumni made to the pool of information provided is discussed in line with objective 5 and research question 9.

### 5.2.1 Word of Mouth sources

WOM sources of information were the most influential sources used by participants throughout the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle. WOM sources triggered a need for postgraduate study and helped participants as they decided on a country, city, university and course to choose. They influenced participants when they applied to universities and then made the final purchase.

The following WOM sources are now investigated; friends, family, agents, academic staff at previous institutions, employers, staff of the host university and members of the local community.

Friends, who were current students or alumni of the UK universities, or friends who were studying at home or at overseas universities, were influencers in the DMU. They were classified as an important source of information for 27 participants and the most influential source for 12 participants.

Participants consulted multiple friends who triggered the need to investigate postgraduate study in the need recognition stage, for example when they were discussing what to do after undergraduate study (P11). When participants first started looking for information on possible universities, they would approach their friends for advice (P39). Friends could provide tangible, credible proof of employment prospects which helped Participant 16 decide between the list of universities he was considering:

*P16 'But then he told me [the University] is one of the best. I have like three, four friends graduated from here and they already now have a job'*

Advice could also be given by friends on how it was to study at the University which helped participants evaluate alternative universities (P32). Information and recommendations were provided by participants to friends in the home country on a daily basis (P1).

Friends provided unbiased and trustworthy information on what the university lifestyle would be like which was an important selection criterion. Friends often knew the participants having studied with them, so they could provide advice on whether the student would be able to cope with the demands of academic study and enjoy the lifestyle while at university. Friends knew that Participant 29 would struggle to adapt and make friends in a new university, so they advised him to remain at the University. Participant 39's friends understood that she would not want to be in a university without students from her own country:

*P39 'And they have Thai people also staying, you feel not lonely and you will like that.'*

Friends also became a reason to attend the University for many of the participants, especially those from Asian collectivist cultures. It was important for them to have a support network of friends when they arrived at the University. Some participants recommended the University to their friends even though they had never studied there (P27, P30) as they wanted to have friends on arrival.

The majority of participants (n23) had recommended the University to their peer group and family in their home countries whilst they were studying and had, in some cases, recruited future students to the University (P11). Participant 35 referred to the fact that every year prospective Vietnamese students asked for recommendations from current students, such as herself, as to which university they should choose.

When deciding which postgraduate degree to purchase, friends often helped the participant make the final decision (P24):

*P34 'Actually they are the main reason I come here because I just ask my friend who had just graduated from here 'How was it?' and it make me decide to come here.'*

Reliance on WOM recommendations from friends when evaluating universities often led to shortcuts being made in the decision making process and a lack of rigour in information search.

P33 *'So they tell me the information about [the University] and I decided to come here [...] I haven't looked at any others. Just [the University] as I have friends to come with, so I am looking only [the University].'*

For Participant 38 the definition of a friend was very broad and encompassed those students who had studied with the participant at a previous institution and whom she located on Facebook but had never spoken to face to face.

Another important source of WOM communication was family members. Parents, siblings, partners (P37), aunts, uncles (P19) and grandparents (P20) provided information and recommendations to participants during the pre purchase stages (P1). The importance of choosing family members who knew them and could guide them to the right decision was evident:

P11 *'I asked my parents as well and because my parents have known me for so long they know which one is the best for me.'*

Parents and other family members triggered the need to attend a university for postgraduate study by encouraging or instructing participants to undertake further study (see section 5.8). Participants' parents told them that they should undertake a postgraduate qualification as they felt that it was in their best interests (P6, P15). Stories from family members of their experiences in the UK also made them realise that they wanted to study a postgraduate qualification in the UK (P14). Siblings, who may have studied a postgraduate qualification, encouraged participants to study a postgraduate qualification and so made them aware of their needs (P30).

Agents were an influential source of information to participants in the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle. 25 participants had used an agent during the evaluation of alternatives stage when deciding between universities for postgraduate study. There were different types of agents who acted as information sources to participants; independent educational agents (n16), university agents, academic staff taking on the role of agents in partner institutions (n6) and a football agent.

Some agents made the participant aware of the options for studying a

postgraduate qualification and so triggered a need. Participant 14 attended the agent's premises for an educational fair with representatives of different universities which led to the decision to start investigating postgraduate study. The ten universities present at the event became the choice set of the participant.

The football agent's role was to source American football players to come to the University. He contacted Participant 22 at the start of his last undergraduate year at an American university and as a result the participant started to research studying a postgraduate qualification. The agent was instrumental in triggering a need in the participant.

Participant 37 met an agent when he was studying English in the UK. She played an important role in convincing him to apply and reassuring him that he should have no concerns about his ability to undertake postgraduate study:

*P37 'And she said 'No you can apply [...] But I have no idea what I have to do. She said 'No worries' [...] I didn't do anything. She did everything for me for free.'*

Agents also acted as gatekeepers in the decision making unit. If participants asked them for recommendations on universities that they could apply to they would provide a list which often became the participant's choice set:

*P28 'I contracted the agency and I showed them my grades and my experience and all that and then they gave me a list of universities for me to choose from.'*

Participant 23 was similar to many participants who trusted their agent and did not search for information on which universities they should consider. She relied solely on the agent's recommendations to form her choice set.

Agents helped participants to decide which universities to apply to and which course to purchase and handed out communications media such as the prospectus (P20). Having decided on a shortlist of universities participants would visit agents to obtain guidance on applications to make based on the 'suitability' of the universities to participants (P39). Participants built up a relationship with

their agents over time and trusted their judgement as they understood the participant's needs (P9). University agents were instrumental in encouraging applications as they acted as salespeople and recommended the benefits of studying at the University to participants (P30).

Agents offered advice and support to participants until they arrived at the University (P9). For Participant 14 who did not have any other WOM information sources, the agent was a valuable source of information during the entire process:

*P14 'So each time even if I had some doubts I would always call her. I would say OK I want some clarification. What's the next step?'*

When participants had to apply to universities it was often the independent educational agents that did this task for them. Agents also applied on behalf of those alumni of the University who wished to return for postgraduate study (P10). Agents made the application process easier, less time consuming and stressful for participants (P15). After application or purchase the agents played a valuable role in reassuring students that they had made the right decision (P14).

After graduation some postgraduate students went back to their home countries and took on roles as agents which helped to inspire future prospective students to apply (P20).

Participants did not question the impartiality of agents and were happy to recommend them to their peer group as they perceived that they performed a valuable service. Participant 28 trusted the agent's recommendations better than that of her friends.

Other important WOM sources of information for participants were the academic staff who lectured the participants at undergraduate level or who acted as agents in partner institutions. Participant 10 recognised a need for a postgraduate qualification from abroad when the academic staff at the partner university introduced the options for postgraduate study to him. Participant 16's lecturer was responsible for triggering his need for a postgraduate qualification, by firstly affirming that he was capable of undertaking further study, and

secondly by highlighting to him the employability benefits of studying for a postgraduate degree overseas and the 'prestige' it would bring to the student.

Staff who were agents in partner universities acted as gatekeepers who would provide a list to participants of the universities they could apply to (P11, P32) but would not do the applications for them. The advantage of this type of agent was that they did not charge a fee.

When participants were evaluating alternative universities and courses in order to choose from their shortlists, the partner staff were instrumental in recommending the University to participants. They were perceived to be a credible source of information (P25, P27, P31, P33, P35, P39). Similarly, those staff in non-affiliated universities also recommended the University (P16). Participant 24 took the advice of his lecturer as the lecturer knew his capabilities and the subject that he wanted to study.

Other partner staff would not recommend one specific university to prospective postgraduates out of the list they provided. However, the fact that they had a relationship with the University was perceived positively by participants. Participant 1 did not look at the website or promotional material and solely chose the University because it had links with his home university.

Employers were a WOM source of information for participants who worked prior to postgraduate studies. For three participants employers helped to fund the cost of the postgraduate degree. Participant 15's first point of contact, once they were investigating further study, was their employer.

A WOM source which could be controlled by the University was the academic and administrative staff who worked there and provided information to participants. Undergraduate students from the University who were planning to return to the University for postgraduate study consulted the staff in the Information point (P11) and Visa hub (P25) for advice on applying to the University for postgraduate study.

The University representatives travelling abroad and the University staff in the international office in the UK responded to participant queries either face to face or by email. Only one participant mentioned contacting the Programme Leader who he found to be very helpful. No other participants mentioned contact with the University's academic staff. They relied on academic staff in previous institutions, agents, partner staff or the University website to provide them with the information they required.

The last WOM source of information for participants was members of the participant's local community. These members triggered a need to study a postgraduate degree amongst participants in collectivist cultures. Postgraduate study was expected as a 'habit' after finishing an undergraduate degree (P31). Participant 29 commented that for him a postgraduate qualification was the next logical step and referred to the expectations of people in Vietnam:

*P29 ...'because in Vietnam everyone want their child to like graduate in the good school. So I think go to England and study is a better chance for me for my opportunity for me, for my future.'*

### 5.2.2 Online sources

In this digital era online sources of information were relied on by participants to inform the stages of the decision making cycle. Universities' websites (n18) including the University website (n27) were a core source of information for participants as they made their decision where to study a postgraduate qualification during the evaluation of alternatives stage. For some participants university websites were used to compile longlists of universities (P18). Others used the university websites to help eliminate universities from a longlist of possible options (P28). The information on university websites also helped participants to decide which universities to apply to and then to make the final decision as to which university to attend:

*P39 '.. I really like what it said on the website so I decided to chose [the University] and apply.'*



Once participants had decided where to apply, they would return to university websites to obtain information about the application process and how to prepare for study at the University:

*P32 '.. they have a lot of guides. I read all, even the accommodation or how to live there or something like that.'*

Table 5.1 identifies the types of information participants searched for on university websites during the evaluation of alternatives stage.

Table 5.1 Information searched for on University Websites

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Information searched for on university websites</b>
P1	YouTube videos of the city and the University
P4	Curriculum of the degree
P10	Modules
P11	'Course structure, the course duration, what opportunity they give, what credit they give to the students when they graduate - Some they say CRM level 5, level 7'
P18	'Course, descriptions, grades you need to apply, the deadlines of when you have to apply, the official rankings, how well the University had done in recent years - shortlisted for that award'
P19	Requirement to have job experience to apply
P22	Pictures on Instagram, sports centre, academic success centre. Quality of business programme
P26	Career prospects
P30	International management - 'video about the student that study there and find jobs - time to study, requirement to study, tuition fee, modules, credit'
P32	'Criteria, date to start studying everything, how to apply, guides, accommodation, how to live here'
P38	Course
P39	Course, accommodation, job

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Participants wanted university websites to be informative (P19), organised, clear (P37) and well-structured which made them easy to navigate to find the information required (P25, P27, P30).

The website had a positive impact on participants' perception of the University (P26):

*P10 'I look at the website and I think like this is a good one.'*

It was the videos and images on the website from YouTube and Instagram which participants remembered most (P30). Some participants relied on the University website to give them information regarding the city, whilst others went onto city websites (P24).

Rankings websites were mentioned frequently by participants (n19) as both a source and type of information. Participants would search for the ranking of the course they wanted to study such as business, management or marketing (P18, P25, P33) and the ranking for the university (P28, P39). Participants used the rankings to form an initial choice set of universities and then to eliminate universities from their lists.

For those who did not have WOM information from friends the rankings led them to choose the University (P14, P16, P22, P28):

*P9 'So at the end I had two choices [...] So I went with the rankings.'*

There were many participants who chose the University on the basis of its rankings (P37) especially if they were improving year on year (P16, P35). Participants remembered the rank number for the university they had chosen (P15, P16, P19, P20) but not which rankings websites they looked at (P14, P15, P16, P17, P22). Only three participants could name the rankings website when they were asked; The Guardian, Times, QS and Financial Times. Sometimes participants obtained the ranking of the university from the university's own website which they trusted.

Another source of information was Google (n13) which was the main or the sole search engine that participants relied on (P11, P39) whilst researching universities and cities during the evaluation of alternatives stage (P1, P11, P24). For Chinese students Baidu was used to search for information and the rankings of universities (P23).

Participants would decide on their university choice sets by undertaking a Google search as Participant 16 did:

P16: *'First of all, I looked at about marketing in general. And I got the best marketing universities, which were the five universities I applied to.'*

Other participants relied on agents or lecturers to provide them with a list of universities which they then researched through Google searches (P14, P26).

When searching in Google, participants did not remember the websites they went to, but they remembered statistical information, such as student satisfaction ratings, as they had with rankings (P28).

The search terms used by participants when 'Googling' universities and courses to research are shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Google search terms

Participant	Search term
P11	Top best 10 business schools Top 10 highest paid jobs
P15	Masters in Marketing Best university for marketing
P16	Best marketing universities
P17	Top ranked MBA programmes in the UK
P26	Business course Business Masters
P27	UK ranking University 2018 UK ranking University 2018 business
P28	University ranking for marketing in UK
P36	List of universities UK
P37	Ranking University UK Ranking UK business management
P38	University Management University Marketing
P39	Best ranked university in UK
P10	What is the difference between marketing and marketing communications

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Many of the search terms included the word 'rank,' 'best' and 'top' as participants formulated a list of universities to investigate and evaluated them.

Of note in Table 5.2 is that some participants searched for schools rather than universities and the term 'Masters' was often used.

Important sources of online information for participants were reviews from current students or alumni (n12). Online reviews became more important if the participant did not have WOM recommendations from friends, family, agents or university staff on which to base their decision. For example, Participant 17 looked at reviews to ascertain if the university was value for money, offered a positive student experience, enhanced employment prospects and had any negative points. These reviews led her to choose the University from a shortlist of two despite its lower ranking.

Online reviews were accessed through Baidu or a Google search (P11):

*P37 '...on Google, I type 'what people say about [the University] management' and I click the first one.'*

The importance of gaining a balanced view of the experience of studying at the University through online reviews was emphasised by Participant 9. He wanted to access both positive and negative reviews about the city and university life from reviews prior to making his decision.

Participant 38 looked for reviews on Pantip, a trusted local Thai website, where alumni from her hometown left their opinions on UK universities. Participant 26 went to the Student Room website. These were the only participants who could recall which review websites Google had taken them onto. Participants were happy to recognise student comments on review websites when making the decision to study at the University even though they did not remember the websites. This demonstrates the influence that Google has as a trusted search engine and the acceptance by participants of unknown sources to give them authoritative answers that they believe are credible. There was no mention of obtaining online reviews through Facebook or other social media sites.

Another source of information mentioned by 13 participants was social media. Participants were explicitly asked if they had used social media when deciding to

come to the University. The majority of participants had not intentionally gone onto social media to research universities. Some participants had come across YouTube videos and Instagram images when they were on the University website. Participant 27 was searching for information on Australian postgraduate programmes when a Facebook advert popped up which caused him to decide to investigate the four UK universities linked to the Thai university advert.

For the few participants who actively went onto social media, they mainly did so in the latter stages of the evaluation of alternatives stage when they had found their choice set and were searching for information on which university to attend. Participants who did not have any WOM sources of information used YouTube, Instagram and Facebook to find out more about student life, safety and the positive and negative aspects of studying at universities (P9, P14, P17, P18). Participant 17 wanted to gain employment in the UK and joined LinkedIn and Facebook groups to find out about part time job prospects and living in the city. As with online reviews and rankings, the source of the message did not appear to impact either positively or negatively on its credibility.

Participant 22 was the only one who mentioned actively signing up to follow the University Facebook and Instagram sites when he was deciding whether to study at the University. He did not have any WOM recommendations from students so social media helped him to understand more about the courses offered. He was aware that the social media messages he was receiving were managed by the University, so they were not impartial.

Email tended to be used as an information source later on in the decision making cycle once the participant had done a general search online and wanted answers to specific questions from the University prior to application. Prompt and effective response to Participant 10's email queries helped to reassure him that the University could be trusted and led to the decision to study there.

Some participants' need for a postgraduate qualification were triggered when they read impersonal sources of information such as job adverts either online or offline. Having read the adverts they realised that they needed to develop their skills to obtain a certain role or saw that they required a postgraduate

qualification. Participant 38 was looking for a graduate management trainee position in a large global company in Thailand and a postgraduate qualification was specified by most companies.

### 5.2.3 Offline sources

Offline sources of information were mentioned infrequently by participants. Prospectuses were handed out by agents to participants (n2) and printed brochures were mentioned (n1) but they were ignored in favour of online sources of information that were easier and more effective to navigate (P28). Only Participant 14 classified the prospectus given to her by the agent as a valuable source of information. She used it for two years during her decision making cycle and the images it contained became tangible proof of what the University represented:

*P14 'I had the brochures so by flipping through the pages, looking at the images and getting all the information [...] so these really impacted on me.'*

Visits to a university were a source of information for only two participants despite the fact that some participants had studied undergraduate qualifications in nearby towns to the University. Participant 9 visited C University and the visit contributed to his decision to study there. He also visited the University along with one other participant who visited the Visa hub to gain guidance on her application.

Educational fairs in participants' home countries were used by universities and agents to encourage prospective postgraduates to study in the UK. This was the case for Participant 14 who formed her choice set from the fair organised by the agent. Participant 13 attended an educational fair and was inspired by the enthusiasm of the university representative to start investigating a postgraduate course.

Full details of the sources of information mentioned by participants are provided in Table 8.28 in appendix 17.

A variety of WOM, online and offline sources of information were used by participants in the pre purchase stages. Understanding which sources were used helps universities to use the correct channels of communication and decide on an influencer strategy.

### 5.3 Types of Information Pre Purchase

This section considers the types of information used by participants during the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle in line with objective 2 and research questions 5 and 7.

#### 5.3.1 Need Recognition stage and Motivation

The types of information required in the need recognition stage were linked to participants' motivations to study a postgraduate qualification. Participants searched for information concerning the postgraduate qualification that would help them meet their needs. For example, if they were motivated to study to improve their careers prospects then they would search for types of information linked to employability.

Firstly, the main motivation to obtain a postgraduate qualification was to improve career prospects (n29) so participants searched for the types of information that would inform them of the likelihood of the degree leading to increased job opportunities (P31, P37). Participants were looking for managerial roles in Government and in large global companies.

Some participants were motivated to apply as they had been unsuccessful in applying for the roles that they wanted (P18). Other participants had been rejected in job interviews:

P36 *'I go for interview and he just ignore me.'*

Postgraduate qualifications were also studied as they led to career advancement and to higher earnings (n5):

*P11 'If you have a Masters you can earn an extra 1000 ringgit [...] then if you want to get a higher position it is much easier compared to other people because you have a Masters.'*

For some participants an undergraduate degree either had not led to the career they had expected or did not give participants the job or salary they desired (P17, P29). Gaining new knowledge from the postgraduate degree allied to their undergraduate degree resulted in participants being in a better position when they looked for jobs (P16).

Participants who had worked in a career already were motivated to undertake a postgraduate qualification as they realised that they needed additional skills in order to progress within their company (n5). Participant 20 wanted to 'get a better position' in her company and Participant 7 was looking to progress to another job. Some participants wanted to change career (n3) which was not possible without further study (P14, P28).

In a competitive job market in Vietnam and Thailand participants were motivated to study a postgraduate degree as it allowed them to differentiate themselves (P10, P28):

*P38 'And that in my hometown it's just a few people who have this qualification so I will be the main talent.'*

Similarly, Participants 17 and 22 talked about the competitiveness of the job market in the USA and their motivation to come to the UK to study a postgraduate degree to give help them 'stand out' and give themselves an advantage.

For Participant 11 a postgraduate degree would give him a 'global perspective' and allow him to compete on worldwide basis for jobs. He also felt that a postgraduate qualification would be needed in the future to gain a job in Malaysia.



The value of studying a postgraduate degree had already been realised by Participant 20 who had been offered a job in his previous company for when he had completed his degree. Similarly, Participant 11 had just received an offer of a job from a Malaysian company due to the fact that he was studying a Masters in Marketing Communications.

The majority of participants intended to return to their home countries to work. However, two participants wanted to work in the UK and Europe (P26, P13).

Secondly, participants were motivated to study a postgraduate degree in the UK to improve their English language skills (n3) and understand the culture so they searched for types of information concerning these subjects. English language ability and cultural understanding would help them when being interviewed for jobs or working in foreign companies (P1).

*P23 'I wanted to do an MBA in a foreign country in order to improve my English. I wanted to be able to argue my case and express myself in meetings which were conducted in English [...] to write emails and do conference meetings.'*

English language skills were also important for those participants who were going to run their family business and needed to negotiate with foreign business partners (P24).

The third motivation to study a postgraduate qualification was linked to entrepreneurship and participants looked for information to reassure them that they would gain entrepreneurial skills through their postgraduate study. Eleven of the participants were the children of entrepreneurs who were running their own businesses in Thailand (n6), Vietnam (n3), Cambodia (n1) and India (n1). Seven participants were motivated to study a postgraduate degree to gain the skills necessary to return home to work in the family business in Thailand (P1, P5, P24, P33, P39), Vietnam (P29) and Cambodia (P4).

There were twelve participants who wanted to set up their own business half of which were the children of entrepreneurs. Their rationale for studying a postgraduate qualification was to develop their knowledge, skills and English

language capability to enable them to run a successful business. They also wanted to study a postgraduate degree in the UK rather than in Asia as they felt that they would be able to develop their ability to think independently and creatively and to use their imagination, which would help them become entrepreneurs (P32).

Participant 12 chose to study a Masters in entrepreneurship in order to become an entrepreneur. Other students chose to study management or marketing courses to gain the requisite skills such as planning (P34).

Participants acknowledged the importance of gaining the experience of living and studying in the UK to help them become entrepreneurs. Participant 32 wanted to open a backpackers' hostel in Thailand or launch a student's cosmetics product and for this she needed to gain experience. Participant 34 wanted to set up a fitness business exporting to foreign countries. Participant 29 had decided to open a computer shop alongside working in his family business. Participant 23 planned to work for a few years and then find an educational product that she could market in China. For Participant 4, who was also going to both work in the family business and set up her own business, studying gave her time to reflect on the business she could launch as well as giving her the life experience she needed. The desire to learn more about digital and information technology, build connections in order to market products abroad and 'try to build my own empire' was Participant 21's motivation to study a postgraduate qualification.

Regarding other motivations to study for a postgraduate degree there was only one participant who was motivated to study a postgraduate qualification for personal reasons:

*P16 'I am doing it firstly for my career and future wise. Secondly for my family [...] In my whole extended family I'm the first one so it's something to make them proud. The third one it's for me at the end.'*

Participant 14 was the only student who wanted to remain within academia and find a part time job as a lecturer.

### 5.3.2 Country Types of Information

The types of information searched for by participants during the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making cycle when deciding on the country and city to study in and the university and the course to choose and then purchase will now be considered.

When deciding on which country to study in a range of types of information were used by participants. The reputation and quality of the UK education system was an important type of information which encouraged participants to study in the UK (n11). Participants from different countries had a positive perception of UK degrees and institutions as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Participants' Responses on the UK's Reputation for Education

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Quote from Interview</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>
P14	<i>I had always wanted to have a UK degree, a British qualification.</i>	Mauritius
P16	<i>My dad wants her to go outside as it's a better degree in the UK.</i>	Syria
P21	<i>The UK has one of the finest education systems in the world [...] It was the quality of education that motivated me want to come here</i>	Ghana
P23	<i>The professional people that I know in my job recommended that I go to the UK to study because the reputation of the Australian University is not as good as the reputation of the UK Universities.</i>	China
P29	<i>I think England has the most academic studying in the world</i>	Vietnam
P30	<i>I think UK is a very good education system and many people in my country want to study in the UK</i>	Vietnam
P31	<i>UK is a very good country about education. It is the leading country</i>	Vietnam
P32	<i>UK is more like famous and there they have the strong education process</i>	Thailand
P36	<i>It's a very well recognised degree. People have a very good impression about you getting a degree. It is considered to be very prestigious.</i>	Bangladesh
P38	<i>UK is the most of everything in their education degree. If you graduate from the UK, whatever university, I think they might be considered as the first country</i>	Thailand

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Participants sought information on the likelihood of being employed in their home countries or overseas if they studied in different countries (n6). If the postgraduate degree was well recognised by employers in their home country, then there was more chance of securing employment there. Participant 32 chose the UK rather than New Zealand because Thai employers acknowledged the quality of the UK's education system.

Similarly, the positive reputation of a UK postgraduate education in Jordan (P16), Vietnam (P3, P25) and Thailand (P28, P39) amongst employers led to enhanced opportunities for postgraduates to obtain jobs and gain an increased salary.

Participants wanted information on the UK Government's visa policy to understand whether they could work in the UK during or after their studies. This information discouraged some prospective postgraduates from coming to the UK to study because they would find it hard to find job opportunities in the UK within the three month period that their visas gave them. Participant 30 highlighted the more favourable visa policy in Canada and Australia which allowed postgraduates to find jobs in the host country on graduation.

Information regarding whether participants were allowed to travel back to their home countries during study under the current visa regulations was important to participants. Participant 29 chose the UK rather than the US as a study destination as the UK visa policy on exiting and entering the UK during study was more flexible. He could therefore go back home to see his relatives as he wanted to.

Participants looked at information on the weather in different countries when investigating countries to study in. Those from more tropical climates preferred the weather in the USA or Australia compared to that in the UK. Participant 23 did not want to come to the UK to study because of the climate:

*P23 '...in the UK everything is foggy [...] Everything is very dark and cold here. I like everything to be bright and shiny, so it is not my choice to be here.'*

The level of tuition fees in different countries was an important consideration for participants when comparing countries to study in (n3). The fees in the UK were found to be lower than other countries which attracted participants to study there.

The duration of study for a postgraduate degree was a type of information that was important when choosing a country for study (n10). The one-year postgraduate degree in the UK compared to longer degrees in other countries encouraged many of the participants to study in the UK. After a year of study, they could get on with their careers (P25, P32, P36).

Participants decided against studying in the USA (P4, P16, P23), Canada (P21) and Australia (P20, P27, P28) because of the length of the degree. Participant 32 decided not to study in Thailand as it could take three years to complete a postgraduate qualification whilst students worked alongside their studies.

Participants considered information on the distance between the participant's home country and the host country when deciding which country to choose. For Participant 16 the USA was not an option as a study destination as it would take too long to return to his home country of Jordan during his studies. Participant 22 from the USA considered studying in Australia but was deterred by the distance in case he needed to get home.

An important type of information to participants was the profile and size of the population of overseas students in different countries (n4). Some participants wanted to study with students of their own nationality, so they chose countries where there was a large cohort of students from their home country. According to participants from Indonesia, China and Bangladesh many of their fellow students went to study in Australia (P13, P23). Participant 36 noted the recent popularity of Australia amongst Cambodians as a study destination. For Participant 30 the lack of Vietnamese students in Australia was a reason to decide not to study there, despite the fact that the visa policy enabled her to look for work after her postgraduate degree.

Participant 23 searched for information on the age profile of postgraduates studying in various countries as she wanted to meet people like herself who were older and had work experience. She chose to come to the UK due an older and more experienced postgraduate population.

Participants sought information on how safe it was to study in the UK as a country. Then they investigated the crime rates in the specific cities under consideration. Participant 23 decided not to study in America because she did not perceive it to be safe:

*P23 'I got a lot of negative information about America, about the schools, about the gangs. I think America is really dangerous.'*

Participants chose countries to study in that were English speaking (n3). The type of English used in different countries was of interest to some participants. Participant 11 preferred the UK as Cambridge English was spoken. Information regarding the culture in different countries was also desired as it helped participants to understand if they would adjust easily to the culture there (n2).

### 5.3.3 City Types of Information

When deciding on a city to study in various types of information were used. Motivations to choose a city were often diametrically opposed which should be understood by national agencies and individual universities.

Participants sought information on the weather to help them choose a city to study in and to eliminate from their shortlists cities that they had learnt had a poorer climate (n4). The importance of gaining information on the weather was understandable as the cold weather sometimes caused health issues for participants (P29). Many participants avoided studying in Scotland and the North of England as they perceived that the climate would be too cold for them. Participant 9 was advised by people at home that he would not be able to 'bear the winter' in Scotland.

The location of the city was a key type of information for participants when choosing where to study. Participants 22 and 26 chose to study in the city next to the University than other cities as they felt that it was in a good location close to London. Other participants decided on the city because they specifically wanted 'a city outside London' (P36) and to move away from London (P21) as it was too crowded (P19). The location of the city near tourist destinations, the countryside and the coast were other types of information required by participants (P17).

The weather caused some universities to be eliminated from shortlists (P27) or to be retained as the weather was perceived to be more favourable (P17, P22). However, participants were not prepared for the shock of the weather on arrival (P32).

Another type of information that was used to assess the city was its size. Participants 17 and 23 chose the city as it was the right size, so it had countryside nearby.

Information about safety and crime rates in each city was examined by some participants when deciding which city to study in (P17, P33). Participant 14 considered the safety of the city to be of importance to her because she was an international student and coming to the UK by herself.

*P14 ... [the city] was classified as one of the safest cities. So being afraid and an international student this is what I have also considered.'*

WOM information from a friend influenced Participant 23's decision to choose the city as it was safer than Birmingham which had 'a lot of thieves'.

The cost of living (n4) was a type of information that participants looked at. They researched the average rent (P17) and compared living costs (P1).

The environment in the city was the most important type of information for participants (n13) as it impacted on their lifestyle as a student. Participants gained this information from current students or alumni who had lived in the

city. The city was perceived to be a peaceful, (P29, P32) and relatively quiet (P29) (n5), clean and nice (n5) city which was easy to live in (P29) with friendly people which was good for international students:

*P36 'People are very nice and friendly and always very helpful. The environment, I think is very good for international students.'*

Compared to other cities there was a large population of students and young people (P13) and activities for them to do.

Participants wanted information on the profile of industries in the city as they wanted to gain exposure to businesses whilst at university and opportunities to network. The city was perceived to be a creative city (P16) with a reputation for business. The ethnic population in the city was also of interest to participants who wanted to find out how many of their own nationality lived there. For Participant 4 the fact that there were a high proportion of Cambodians in the city to support the student, was a positive reason to choose to study there.

#### 5.3.4 University and Course Types of Information

The types of information participants used when choosing a university and a course will now be considered.

The course and the curricula were the most important types of information when deciding on the universities that should be in participants' choice sets, which courses to apply to and which universities to attend (n27). Participants used information on course curricula to compare courses offered by one or a number of universities (P11). The modules offered in the course often became the point of differentiation between different universities and the reason to choose one university (P36).

Websites provided information to participants on the courses and curricula to help them decide on the course to choose. Websites that facilitated the comparison of a university's courses were appreciated by participants (P10).



A university website that provided comprehensive, well-structured information on the course curricula was praised by Participant 4 and led to her decision to study at the university. If a university had a number of business courses this was seen as a commitment by participants to business and so helped to position the university in a more positive light (P27).

Participants wanted to find courses in Global Marketing (P16), Public Relations (P15) and Corporate Communications (P14), social media marketing and digital marketing (P13) but were unsuccessful and ended up studying marketing communications. Participant 29 wanted to return to the University to study digital marketing which was desired by employers in Vietnam.

A few participants wanted to study an MBA rather than an MSc because it was perceived to be a more prestigious qualification in their home countries. However they did not have the prior work experience to allow them to study the course at the University:

*P30 'Because in my country [Vietnam] [...] they think that MBA is a higher qualification more than other MSc because they think this MSc is more academic, is not related to reality.'*

Participants therefore applied to universities who accepted students onto the MBA without any experience such as the London campus of CO University or C University.

One of the most searched for types of information was the overall reputation of the university (n10). For many participants the reputation of the university, as evidenced in the rankings and student satisfaction rates, was a key choice factor (P23, P34):

*P36 'My reason for choosing [the University] is that it has quite a good reputation. It has the highest student satisfaction rate.'*

The reputation of the university in the home country was important as participants wanted to return to their countries to obtain jobs and needed employers to positively perceive the university they had studied at. Alumni with

a favourable impression of their university would go back to their home country to work and would communicate the benefits of their university to employers and other influencers. They would therefore help to improve the university's reputation in the market.

Rankings were an important type of information (n20). Participant 15 perceived that the university ranking was more important than a reputation as a prestigious university and chose to attend the University rather than B University because the course was ranked higher. Similarly, the ranking of the university was a more important type of information than the city that the university was located in. Participant 27 decided against studying at a university in Cambridge even though he wanted to live in the city as the ranking was lower.

Another key type of information for participants, as they were planning to study business subjects, was the university's reputation for business or a specific business subject or course (n5). This information helped participants to put together a list of possible universities, screen the list and then choose a university. Participant 11 relied on the reputation of universities for business and business courses to decide which university to attend. A positive reputation for business programmes communicated by alumni was perceived to be a reason to choose the University (P12).

Linked to the positioning of the University as expert in business and business subjects was the offer of attendance at the Distinguished Business Address series which influenced the decision of Participant 21 to join the university.

As employability was a key motivator for participants, the need to find a university which had a good reputation for links with the business community and whose postgraduate alumni had found work after graduating, was evident (P16). The University's reputation for business courses was communicated to prospective students through online reviews and through WOM recommendation from friends (P24) or agents (P26):

*P26 'They [agent] told me that it is a very new university and they are very good with business because of their new business building.'*

Participants looked for information on tuition fees once they had a list of universities to assess. This information helped participants to decide which universities should be eliminated from their lists, and which universities they should apply to and enrol in. Participants were looking for tuition fees which were 'affordable' (P3, P11), and 'not too high' (P26, P29) and this became a reason to recommend the University to prospective postgraduate students.

There was an appreciation amongst participants that the fees did not necessarily reflect the quality of the educational service provided:

*P10 'I did have a research on the [B University] but I think that the tuition fee is a reason that encouraged me to choose [the University] because it's the same quality.'*

There was also an understanding that the tuition fees charged by universities were based on their reputation and ranking. Participants acknowledged that the better the reputation of the university and the higher in the rankings, the more expensive were the tuition fees:

*P16 'I chose the rankings, the programme they offered, and money wise if I want to go for a very high ranked university, I need to pay a lot of money.'*

Participant 32 decided to attend the University even though it charged more than some other universities because it had a good reputation. Gaining an alumni discount off the tuition fees or a scholarship were also important considerations when choosing the University (P11).

Linked to some universities with higher fees was the need to pay a fee to apply to the university. The application fee of £200 deterred Participant 11 from applying to W and L universities.

The cost of living in the area was a type of financial information that also impacted on participants' choice of university which was also a consideration when choosing a city.

The entry requirements for a university and their courses were an important type of information for participants as they could preclude them from studying at the University. Some universities required applicants to have achieved a 2:1 in their undergraduate degrees. Others would accept a 2:2 which was a reason for participants to shortlist the University.

International students were required to pass an IELTS test or equivalent for entry into UK universities. However, some universities waived this requirement if the prospective postgraduate had been studying in English in a partner institution. This saved the participants time and money and made the application process much easier. For Participant 38 the agent's list of universities that did not require an IELTS test became her choice set of universities to evaluate.

Participants wanted information on the ethnic mix of the student population at a university. They would gather this information from students or from online sources if they did not know anyone. For some participants, especially those from collectivist cultures, it was important to have a large cohort of students from their home country at the university so there would be a support network of students on arrival and the possibility of friendship groups. Six participants mentioned the importance of forming friendship groups, so they opted to study in countries and universities where their friends were studying. Vietnamese Participant 35 came to the University with her friends and now lived in a house with them. A Bangladeshi participant wanted to study in universities in Canada or Australia because all his friends were over there and he could become part of a community (P20). Participant 30 wanted to study an MBA in CO University in London that did not require work experience. However, her sister recommended the University as she would have a Vietnamese community and the opportunity to join friendship groups there.

Fear of being lonely and not having friends were factors that led Participant 38 to decide to study at the University where there were many Thai students:

*P38 'And then I have a lot of friends who study here [...] Make me feel better [...] cos I have friends here.'*

Other participants deliberately avoided attending a university with too many students from their home country. The disadvantage to Participant 1 of the high number of Thai postgraduates in classes at the University was that he was not improving his English sufficiently.

Many participants wanted to attend a university with a mix of different nationalities so they could get to know people from different countries, learn about their cultures and practice their English (P27, P16). This would benefit them later on when they were working for global corporations or negotiating with foreign business partners. Participant 9 lacked international exposure at his previous C University as 70% of postgraduates were Indian, so he selected the University as there were few Indians there. Similarly, Participant 23 chose the University as it was not in the top twenty ranked universities so Chinese students did not opt to study there. These participants were benefitting from mixed nationality groups which allowed them to meet people of different nationalities in class and outside class.

Information concerning the student experience and what kind of lifestyle they could expect when studying at a university was required by participants. In order to find this information participants asked their friends who had experience of universities for advice, or looked at online reviews, rather than university generated communications materials. Participant 31's friends wanted 'real information' about his 'real experience' at the University.

The opinions of participants' friends regarding student life were more important to them than comments about the course they were thinking of studying. They wanted to know whether the lifestyle would suit them in the city, how students studied and if they would experience 'good living' (P27,P34). They were interested in information on the 'environment' in the university and what there was to do there (P13). Participants also desired information on the 'atmosphere around the university' which was described by Participant 39 in the following terms:

*P39 'They explain when they study in the class and how about the friend, the teacher that they're friendly. It's good like that.'*

Some participants took videos and photos and posted them on social media. Participant 32 posted on Instagram every time she went to visit another town. Participant 24 would film videos in class and around the university and post them on Facebook. Their friends back in their home countries followed them as their posts gave them a clearer picture of what life was like for a student at the University.

Linked to a positive student lifestyle was the need for information on how easy it was for students to adapt to the university environment and to the culture in the UK. Some participants decided to return to the University to study because they felt that it was easier to adapt to an existing institution and learning environment than go to a new university.

Information regarding the ease of adaptation of students to the UK culture was provided by some participants when talking to their friends back in their home countries. Participant 11 felt that it was easy to adapt to the culture in the UK as he was from Malaysia which had a similar culture.

As part of the lifestyle they would experience in the foreign institution, participants wanted to find information on whether the academic staff were friendly and helpful. Having lecturers that were supportive helped participants to learn more effectively, understand the subject and do the assessments well. Universities were classified as good places to study if the lecturers offered support (P30). Participants felt more confident to ask questions if lecturers were enthusiastic, approachable and easy to contact, offered support and responded quickly to email queries (P30, P32).

Participants had experience in their home countries of lecturers that were not interested in supporting students and did not 'care' about their students, so they wanted to ensure that this was not the case in the UK university (P29). The friendliness of the academic staff contributed to making the experience of being a student at the University better than expected (P31).

Non-academic staff support was equally important in delivering a positive student experience and participants wanted to find information on whether they

cared for their students (P10), looked after them, helped them ease into the new environment and were easy to contact (P13). Information on the helpfulness and friendliness of the staff working in the university assisted participants in deciding on the universities they should investigate further (P16).

Participants were interested in finding out information on the teaching quality, teaching style and assessments at universities as this information impacted on their student experience. For this information they would seek WOM comments from friends or online reviews.

The teaching quality and style was often considered by participants to be different to that which they had experienced before which was a positive reason to recommend the University to others. They were encouraged to demonstrate independent and creative thinking in class and in assessments and express their ideas in workshops, so they found the subjects easier to understand:

*P32 'They teach like the easy way to help student to understand and use the imagination or creativity compared to Asian country where teacher will teach everything, but students don't have an opportunity to answer.'*

Participant 2 was encouraged to critique literature which developed her personal skills:

*P2 'But here I can critique [...] In Asia people tell me what to do and I follow them and I will get my mark.'*

Participants sought information on whether the teaching style would encourage them to develop practical skills and apply theory to workplace situations so they could develop the skills required to run their own businesses or gain employment (P25, P10, P2, P32, P5).

Information on the student to staff ratio, class sizes and the number of large lectures was required by participants as it gave them an indication of how much attention and support each student would receive, and the opportunities to interact with their peers and the lecturer in class to learn about different cultures (P22).

Participants perceived exams as being stressful and not useful for the workplace so they wanted to gain information about their assessments and how many exams they would need to sit (P32).

Linked to the motivation to study a postgraduate qualification to progress careers was the need to obtain information on employability statistics, career prospects for different courses, and jobs obtained by postgraduates (P10, P29). Participants researched careers online and which university courses led to the greatest number of possible job opportunities or self-employment (P11, P15).

Participants were also interested in finding out about opportunities to gain work experience whilst studying at university and how the university would support them when looking for jobs:

*P15 'And what really drove me [...] they said that they were going to help international students get jobs. Because that is my biggest worry.'*

Opportunities to meet employers at careers fairs and gain job interviews whilst at the university were also important types of information that helped participants when choosing universities (P18).

The messages regarding employability and gaining work opportunities were communicated by university websites and also by university representatives abroad to encourage prospective postgraduates to enrol (P30).

For some participants information regarding the availability of the January start date was a reason to retain the university on their shortlist and reject those universities that could not offer this (P38). Some participants wanted to spend one semester in their home university and then two semesters at the UK university and this information helped them to screen out universities from their lists (P28).

Information on the facilities provided by the university including the accommodation (P39), sports centre and student union was required by



participants as they contributed to a positive postgraduate experience and helped to screen universities from their shortlists. The modernity of the facilities and the high level of technology used impacted on participants' impression of the facilities and ultimately the university (P28). If a university was perceived to have 'very advanced' facilities (P23) and 'high technology' (P7, P32), current students would recommend the university to prospective students to encourage them to enrol.

Participants wanted information on the library facilities, size and opening hours of the library and the availability of books, databases and computers. A library that opened 24 hours a day was of benefit to participants and differentiated one university from others (P2, P26).

The size of the library offering space to study (P30) and the availability of a large quantity of databases, books and computers in the library were types of information that were also differentiators (P29) compared to other university libraries such as that in CO University's London campus (P30).

Once participants had applied to universities they would be sent the types of information that would help them to make the final decision of university to study in. The information provided would help to cement the relationship between the university and the participant and reassure the participant that they were making the right choice. It was often instrumental in turning the applicant into a purchaser of the postgraduate course.

The speed with which the University processed the application and offered applicants a place was a reason to accept a place to study at the University (P5, P9, P14, P15, P31, P32, P38). Many participants made the decision to come to the University as they received an offer before other universities had communicated an offer to them (P16, P26):

*P 27 '[The University] came back to me with an offer first. And [DM University] called me and asked me why don't I choose [DM University] and I said that it's a bit late to give me back an offer and [the University] responded better.'*

Some universities required additional information to process the application and this led to participants accepting the offer from the University rather than providing the additional information (P14).

Participants searched for a wide variety of types of information when deciding on a country, city, course and university to attend. Understanding the information needs of prospective postgraduates can help the UK Government to position the UK as a study destination and universities to provide the types of information required so potential postgraduates can make informed decisions.

#### 5.4 Gaps in Information Provision Pre Purchase

This section explores the information that the participants felt was missing during the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making cycle and how the information provided structured expectations in line with objective 3 and research questions 10 and 11.

Participants wanted information on the ease of the application process for prospective postgraduates and they felt that this information was missing. It was not until Participant 11 started applying to different universities that he became aware of the fees charged to apply to them and he aborted the process. Participant 34 from a partner university was not told before he started applying to universities how easy it was to apply to UK universities who were partnered with his home institution. He felt that prospective postgraduates should be informed of the ease of the process and the lack of paperwork.

Prospective postgraduates wanted to know how people from different religions were supported and could not find this information. They had to ask Participant 11 for details:

*P11 'The Muslims asked me if there is any halal food over here. Is there a Prayer room for them?'*

Information on whether the courses carried any accreditations from other bodies for example a CRM or ACCA award was missing as far as Participant 11 was

concerned. Participant 14 wanted to ensure that her course was recognised by the Tertiary Education Commission in her home country to make it easier to apply for jobs and this information was not publicly available to her.

The safety on the university campus, and in the surrounding area, was of utmost importance to some of the participants who did not feel that there was enough information on this to reassure them, especially if they did not have any WOM sources of information. Gaps in information provision resulted in dissatisfaction amongst participants.

However, there were some gaps in information provision that impacted positively on participants when they arrived at the University and resulted in enhanced satisfaction levels. The information provided prior to arrival from the website and WOM communication concerning the modernity of the University and the facilities provided had structured participants' expectations at a low level. On arrival at the University many participants thought that the facilities were better than they had expected (P5, P7, P8, P31, P37) which contributed positively to their satisfaction levels. Participant 33 described how he felt when he first saw the new Business School building:

*P33 'As I first see the old library building. I am not expecting the business building. It's beautiful'*

Overall there were not many gaps in information provision highlighted by participants when evaluating countries, cities, universities and then making applications and the final purchase. On the whole there was a surfeit of information available to participants and they did not complain of frustration in not being able to obtain information.

### 5.5 Sources and Types of Information Post Purchase

The following section firstly explores the sources of information used by participants and the types of information they required immediately after purchase and then secondly when studying at the university in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle in line with objective 2 and

research questions 6 and 7. The contribution of participants to the pool of information available to current students is discussed in line with objective 5 and research question 9

Once participants had purchased a postgraduate degree they were given access to a portal which provided them with comprehensive information on timetables, accommodation and other queries such as what to do for the visa. Participant 16 looked on the welcome website for tips on coming to the university and how to stay safe.

The communications post purchase were mainly by email. Accepted applicants sent many email queries to the various departments to have their questions answered (P2) on accommodation (P1, P14, P16, P24, P26, P27, P36), the deposit, tuition fees, modules, timetables (P16), visa applications (P6, P36), transport, restaurants, local tourist activities (P16), employment, finance and the weather.

The importance of university staff replying promptly to email queries was stressed by Participant 13 who wanted replies to relieve her 'anxieties.' Once again agents acted as a valuable source of information for participants between the purchase of their degree and arriving at the university. Many agents kept in touch with participants up to the point that they left for the UK and provided information on where they should live, accommodation options (P14), health checks, the weather, how to prepare for the visa interview and payment of fees (P15).

There was little evidence of social media being used in the post application stage to reassure respondents that they had made the right choice of university. Participant 15 was the only student who mentioned going on social media, in this case Twitter, to look at student reviews to reaffirm the decision she had made.

On arrival at university the information needs of participants, regarding the sources of information and the types of information, required were varied. Current students were the most important source of practical and academic

information to participants. Even when understanding academic requirements current students were a significant source of information (P33):

*P32 'I am looking for [...] how to apply the knowledge or how to write down the British style [...] so I looking for the lecturer but mostly I asked my friends.'*

Participants who had previously studied at the University, became a valuable source of information for those who had just arrived (P25):

*P11 'The UK for them is like a new world for them so I take a lot of time to explain to them what is [The University] and around the area.'*

*P28 'I found a friend here who came before I do so, and she taught me everything I need to know.'*

Advice from the participants' friends and friendship groups contributed to the pool of information they used. They provided academic information on how to do the assessments, write reports, prepare for exams and time management (P1, P10, P20). Participants put themselves together into study groups of mixed nationalities (P3, P27, P33) to help each other when preparing for assessments.

Friendship groups helped participants to overcome any acculturative stress and adjust to life in the UK which for participants took between one month and a year (P7, P8, P11, P25, P31, P32):

*P34 'After first month I feel more confident. I think it is because I have more friends.'*

Those participants who did not join friendship or study groups required more support from university sources of information such as lecturers and non-academic staff. They found it harder to adjust to life at the university and to succeed in assessments (P19, P20, P21). Participants referred to the 'struggle' they experienced (P4) and reported feeling homesick (P14, P16, P33), lonely and depressed (P36).

Participant 34 arrived at the University and it was not until he found some friends that it became less challenging for him:

P34 *'I feel I don't know what I had to do [...] it was easier for me when I find my Thai friends.'*

Student societies played an important role in providing information to participants and supporting them at the university and so added to the pool of information available to them. The Vietnamese society gave practical information and advice on accommodation, transport and living in the city to participants prior to arrival and once at the university (P35). The Chinese Society provided information on how to succeed in assessments (P29).

Staff were an important source of information for participants. Many participants commented positively on the information that was provided by the academic and non-academic staff and the level of support that they provided to students. Staff were found to be friendly, helpful and enthusiastic which contributed to a good student experience (P30, P16), which exceeded participants' expectations (P3) and contributed to student satisfaction levels (P16, P2, P6, P9).

For participants the key question that they sought information on was:

P26 *'And how can I graduate? How can I get a better mark?'*

For Participant 2 the lecturers were vital in helping her to adapt to academic study at the university:

P2 *'It was such a tough journey [...] I was really lost and I did not have the right direction [...] but the professors they guided me quite a lot.'*

Participants were satisfied with the induction events that they had attended where they had gained information on report writing, referencing, the library, accessing their marks and Blackboard (P1). Those who had less specific induction briefings missed out on receiving this information (P31).

On arrival participants appreciated the student ambassadors who guided new students around the University and gave them advice on bank accounts and registration (P20). The international student representative (P4) and staff at the accommodation fair (P4) also helped participants.

In terms of the sources of information supplied by the University its own website (P19) and the Information point (P20, P9, P12) were popular sources.

Participants found it easy to obtain information from the Information point and gained answers to their questions concerning navigating the university campus and rooms, applying for a visa, getting student ID, English language support, grades and timetables (P2).

Participants visited the IT Help desk (P6) and Visa hub (P6). Through the Careers Hub (P32, P35) they gained information on part time jobs (P15), graduate roles (P3) and writing a CV (P2).

Academic information was obtained from the library databases, books, (P1, P2, P24), Google (P3), the University website (P5), Blackboard (P4), staff and friends.

Google was a valuable source of local information. Participants looked for information on restaurants (P1), shopping, transport to the university and other cities (P34, P8, P1), social events (P16), local activities and tourism (P8, P16) by performing Google searches.

In the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle participants obtained different types of information from various sources. Universities need to understand the information requirements of international postgraduates in this stage and encourage students to contribute to the pool of information available to other students whilst at university.

### [5.6 Gaps in Information Provision Post Purchase and influence on Satisfaction](#)

This section discusses any gaps in information provision for participants immediately after they purchased a postgraduate degree and then when they were studying at the University and considers the influence of missing information on participants' satisfaction levels linked to objective 3 and research questions 10 and 12.

Before international postgraduates arrived at university some participants felt that information was missing to reassure them about their transition to study. They felt such information would help their 'post arrival adaptation and resilience' and combat 'loneliness' and so improve satisfaction (P11). Participant 11 suggested that information on the health and wellbeing service, campus navigation, events to attend and what to bring should be provided by email. Participant 16 recommended a virtual tour of the University on the website for prospective postgraduates to see what the university was like (P16).

Participants felt that changes could be made to the channels the University used to communicate with international postgraduates prior to arrival so that they could have their questions answered directly. Participants 14 and 35 recommended having an online conversation with postgraduates on WhatsApp and interacting with them on Reddit, Quora, Facebook and Twitter.

There was a need amongst participants to get to know fellow students before they arrived. Participants suggested that social media accounts and Facebook groups be set up for different segments of postgraduates (P16) and that partner universities should host pre departure events (P35).

These initiatives prior to the arrival of international postgraduates at the University would meet their information needs and contribute to their level of satisfaction with the University.

Initiatives were suggested by participants to help international postgraduates on arrival to meet other students and adapt to the University such as specific international postgraduate events and campus tours (P16), city tours, a buddy system, cultural and language exchange events (P11) and English language tuition (P13).

Once participants were at university the majority had been able to access the information they needed to answer any questions that they had. They did not feel that there was any missing information:



P5 'I have the information when I wanted the information. I would go to the [The University] website, ask the teacher, ask my friends in the class. It's very nice.'

Participants found information easy to access compared to previous universities (P5) and had a positive experience of obtaining information (P2). This meant that they were not uncertain about anything (P18) and that they had high levels of satisfaction.

Table 5.4 shows the level of satisfaction of participants whilst at university when they were asked to rate their satisfaction from one to ten (with ten being the highest level of satisfaction), or from Low (L) to High (H).

Table 5.4 Participants' Satisfaction Ratings

Participant #	Satisfaction Rating	Participant #	Satisfaction Rating
1	L	22	H
2	H	23	H
3	7	24	10
4	H	25	8 - 9
6	8	26	7 - 8
7	9	27	8
8	8	28	10
9	9	29	7
10	8	30	7
12	8	31	7
14	H	32	9
15	H	33	9
16	8	34	7
17	8	35	7
18	7	36	8
19	6	37	8
20	10	38	8
21	6	39	8

Legend for Satisfaction	
H	High
L	Low
10	Highest
1	Lowest

Source Author's  
Analysis 2020

Source Author Analysis 2020

Table 5.4 shows that of 36 participants 26 provided a satisfaction rating between 8 and 10 or High. Seven participants rated their satisfaction as a 7. None of the participants provided a rating of below 6. Only one participant rated his satisfaction as Low, so all but this participant were satisfied with their university experience.

There were some instances when participants experienced gaps in information provision whilst at university and this impacted negatively on their satisfaction levels. Participant 2 wanted further information on how to enhance her career prospects and requested activities to help her understand how to do this. The fact that the careers service was less active in the summer when participants were looking for jobs was noted by Participant 3. Participant 15 had arrived at the University expecting to get help to find a part time job and when this help was not evident, she was dissatisfied.

Participant 2 had experience of studying at a university in Japan where students were encouraged to engage in activities outside the classroom to improve their academic and employability skills. She would have liked the University to have provided additional informational events to help improve her skills which would have improved her level of satisfaction.

With regards to missing academic information participants wanted information on academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, marking criteria, SPSS and the course modules so they could make an informed choice (P3, P8, P26, P29). Participant 29 explained that he could obtain all other types of information from his friends, but he lacked information on how to do the assessments:

*P29 'But I think it's enough for us because we only need to survive in the uni environment [...] Everything else we can take care of our self.'*

Participants felt unprepared for the differences between academic study in their home countries and the expectations at the University concerning writing assignments (P3). High performing participants referred to the 'big shock' that they experienced, how hard it was to obtain information to understand what was required of them and how they felt 'down' when they received unexpectedly low marks (P3, P26, P29, P35). It took participants two to twelve months to comprehend what they needed to do (P19, P29) and during this time they were 'confused', 'annoyed' and 'frustrated' (P3, P5). This had a negative impact on their levels of satisfaction:

*P19 'It took 2 months for me to understand how everything is going. So I*

*really lost that time [...] But there is always trial and error with everything. So last semester was an error for me.'*

Some participants missed out on receiving information on their assessments because they did not want to email the lecturers and were not used to having to visit the lecturer in their office at specific times or having to book an appointment with them (P25). They would have been more satisfied if they had been able to visit the lecturers in their offices whenever they wanted to (P3).

Concerning practical information participants sometimes struggled to find the information they required when they first arrived in the city and this led to dissatisfaction. Participants wanted help registering with the doctor (P21) information on the Schengen visa (P1) and transport to the university (P16). Participant 32 and her friend, who arrived in August for a preessional course on campus, did not know where to shop for food:

*P32 'We are so hungry and no one can help us. So we just walk and it's raining. So I found someone, he is just like the maintenance and we just run and say to him that we are hungry [laughs].'*

Many participants wanted information and help to find accommodation especially if they were looking once the semester had started (P24, P30). They were unhappy that the university did not do more to support them and the difficult 'struggle' to search for accommodation impacted negatively on their student experience (P4, P17, P21, P26).

Participant 21 claimed that African postgraduates needed additional information and tuition on the University's IT systems as they did not know how to use the computers or receive emails with important messages on what they should be doing. Weaker IT skills also impacted on their ability to search for information to produce assignments. This lack of support and information led to African postgraduates being dissatisfied.

Similarly, Participant 28 could not find the information that told her how to log into her emails and Blackboard and did not have any friends to ask. This resulted in her missing her induction session.

Participant 1 was 'frustrated' about looking for information on English language tuition to improve his skills and had the lowest level of overall satisfaction with his experience at the University. Participants 6 and 17 were 'angry' and 'very annoyed' with the Finance Department due to receiving a warning email concerning non-receipt of fees when they had tried to pay them and being passed from one individual to another when a Government loan was not being processed. Participant 4 needed advice on how to end her accommodation contract and a letter stating that she would graduate but she was similarly passed from one person and department to another and that resulted in frustration. Participant 2 was in desperate need for information on her visa and perceived the wait for a response negatively. These participants reported their dissatisfaction with their student experience in these cases.

Vietnamese participants complained about having to read text heavy emails to obtain information. They preferred messages relayed to them through video on arrival at the university and throughout their course as they were 'lazy' and did not want to process a lot of text in an email (P29). Participants also wanted all lectures to be recorded so they could review the information provided (P32).

The degree to which participants felt that there were gaps in information provision often depended on the speed of their adjustment to the university environment, their profile and prior experiences. Those participants who were more mature (P24), had already studied in a foreign country (P4, P9, P28), had studied the University qualifications in their home university (P11), had prior experience of travelling abroad (P27, P36) including the UK (P14, P33, P34), had worked abroad (P32) or mixed with foreigners who spoke English at school (P29) were less likely to experience acculturative stress. These participants often did not perceive that they were lacking information.

Friendship groups helped participants adjust to the culture shock of being in the UK as did a positive mental attitude and clear goals regarding what they wanted to achieve. For Participant 19 studying at the University fulfilled his 'dream' and this helped him to cope with any adjustment challenges or a lack of information. Overall, gaps in information provision did negatively influence participants' satisfaction levels which has implications for universities' communications.

## 5.7 Information Behaviour in relation to Kuhlthau's Information Search

### Process Stages

In this section the information behaviour of participants is related to the stages in Kuhlthau's ISP model. Participants went through the stages in the ISP model as they searched for information to enable them to make the decision whether to study a postgraduate qualification and then which qualification to purchase. In the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle when participants were at university, they went through the ISP stages when making an important decision or completing an assignment.

It was found that in the need recognition, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post purchase stages of the decision making cycle participants went through the stages in Kuhlthau's model, initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation, to a greater or lesser extent. The links between the decision making cycle stages and Kuhlthau's model are shown in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5 Kuhlthau Information Search Process (ISP) linked to Decision Making Cycle stages

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Appropriate task and description</b>	<b>Feelings (Affective)</b>	<b>Thoughts (cognitive)</b>	<b>Actions (physical) in stages</b>	<b>Stages in decision making cycle</b>
Initiation	Recognise: lack of knowledge of topic	Uncertainty	General and vague	Seek background information	Need recognition
Selection	Identify: topic and approach to take	Optimism		Seek relevant information	Evaluation of alternatives
Exploration	Investigate: information on general topic	Confusion, Frustration, Doubt			
Formulation	Formulate: Explore information on focused topic	Clarity	Narrowed /clearer	Seek relevant or focused information	(Application)
Collection	Gather: information on focused topic	Sense of Direction, Confidence	Increased interest		
Presentation	Complete: search and use findings	Satisfaction or disappointment	Clearer or focused		
					Purchase Post Purchase evaluation

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Kuhlthau (2004 p.82)

In the need recognition stage of the decision making cycle participants acknowledged the need to search for information to help them to make the decision whether they should study a postgraduate qualification. This corresponds with stage one of Kuhlthau's model, Initiation. Once they had decided to study a postgraduate degree, participants would then search for information to inform their decisions of which country, city, university and course to choose. They would go through the other stages in Kuhlthau's model or skip stages depending on how important they considered the decision to be.

Once participants recognised that they had a need to study a postgraduate qualification, they entered the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision making cycle. They were still at stage one of Kuhlthau's model, Initiation and began to think about how they would search for background information to help them make their decision as to where to study. They were often uncertain and apprehensive about the about the process of searching for information. Many had the option of studying a postgraduate qualification in any country, city and university that they had the qualifications to apply to, and the thought of gaining the information to make an informed decision was very daunting:

*P16 'In the beginning I had the need, which was that I want to do a Masters, but then I was like really uncertain about looking for universities.'*

Participant 17 decided to start investigating universities a year before she enrolled. Faced with the choice of numerous universities and countries she felt overwhelmed by the prospect of searching for information and was 'in an emotional state.'

In the next stage of Kuhlthau's model, Selection, participants decided how they would search for relevant information on countries, cities, universities and courses. A few participants felt optimistic and ready to begin the search:

*P15 'I was satisfied. The timing was good for me [...] I started planning how I can do it [the Masters] outside Kenya.'*

Participant 28 turned to her friends to help her overcome her negative feelings concerning the search process and show her the way forward:

*P28: 'So it was depressing, and I didn't really know where to start but luckily I got a lot of friends who had studied in the UK before [...] I got a lot of recommendations of what to do and where to start researching'*

Similarly, Participant 38 felt 'so confused' and to overcome her confusion she asked her friends and alumni to give her guidance on the information searching process and what she should be looking for.

Participant 9 decided on a strategy for searching for information and evaluating it by comparing his current decision to choose a university with that of a previous decision he had made to study a postgraduate qualification.

In the Exploration stage, participants undertook a broad search for information and gathered facts about different countries and universities to gain further understanding of the options available. The focus of participants' efforts was to become adequately informed about the different countries and universities so they could reject some options at later stages and reach a decision. However, the sheer volume of information collected and the large number of options available made it difficult for participants to sort through the information to help them come to a decision. Participant 9 spoke of how confused and uncertain he had been when trying to assess all the information he had gathered on fifty universities and two different courses:

*P9 'In the initial stages it was very confusing because there are 50 mouths saying 50 different things to you and at the end it becomes your choice only. Because people also tend to confuse you because they show you different aspects [...] So, you know, there's all the aspects comes under one roof and it creates a chaos in your mind.'*

Many of the participants started searching for information with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Participant 22 referred to the 'hectic' feelings he had experienced at the start of the information searching process. He thought that finding the information he required to make the final decision as quickly as possible, would result in less uncertainty which meant less stress:

*P22 'I'd say in the beginning it was a bit hectic just cause like in my head I thought I'd need to get this all wrapped up by June which would be good as I would not be stressed out about it throughout the summer.'*

Those who felt overwhelmed experienced a dip in their confidence levels, and some took shortcuts at this stage to move to the next stage and come to a decision quickly. Participants 16, 20 and 27 searched for information but took a shortcut in the Exploration stage, skipped the next stages in Kuhlthau's model and decided which university to apply to. This is further discussed in section 5.10.

When searching for information on universities in the UK, Participant 37 found conflicting and inconsistent information which made him feel confused and uncertain. On the one hand people were telling him to study for a postgraduate qualification in order to get a better job back in Brazil. Whereas on the other hand, people indicated that he would be better off deciding not to study and to save his money.

Those participants who perceived a high level of risk in the purchase and had a lack of WOM sources of information were more rigorous in their search for information. They would evaluate a broad range of countries, universities and courses at this stage. There was therefore a link between the rigour with which the decision making process was approached and the rigour of the information searching process. This is further discussed in section 5.10.

For many of the participants however the search for information was not as comprehensive and they relied on WOM sources such as agents or friends to narrow down the number of universities they initially considered. For these participants the feelings of doubt and confusion at this stage were not as great. Participant 7 found it easy to narrow down the number of universities to one as he relied on advice from alumni who had studied there:

*P7 'No it was not difficult for me to choose a university in the UK as [Thai University 1] has many students who have already studied at [the University] and they gave me advice on why I should study at [the University] and what I should study...'*



In the Formulation stage participants would explore the information they had collected on countries, universities and courses to make decisions on the country to study in and the type of course and university to choose. Their search process became more focused and the goal was to obtain relevant information to help to narrow down their search.

Some participants started broadly researching one type of course in the exploration stage, and then having gathered further information in the formulation stage, they changed their minds and opted to study a different subject. Participants initially searched for information on finance (P14), international management (P21), human resources (P37) hospitality and management (P39) programmes and then decided that these courses were not suitable for them and started to search for information on alternative courses in the formulation stage:

*P37 'Yes I was looking for human resource information for all universities as well. And I was making my decision about human resource or business. But I chose business'*

Participant 13 started looking for information on creative writing and publishing courses in universities in the North of the UK in the exploration stage. She later resumed her search in the formulation stage but focused down on universities in the South offering marketing communications courses.

Other participants researched universities in a number of countries in the exploration stage and then decided on the UK as a country of choice in the formulation stage. Participants looked at Australia (P15, P16, P20,P23), America (P17, P23), Canada (P20, P21) and Switzerland (P39) before deciding at this point to study in the UK:

*P21 'I remember applying for one university in Canada but later I concentrated on the UK because of its one-year Masters programme.'*

Coming into the formulation stage many participants would have a list of universities to consider with alternative options regarding courses offered by these universities. During this stage they would gather information to screen out

universities from their longlists in order to form a shortlist. Participant 14 investigated ten universities in this stage through a systematic search process based on a number of types of information including requirements for academic qualifications. Similarly, Participant 26 researched six universities using a variety of sources and types of information. During this stage these participants were less uncertain and felt more confident about making the final decision based on the information they had gathered.

Participant 10 used her friends and online sources to help her decide what postgraduate qualification she should study. Her initial confusion in the exploration stage was replaced by a sense of clarity in the formulation stage:

*P10 '.. at first I was confused as to whether I should take marketing or marketing communications. But then I was just going through things and I decided to take the same one.'*

Other participants continued to feel anxious and confused at this stage about searching for information and trying to evaluate the information they had gathered. This was especially the case if participants were trying to evaluate different types of information from a large number of sources. They felt overwhelmed by the volume of information they had to process. Participant 39 referred to the confusion she felt when needing to decipher the information she had gained on P University and the University from online sources, the agents and her friends. Even though she had undertaken a search for information from a number of sources she still felt uncertain:

*P39: 'A bit confused. Yeah. Cause I don't know how about [P University][...] And how about [the University]. I also got a lot of information [...] that my friend and also agency recommend me.'*

During the Collection stage participants would look for additional focused and relevant information that would help them make a final shortlist of universities to apply to. Once they had applied and received offers from universities of a place on a course, some participants continued to search for information to help them reach their final decision.

Participant 9 chose nine universities out of the fifty he had evaluated to apply to. When he received nine offers he was confused as to which university he should choose. He ended up abandoning the search process and taking a shortcut to making the decision based on emotional criteria:

*P9 'During the time of [C University] I had a lot of confusions. I had offer letters from around nine universities so out of nine universities, it was very difficult for me to choose one. [...] I chose [the University] because they were the first one to give me an offer [...] So I would say I just went with my gut feeling.'*

Other shortcuts taken during the information searching process are discussed in section 5.10.

For Participant 28 the fact that she had little time available to search for information to help her decide on universities to apply to, and had not undertaken the degree of information search that she wanted, led to negative feelings at this time:

*P28 'I was depressed because [...] I only spent two months deciding and choosing universities [...] So I didn't have that much time to do the research.'*

Participant 14 was unsure whether she had made the right decision to come to the university despite a systematic search for information. She recounted her feelings from the point that decided on studying at the University in April until she arrived in September:

*P14 'At times I would say that I felt nervous which is quite normal; a different place, a different county in Europe and then excited. A mixture [...] And then a little concerned [...] I don't know how the British [...] assessments would be like [...] so I was quite worried.'*

For other participants the feelings of uncertainty diminished as they made their final decision as to which university to choose. They felt more confident that the information searching process that they had gone through had led to the right decision. To a certain extent this depended on the rigour with which they had approached the information searching process and the degree to which they had gone through its stages. This is further discussed in section 5.10.

Participant 36 was an example of a participant who gathered facts about universities and different courses and systematically screened them from a longlist of fifty universities to a shortlist of two. She commented on the time it took to amass the information to be able to reject universities from her list. It was not until the very end that she felt some confidence in the information searching process that she undertaken and the decision she had made:

*P36 'It was a lot of work for me to do when searching for information and even when I chose [the University] I was not one hundred percent certain that I had made the right choice, but then the process of having contact with [the University] reassured me. [...] I felt more confident.'*

Participants 7 and 8 had been through a confusing information searching process but they were confident at the end that they had made the right decision:

*P7 'It was confusing looking for information [...] As I was searching for information things became clearer to me. Once I made the decision to study marketing at [the University] I felt confident that I had made the right decision.'*

*P8 'I felt much happier as I was not confused anymore.'*

Participant 38 referred to her feelings of relief when she had decided on a university to choose:

*P38 'So I feel okay. I feel warm in my heart and then okay I think it's going to be okay after that.'*

In the last stage of Presentation, the participants would make the final decision as to which university to enrol in and would then purchase a postgraduate qualification. They then entered the post purchase stage of the decision making cycle and at some point after purchase they felt satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the information searching process and the decision they had made at the same time.

Overall, there were a number of different feelings experienced by participants as they progressed through the information searching process. For example, Participant 15 felt uncertain throughout the process of gathering information to decide if she should study in the UK and which university she should study in.

For other participants, such as Participant 23, there were no feelings of uncertainty or worry about the information searching process.

Some participants continued to search for information immediately after purchase as they were anxious about whether they had made the right decision to study a postgraduate degree at the University. Participant 38 was still not confident in her decision after purchasing her postgraduate degree. She was concerned as to whether she would be successful in completing their studies and looked for information on how she should prepare to study at the University:

*P38 'How I feel [...] I feel like I'm not confident. I am afraid that I'm not gonna finish the graduation [...] And just looking, what should I prepare before study here.'*

Once at university in the post purchase stage of the decision making cycle participants searched for information and went through all the stages of Kuhlthau's model or skipped stages each time that they needed information to inform their academic study or practical decisions. Participants would gather information on specific topics to help them with their assignments or to make other decisions concerning accommodation, employment, travel, tourism and leisure activities. They therefore tended to go through the stages of Kuhlthau's model a number of times in the post purchase evaluation stage.

Participant 4 felt confused when undertaking assignments or exams and so searched for information each time he was preparing an assignment to inform him what to do.

The discussion above has shown how participants went through the stages of Kuhlthau's ISP model when looking for information to inform their decisions whether to study a postgraduate qualification and where to study. Then in the post purchase stage they would go through the stages of the model when searching for information for their academic assignments and sometimes when they were deciding on day to day activities. The model has therefore been shown to be an appropriate model to be in the inner ring of the author's proposed new model.

## Decision Making Process

In this second part of the chapter the qualitative findings concerning the nature of the decision making process, the DMU and the factors impacting on the process are discussed.

### 5.8 Decision Making Unit (DMU)

The composition of the DMU is explored in this section linked to objective 2 and research questions 4 and 5. The number of members of the DMU who provided information and advice and so contributed to the decision as to which postgraduate qualification to purchase ranged from just the participant to six members. The average number of members in the DMU was four including the participant. Members of the DMU who helped participants during the decision making cycle included parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, partners and influencers such as friends who were current students and alumni, employers, agents and partner university staff. Eight participants were the sole members of their DMU and took on all the roles of the DMU members (P3, P7, P18, P22, P26, P27, P33, P36). The number of members in the DMU had implications for the rigour of the information searching and decision making processes (see sections 5.10, 5.12).

Roles performed in the DMU included initiators, users, buyers, influencers, deciders and gatekeepers. Table 5.6 shows the members of the DMU and the roles they adopted.

Table 5.6 DMU Member Roles

DMU Role	Participant	Parent	Other Family member	Partner	Agent	Staff at previous institution	Friend	Employer	The University staff
Initiator	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	
User	x								
Buyer	x	x		x				x	
Influencer		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Decider	x	x	x	x					
Gatekeeper					x	x			

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Participants were the users in the DMU as they studied the postgraduate degree. They also played the role of initiator as they first recognised the need to obtain a postgraduate qualification. Parents, other family members, partners, agents, university staff, friends and employers also triggered the need for a postgraduate degree and so became initiators (see section 5.2.1).

Out of 39 participants 30 involved their parents when making the decision as to which postgraduate qualification to choose. Parents encouraged their children to study a postgraduate qualification and so played a significant role in the DMU:

*P19 'After completing my graduation my father was actually pushing me to go and complete it 'you don't need a job, you have to go for it, don't waste time and everything'.*

The father of Participant 32 'sent' her to the UK to study a postgraduate qualification:

*P32 '..I decide to ask him [Father] I want to open my own business. But he said I still don't have an experience [...] So he sent me here.'*

Participant 19's father told him to go and stay with a relative and study in the UK. Parents who had not been to university themselves valued the knowledge that a postgraduate degree would bring to their children and so they insisted that they study in the UK. Participant 34 was told by his father when he started his undergraduate degree that he would study for a postgraduate qualification in the UK:

*P34 'The reason I select to study is because my father forced me to study. Like all my brothers and sisters have to finish postgraduate before work [...] because my father haven't study much and he has much experience in business field and he realised that the study is very important.'*

Parents were often the buyers who paid for the university qualification. Out of the 35 participants who stated their source of income, 29 were financed solely (n27) or partially (n2) by their parents. Parents were also the deciders who with the participant made the final decision to study a postgraduate degree at the University.

Influencers were those members who influenced the decision making process directly or indirectly by providing information and criteria for evaluating alternative countries, cities, universities and postgraduate qualifications. There were up to three influencers in each DMU including parents, family members, employers, friends (n16), educational and football agents (n17), university representatives and staff at partner institutions (n6).

Gatekeepers controlled the flow of information into the DMU and this role was often taken by agents or staff at the previous institution. For 11 participants agents and staff provided lists of universities to investigate and these lists often formed the complete choice set of universities that were considered. As gatekeepers, agents and staff at partner institutions had a significant impact on the decisions made (see section 5.2.1).

Full details of the members of the DMU for each participant in the study are shown in Table 8.26 in appendix 17. Universities need to be aware of influential members of the DMU as potential target audiences.

### 5.9 DMU Information Requirements

This section considers the information requirements of DMU members in line with objective 2 and research questions 4 and 5.

Parents were important members of the DMU. Often they had little knowledge about universities overseas and they required information so that they could advise their children as to which country, city, university and course to choose. They tended not to search for this information themselves and relied on participants to report back to them on the information they had found. Participant 39's mother asked her to research universities and advised her not to study hospitality management in Switzerland. When the participant had narrowed the search down to two universities her mother let her choose. She did not have to justify her choice with a more rigorous search for information, so she chose the university based on emotional criteria:



P39 *'...my mum said anything you want; you just decide by yourself. So, I chose [the University] [smiles] and left the [P University].'*

Participant 15 felt that she had to 'sell' her choice to her parents as they were not aware of the different options, so she spent time searching for information. Other participants searched for information alongside their parents (P16). Participant 32 was unusual in that her father was knowledgeable about UK universities and told her that he wanted her to go to the University, so she only spent two days searching for information:

P32 *'Because my Dad already want me to come here and he just asked me which university are going to choose.'*

Parents were most interested in rankings as a type of information to help them decide on a university for their children (P23, P27). They were 'highly concerned about the campus environment' and needed reassurance that their children would be safe and happy, so they wanted information about safety and the student lifestyle (P35).

Parents used WOM information from siblings, aunts, uncles or grandparents who had studied abroad or who had experience of living and travelling in the UK, other parents and university websites (P25, P30).

Participants commented that the information needs of parents had not been met and that parents still had questions regarding studying at the university (P13). There is an opportunity for universities to provide tailored information through the right media channels to parents.

The information requirements of other members of the DMU; friends, agents and staff at partner institutions, were discussed in section 5.2.1. Universities need to be aware of the information requirements of influential DMU members in order to provide them with the sources and types of information they require.

### 5.10 Rigour and Rationality of Information Searching and Decision Making Processes

This section discusses the rigour and rationality of the information searching and decision making processes pre purchase which refers to the breadth and depth of the processes. Rationality is linked to the degree to which the participants approached the processes in a rational rather than an emotional manner. Allied to the concepts of rigour and rationality is the level of informedness of the participants when making their decisions. This section links to objectives 1 and 3 and research questions 3 and 15.

The breadth of the information searching process related to the number of sources or types of information considered by participants when making the decisions as to which country, city, university and course to choose. Whereas the depth of the search was the time taken in searching for information. The breadth of the decision making process was measured by the number of universities in participants' choice sets and the number of universities that they applied to. The depth of the decision making process linked to the time it took to make the decision. The length of the information searching and decision making processes were the same as participants searched for information to inform the decisions being made throughout the decision making process.

The degree to which participants approached the information searching and decision making processes in a rigorous and rational way varied from one participant to another and depended on the factors impacting on the processes which are discussed in section 5.12.

Table 5.7 shows the breadth and depth of the information searching and decision making processes by gender and country of origin.

Table 5.7 Breadth and Depth of Information Searching and Decision Making Processes

P#	Participant Gender	Participant Nationality	No. of sources of information	No. of types of information	Main Source	Number UK University evaluate	Number UK University apply to	Time evaluate (month)
P9	Male	India	10	5	Online	50	9	25
P10	Female	Vietnam	7	3	Friend	2	1	
P11	Male	Malaysia	9	10	WOM	3	1	3
P12	Female	Thailand		4				
P13	Female	Indonesia	6	2	Online	3	1	2
P14	Female	Mauritius	10	9	Online	8	1	1
P15	Female	Kenya	10	5	Rank	4	4	3
P16	Male	Syria	8	5	Online	5	5	
P17	Female	USA	6	3	Online	9	3	24
P18	Male	Russia	4	3	Online	3	3	
P19	Male	Bangladesh	6	2	Family	3	3	1
P20	Male	Bangladesh	5	5	Family	1	1	24
P21	Male	Ghana	5	3	Friend	2	1	
P22	Male	USA	6	6	Staff	3	1	8
P23	Female	China	8	3	Friend	4	3	
P24	Male	Thailand	8	3	Friend	4	1	
P25	Male	Vietnam	3	4	Staff	2	1	2
P26	Female	China	6	4	Google	6	3	2
P27	Male	Thailand	8	6	Friend	5	2	2
P28	Female	Thailand	3	6	Online	8	3	2
P29	Male	Vietnam	7	4	Friend	1	1	
P30	Female	Vietnam	6	10	Sister Friend	2	2	1
P31	Female	Vietnam	5	3	Agent	3	1	
P32	Female	Thailand	3	8	Agent	5	1	1
P33	Male	Thailand	3	3	Friend	1	1	
P34	Male	Thailand	2	6	Friend	1	1	
P35	Female	Vietnam	7	9	Friend	2	1	
P36	Female	Bangladesh	4	7	Online	50	2	
P37	Male	Brazil	8	3	Agent	3	3	
P38	Female	Thailand	10	6	Friend	2	1	
P39	Female	Thailand	9	10	Friend	3	2	

Source Author's Analysis 2020

In terms of the breadth of information sources Table 5.7 shows that this ranged from two sources, which were typically WOM sources such as friends and agents, to ten sources which included a range of WOM and online sources. Similarly, there were a range of types of information evaluated by participants when making decisions on a country, city, course or university from one type for each decision to ten types.

The breadth of the decision making process in terms of the number of universities in participants' choice sets as shown in the Table 5.7 varied from one university to fifty universities. Participants who did not have any knowledge of UK universities or WOM recommendations tended to have larger choice sets

and evaluate more universities. The length of the information searching and decision making processes ranged from one month to 25 months. Information on the breadth and depth of the decision making process is summarised in Table 5.8 below.

Table 5.8 Breadth and Depth of Decision Making Process

Number of universities apply to	Number of Participants		Number of months to make decision	Number of Participants
1	16		1	4
2	4		2	5
3	7		3	2
4	1		8	1
5 and 9	2		24 and above	3
	Total 30			Total 15

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 5.8 shows the number of applications made to universities for a postgraduate course ranged from one university to nine universities. The majority (n16) of participants applied to one university. Those participants who applied to more than two universities (n14) were those who were uncertain as to whether they would be accepted, had no knowledge of UK universities or were applying through agents who did the applications for them. Some participants who had time before needing to decide on a university applied to one university to see if they were accepted before applying to another.

Regarding the length of the information searching and decision making processes the majority of participants took one (n4) or two (n5) months to make a decision. The three participants who took 24 or 25 months to search for information did not have any WOM recommendations from the University's students to rely on (P9, P17, P20).

The level of rigour of the decision making and information searching processes depended on the level of risk that the participant perceived in making the decision. The main type of risk to participants was financial risk due to the high cost of postgraduate courses. Those participants who were paying for the qualification perceived the highest level of risk. Fear of not making friends at the university was another perceived risk. Other risks included the opportunity cost

of studying compared to staying in the home country and the risk of failing to obtain the qualification. The higher the perceived risk the more rigorous and systematic was the search for information and the more informed participants were when making their final decision.

The decision making process was referred to by Participant 23 as a 'gamble' which indicated that she perceived a high level of risk. She conducted a systematic search for information. Participant 14 was aware of the financial risk involved in making the decision and searched for information and evaluated eight universities carefully when considering whether to pay the deposit to secure her place at the University:

*P15 'I think that I just was not sure yet and I wanted to measure options, and this is a lot of money you are putting somewhere else. You just have to be keen on where you are investing the money.'*

Participant 22 also alluded to the risk involved in deciding on a university when he described choosing a university using gambling terminology:

*P22 'I put all my chips in at going to [the University].'*

When evaluating universities during the decision making process a few of the participants formed a spreadsheet or written document detailing the list of universities and the types of information used to screen them (P38). Participant 36 was making the decision by herself without any WOM sources and had a high level of perceived risk. She wrote all the information down to systematically screen the list of UK universities down to fifty, then shortlist three and apply to two. This was a time consuming process. When asked whether she had formed a spreadsheet when evaluating the universities, she replied:

*P36 'It might seem a bit traditional, but I just wrote it. It took a lot of time.'*

Participant 17 similarly perceived she was making a high risk decision and wanted to make sure that she was as informed as possible. She was unaware of UK universities, had no personal sources of WOM information and did the most thorough information search compared to the other participants. She searched

for information and made a shortlist of nine universities which she then evaluated. Over an extended period of two years she systematically screened universities in the USA and the UK using a large number of sources and types of information:

*P17 'I created a Google document and I basically pinpointed all the universities for consideration. And it was up to nine universities at one point.'*

A systematic approach to screening universities was also taken by Participant 38. She awarded universities points for certain attributes when evaluating them. Participant 32 spent two days systematically comparing five universities provided by the agent on a number of criteria. For her the perceived risk was lessened as she had WOM sources to rely on and her father wanted her to study at the University:

*P32 'And I list everything, and I deduct like, and I did that and I choose [the University].'*

There were participants who had more limited choice sets and due to certain factors, such as family or partners living in the University area, family coming to the University, or wanting to stay in the local area. Their information search was less rigorous, and the decision was made more quickly (see section 5.12).

Participant 20 apologised to the interviewer for not using many sources of information. He was aware that he had used limited information sources, but he could not be bothered to do a more rigorous search:

*Interviewer: 'So you looked at the website, you went to the agent's office, you spoke to your grandpa. Were there any other sources of information you used to help you make your decision?'*

*P20: No I'm afraid not.'*

The main factor that impacted on the degree of information searching and the rigour of the decision making process was whether participants had WOM recommendations from friends or siblings that had studied in the UK that they could rely on. They then felt sufficiently informed to make a decision.

Participant 30 had a sister who had studied a postgraduate qualification at the University, and she undertook minimal information search on two universities, relying on her sister and her friends' recommendations:

P30 *'I just go to [the University] website [...] and many people around me.'*

Many participants (n12) stated that friends were the most important information source and their recommendations often led to a curtailment of information search and to the final decision being made. These friends provided advice that added to the pool of information available to participants. Participant 24 did not do a rigorous search for information and relied on WOM recommendations from friends they knew:

P24 *'But my friends said [the University] is for me, it's suitable for me and so that is why I come here.'*

The only source of information mentioned by Participant 33 was his friend who influenced him to apply:

P33 *'Yes she [friend] decided to come here so I followed her.'*

Friends were a credible source of information that helped to fill gaps found in other sources. Participant 38 was asked what the most important sources of information were to her:

P38 *'I think it is about the word of mouth [...] when someone told the experience that they faced before [...] it's the credible information for me.'*

Those participants who returned to the University often did so after having spoken just to friends who had undertaken postgraduate courses, so the sources of information used were limited (P25). They were encouraged to return because of the discount offered (P11).

After searching for information in a systematic or semi systematic way certain participants made a quick decision based on one piece of information or a gut

feeling (P9). They made a shortcut to the final decision and so shortened the decision making process. Often, they queried how informed they were and whether they had made the right decision (see section 5.11). Participant 16 suddenly decided to come to the University as he heard his friends were going there. Participant 20 was told by his father that he could stay with a relative near the University city so he aborted his search for universities in Canada and decided to go to the University. For Participant 22 after a systematic information search of several universities, the shortcut occurred when the University was the first to contact him and offer him a place. The decision to accept the University's offer was then based on emotional criteria:

*P 22 'I'm one of those guys that if you show me attention first then I'm going to show you more attention as obviously you are interested.'*

The speed with which the University offered a place to Participant 14 also offered her a shortcut to the final decision to study at the University rather than applying to other universities. Participant 27 admitted that he did not know as much information as he wanted to, but he took a shortcut to make the decision when a friend recommended the University to him:

*P27 'I have not know as much information as I wanted to know. But someone said [the University] is good [laughs] [...] good living, good for studying.'*

Participant 39 acknowledged that her final decision was based on gut feeling and so took a shortcut at the end:

*P39 'Actually it's hard to like to decide but finally my feeling is prefer [the University].'*

The majority of participants made the decision to study at the university in a rational manner. They systematically searched for information and evaluated different universities one by one based on the information they had found. The rationality of the process ensured that they were sufficiently informed to make the final decision. Those participants who had an emotional approach to making the decision were influenced significantly by their friends as they progressed through the decision making process and relied on their recommendations rather



than searching for different sources and types of information (P24, P33, P35). Their information search was therefore limited.

In this section the importance of WOM recommendations from friends when making a decision to attend the University has again been highlighted. These friends added to the pool of information available to participants to help them reach a decision. Advice from friends and siblings also allowed participants to take a shortcut to the final decision, skip stages in the information searching process and curtail the evaluation of universities. The degree to which participants searched systematically for information and approached the decision making process in a rational and rigorous way was related to the level of perceived risk that participants had when making the decision. Friends' recommendations helped to reduce the risk that participants felt. Those who did not have WOM information from, for example current students, alumni or family, had a greater perceived risk and performed a more rigorous and rational decision making process. The level of informedness of participants was directly related to how rigorous and rational their information searching and evaluation of alternatives was.

### 5.11 Decision Timing, Sequence and Iterative, Cyclical Process

In this section the timing of need recognition, the sequence of decisions made by participants when deciding where to study a postgraduate qualification and the cyclical and iterative nature of the decision making and information searching processes are explored in line with objective 1 and research questions 1 and 2. Participants learnt from the decision making and information searching processes that they undertook and this impacted on how they would make decisions and search for information in the future which is investigated in line with objective 1 and research questions 13 and 14.

The time when prospective postgraduates recognised that they had a need for information regarding studying for a postgraduate degree varied amongst participants. Table 5.9 shows the timing of need recognition in terms of the

number of months that the need was recognised before or after graduation from undergraduate study.

Table 5.9 Timing of Need Recognition

Participant	Pre graduation (month)	Post graduation (month)	Pre enrolment (month)
P10		1	3
P11		1	3
P13	9		12
P14		12	5
P15		24	9
P16	12		12
P17		12	24
P18		1	3
P19		1	36
P20		1	12
P21		1	24
P22	9		12
P23	36		60
P24		6	9
P25		0	3
P26	17		24
P27	9		72
P29	1		4
P30		0	3
P31		3	3
P32		36	4
P33	6		9
P34	48		48
P35	6		9
P36		72	6
P37		84	2
P38		12	9
P39	6		9
Number of participants	11	17	28
Average	14.5	15.7	14.8

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Participants recognised the need to undertake a postgraduate qualification from 48 months to one month prior to their undergraduate graduation. Many of the participants who recognised this need were in their last year of study or the need was triggered around graduation. Fifteen participants had gone on to study a postgraduate degree straight after studying an undergraduate degree.

Those participants that recognised a need for postgraduate study after their graduation did so between one month and seven years after graduating. Participants who worked after graduation realised a need for postgraduate study between two and seven years after graduation

Table 5.9 also shows that the length of time between the need being triggered and enrolment at university for the majority of participants was between three and twelve months.

For some participants the desire to study abroad for a postgraduate degree often emerged a long time before enrolment. Participant 27 enrolled for postgraduate study six years after being first aware that he wanted to undertake further study. Participant 19 aspired to come to the UK to study a postgraduate qualification from a young age but finally recognised a need to study as he graduated. Other participants decided to undertake postgraduate study as they approached their undergraduate graduation. Participant 29 considered entry into postgraduate study as a logical next step after graduating with his undergraduate degree:

*P29 'When the undergraduate programme is finished. I just go for the next master degree. I decided this right away even when I finish.'*

For some participants there was a conscious decision to delay entry to postgraduate study until work experience had been gained in order to profit most from the course. They demonstrated rationality in the decision that was being made (P19).

There was a link between the length of time between need recognition and enrolment and a more rational decision making process accompanied by a

systematic search for information. For this reason, time is shown as a factor impacting on the author's proposed decision making cycle model.

The sequence of decisions made concerning the country, city, university and course to choose varied between participants. There was however a typical sequence of decisions made by many participants with no prior experience or connection to the University as exhibited by Participant 14. She decided on a country to study in followed by the course to study and then the university that best delivered that course (P16, P18, P28). She only looked at the city at the end of her information search.

Participant 28 was typical of those participants who had decided that they were going to study in the UK and were given a list of universities by their agent. Once she had a list of universities, she used the rankings and then university websites to look at the facilities, fees and course modules. She researched universities and courses simultaneously and then looked at the cities before making her final choice.

Similarly, those participants with prior experience of studying at partner universities often knew that they wanted to study in the UK and had been provided with a list of universities by partner university staff. Their decision as to which university to study in was based on the cities that the universities were in, the reputation of the universities and the type of lifestyle they would experience at the university. The information on cities and universities was considered simultaneously (P26):

*P11: 'I know from the [Thai University 1] they have the connection with [the University] and I searched about [the city] and I think it is a very nice city. That's why I choose [the University].'*

Those participants who were constrained by wanting to study in the vicinity of the University city as they were familiar with the area, or had family there, chose the city first and the university and course second.

Participants who considered more than one country to study in were in the minority (P15, P16, P20, P21, P23, P39). Participant 17 was an example of a

prospective postgraduate who had considered two countries simultaneously and searched for information on courses first. She then looked at the cities and made her decision.

Next the iterative and cyclical nature of the decision making and information processes is explored. The iterative nature of the information searching process was also discussed in relation to Kuhlthau's model in section 5.7.

The qualitative findings showed that the information searching and decision making processes of participants were iterative rather than sequential. Participants moved backwards and forwards through the decision making process stages and revisited prior stages, sources and types of information. During the evaluation of alternatives stage participants would return to the sources and types of information they had previously accessed as they decided on different countries, cities, universities and courses. As they applied to universities and made the final decision as to which postgraduate qualification to choose, they would similarly revisit the information they had previously gathered and the decisions that they had made.

Having received offers from universities some participants were unsure as to which offer to accept and they looked at additional universities and revisited the sources and types of information they had previously evaluated to help them decide. Participant 38 went back to Google and visited previous and new university websites to assist her in making the decision where to study. Participant 15 gathered further information on the weather, ability to work while studying and graduate employability by returning to the University website, Twitter, her agent and the University representative. The information she gained reassured her she was making the right decision and was instrumental in persuading her to accept her offer.

After accepting his offer Participant 27 revisited online sources and types of information to look at the university and the city and alternative universities to confirm to himself that he had made the right decision. Participant 9 frequently went back to look at the University website after purchasing a degree to feel positive about studying at the University and reassure himself:

*P9 'Once I got the unconditional letter, I used to see the website every day. This is the one I'm going to [smiles].'*

In the post purchase evaluation stage Participant 14 returned to her agent for reassurance that she had made the correct decision and spoke to her father again, once at university, as she was experiencing acculturative stress:

*P14 'So he reassured me again that for the first week you will have this feeling and then after you will get used to it. He said it will take time.'*

Participants therefore revisited previous decisions, sources and types of information in order to make sure that they were making or had made the right decisions. This shows that the decision making and information searching processes were iterative rather than sequential and the current author's proposed cyclical model of the decision making cycle in section 6.9 reflects this.

The continuous cyclical nature of the decision making and information searching processes is now explored. The degree to which participants learnt from the decision making and information searching processes that they had gone through which would then inform their future search strategies and decisions is discussed.

Those participants who felt that they had made the right decision based on the thorough information search and evaluation that they had performed claimed that they would repeat the same process when making a decision and searching for information in the future (P14, P15, P28, P38, P39). Participant 14 was satisfied with the decision she had made:

*P14 'Normally when you make a decision you need to reflect well, you need to analyse well and then finally say 'OK would I go for it or not?'*

Participant 17 researched universities in the UK and USA over a two year period before she made her decision to study at the University. She was happy with the systematic and rational approach she had adopted when searching for information and making the decision:

*P17 'I'd say the whole decision making process went well for me. I tend to*

*[...] plan ahead, be strategic, be deductive in my decision making.'*

In terms of making future decisions she had learnt to take into account unexpected factors:

*P17 'My experience of this decision making process has taught me to account for variable change [...] I have to consider that there may be a couple of missing pieces of information that I should continue to take into consideration [...] for future decisions.'*

The first time Participant 9 applied to universities for a postgraduate degree he undertook a systematic and rigorous search and evaluation of information on fifty universities provided to him by the agent. He made the final decision to attend C University based on emotional criteria. It was the only university he visited, and he was impressed with the buildings. He found the process of researching 50 universities, and deciding which one of the nine offers he received to accept, to be a time consuming and confusing process. He learnt from making this decision and the next time he applied for a postgraduate qualification he approached the decision making process differently. Rather than spending a lot of time researching universities and evaluating them, he decided to ask an agent to apply to universities on his behalf and then chose the university that made him the first offer. He admitted that he had used 'gut instinct' to make what he perceived to be a risky decision, but he was happy with the decision that he had made. He would take a similar emotional approach when making a high involvement decision in the future and undertake the same level of information searching:

*P9 'I had learned from my first decision with [C University] so I made the decision with [the University] more simply with a smaller number of universities [...] [The University] selected me. They knew my capabilities.'*

Some participants who had been less rigorous when searching for information and making the decision to come to the University felt less informed when making the final decision as discussed in section 5.10. This impacted on the satisfaction of participants with the decision that they had made. Those participants who had not evaluated many sources and types of information, or those who had limited choice sets and spent a short time searching for

information and making the decision, questioned whether they had made the right decision. Participant 18 had not fully researched universities to attend and had chosen the University on the basis of a few criteria. He was unsure whether he had made the right decision to come to the University as he was not satisfied with the University experience.

Participant 29 had made the decision to undertake a postgraduate qualification at the University very quickly and without much thought. His friends who had remained at home and started working were progressing their careers and earning money. He was not happy with the decision he had made and stated that he should have researched his options more thoroughly and gone to work instead of studying. These participants claimed that they would make high involvement decisions and approach the information searching process differently in the future.

Participant 22 had learnt from the decision making process that he had gone through to think more critically when making decisions in the future:

*P22 'So thinking things out and not doing just the first thing that comes to my mind.'*

In conclusion, participants had learnt from making the high involvement decision as to which university and course to attend and what they had learnt would impact on how they would approach decisions and how they would search for information in the future. Those who had approached the information searching and decision making processes without much rigour or rationality, and were therefore less informed, were the most likely to question whether they had made the right decision, especially if they were not satisfied with their university experience. They would approach a future high involvement decision with more rigour next time and do a more systematic search for information. Those who had approached the decision making and information searching processes in a rational and rigorous manner were more likely to be happy with the decision that they had made and conduct themselves in the same way in the future when purchasing a high risk product or service and searching for information. The current author's proposed model is a continuous circular model which reflects



the fact that one information search informed the approach to the next search and one decision led to the next decision in a continuous manner.

### 5.12 Factors impacting on Information Searching and Decision making Processes

This section considers the factors that influenced the manner in which participants went through the information searching and decision making processes in the pre purchase and post purchase stages in line with objective 4 and research question 8. This discussion is linked to section 5.10 as the factors discussed here impacted on the degree to which participants approached the information searching and decision making processes with rigour and in a rational manner.

The age and maturity of the participant were factors that influenced participants' approach to the decision making cycle. Participant 23 was the oldest participant and took the decision to suspend her career and study in the UK very seriously. Similarly, Participant 32 was older as she had studied abroad and worked prior to her studies. These participants spent time conducting a systematic information search and evaluating alternative universities and courses to make a final decision.

Gender had an impact on the extent to which participants searched for information and evaluated it. Table 5.7 showed that there were a greater number of females who performed comprehensive information searches compared to males who were more prone to spend less time looking for sources and types of information.

The approach to the decision making cycle was influenced by the country of origin of participants. There were a greater proportion of Thai and Vietnamese participants who undertook more limited information searches and made their decisions more quickly as shown in Table 5.7. This was partly due to the fact that participants from Asian countries were heavily influenced by their parents and friends when deciding on a university and this resulted in them looking at

fewer sources and types of information (see sections 5.2.1, 5.10).

Participants who had work experience had more time to reflect on the decision to study a postgraduate qualification and approached the decision they had to make in a systematic and rigorous manner (P20, P23, P27, P36). Participant 19 recognised a need for postgraduate study three years before he enrolled at the University and decided to work for two years to gain the necessary experience for the degree. He had a rational approach to decision making and searching for information:

*P19 'I have to have job experience and that's just not any job experience you have to have a good one, a rational one. So I took 2 years time.'*

The number of members in the DMU and which member adopted the role of decider also impacted on the rigour with which the decision was made. If the participant was the decider who chose which postgraduate degree to purchase, with no or little support from DMU members, then they performed a more rigorous and rational information searching and decision making process.

There were a number of factors that impacted on the degree of risk the participants perceived in the process of deciding on a university and course to purchase. The greater the perceived risk the more rigorously participants would search for information and approach the decision making process in a rational manner (see section 5.10).

The source of finance for the postgraduate degree was linked to participants' perceived risk. If participants were funding their own studies, they performed a more rational and rigorous search for information, as they were aware of the financial risk. Participant 22 received a sports scholarship to study at the University and so for him there was less financial risk in studying there. He looked for some information, but he only applied to the University and his decision was based on more emotional than rational criteria.

Participants whose tuition fees were being paid by their parents perceived less risk in choosing a university, so they spent less time making the decision which

university to attend (P35). The number of sources and types of information consulted was relatively low:

*P38 'I'm not looking for the tuition fee at all [laughs]. I search for what I want to study and what that university is.'*

Participant 36 made the decision to come to the University all by herself. She perceived the risk of choosing the wrong institution to be very high and spent a long period of time searching for information and evaluating alternative universities.

Prior experience of studying the University's undergraduate qualifications, either in the UK or at a partner institution, reduced the perceived risk in choosing to study a postgraduate degree at the University. Participant 29 used few sources of information and relied on his friends for advice. He made his decision to return to the University for his postgraduate degree without much thought:

*P29 '[The University] is like old home so it's more flexible for me, everything is more easy [...] When the undergraduate programme is finished. I just go for the next master degree. [...] So I don't [...] like something like new challenge. It's more risk you know.'*

Participants without knowledge of the University or its students would systematically evaluate different universities on a number of different criteria and would look for more types of information and consult more sources.

Previous experience of travelling, living or studying abroad resulted in higher levels of confidence amongst participants and a reduction in the level of perceived risk involved in studying a postgraduate qualification in the UK. This then impacted on the degree of information search and the number of alternatives evaluated. There were 25 participants with experience of travelling abroad. Those participants who had experience of the UK often only evaluated universities in just the UK rather than a number of countries (P14, P18, P26, P33). Similarly, Participant 29 only looked at universities in the UK as he was inspired as a child by his grandfather's stories of travelling and studying there.

The personality traits of some participants linked to a desire not to have to adapt to a new country or university environment or take on a new challenge.

Personality traits thus impacted on the decision to return to a familiar university without performing a rigorous information search. For Participant 25 who did not want to change to a new university, it was an easy and quick decision to make to return to study at the University and he used few sources and types of information:

*P25 'Because I've been living here for more than 2 years already and then I get used to live the environment and then I don't want to change and adapt the new environment.'*

Similarly other participants decided to study in the university that had awarded them their undergraduate degrees due to their personality traits (P34, P35, P31). They spent limited time making the decision and looking for information:

*P31 'I'm not the one that can take too much challenge. I like to choose the safer one. So I think studying those university that have more Vietnamese people or more friends that might be better for me.'*

The impact of cultural norms on the decision making process of participants was evident. Participant 16 from a collectivist culture explained that his decision to study a postgraduate degree had to take into account other people:

*P16 'But I wasn't thinking of it at all from a prestige wise cos I believe that what I do is for me and for my family and friends.'*

Relying on WOM advice from others was another cultural norm that impacted on the degree to which participants searched for information and the time spent making the decision. Those who relied on WOM recommendations would often curtail their information search and so spend less time in the decision making process (see section 5.10).

The cultural norms in India influenced Participant 9's decision making process. He had a fatalistic attitude to making a decision and chose to attend C University based on emotional criteria:

*P9 'At that moment of time I thought if I'm coming to UK to study, I am coming to that university just because of the physicality and the beauty the university had. So yeah, that was my foremost reason because that was the first university I ever saw [...] I came to [C University] they accepted me with open arms, so that's all I should want from a university.'*

The educational background of the participants' parents and siblings influenced participants' approach to the decision making cycle and the degree to which they searched for information and evaluated it. The father of Participant 34 had not been to university and he 'forced' the participant to study a postgraduate qualification. This resulted in the participant undertaking minimal information search and no evaluation of alternatives. He simply chose to go to the university that his friend told him to go to. Those participants who had siblings with experience of studying in the UK often relied on them for advice and consulted fewer sources and types of information (see section 5.10).

The location of family members and partners near the University city who offered to support participants through their time at university, often led to participants choosing to live with them. This limited the time spent searching for information and making the decision as there were fewer alternative universities to consider. Participants also relied on the WOM recommendations of their family and partners if they knew the area and did less searching for information (P19, P15, P37).

The role of parents and other family members in the DMU as initiators, buyers and deciders also impacted on the rigour with which participants went through the information searching and decision making processes (see section 5.8).

Participant 9 was influenced in his choice of country and university by his father and made the final decision by taking a shortcut based on emotional criteria:

*P9 'So it was his dream that his son should grow up one day and go to the UK and fulfil his dreams. So I am living his dreams.'*

Influencers in the DMU such as friends and family impacted on the degree of rigour with which participants undertook the information searching and decision

making processes as discussed in section 5.10. Knowing current or previous students who had studied at the University and recommended it to participants often led to less sources of information being used and a less rigorous decision making process. Conversely, a lack of WOM recommendations from influencers also led to participants performing a more extensive information search (P36).

Members of the family who had travelled or studied abroad were influencers in the DMU and their WOM recommendations strongly impacted on participants. This meant that participants did not need to search for as much information (P19).

In the post purchase stage of the decision making process some of the same factors were found to impact on participants' information search behaviour. These factors were participants' prior experience of travel or study abroad, WOM information from friendship groups and country of origin.

Those participants who had previously studied at the University in the UK or at partner institutions tended to have more of the academic information they needed (P35, P30). They also had the opportunity to join friendship groups of students from their own countries as there were a high proportion of students of their nationality at the University. These friends provided them with the practical and academic information they required (see section 5.5). Their information needs were therefore not as great or could be easily satisfied with a lesser information search.

Travel to previous countries meant that participants' information needs were fewer and they knew where to obtain the information they needed having adjusted to new environments in the past (P5, P27, P34). They spent less time searching for information.

Those participants who did not find friendship groups from whom to gain WOM recommendations struggled the most to find the information they needed and undertook more frequent and rigorous information searches whilst at university (P19, P20, P29).

The country of origin of participants influenced the degree to which participants felt they lacked information. Asian students with friendship groups were able to effectively access the information they required from their peers whereas students from other countries who were not well represented at the University found it harder to obtain the information they needed and spent more time searching for information (see section 5.5).

This section has investigated the factors that influenced the information searching and decision making processes of participants during the pre purchase and post purchase stages of the decision making cycle. These factors are pictured in the current author's model as impacting on the information searching process and decision making cycle (see section 6.9).

In chapter 6 the conclusions are now presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter conclusions on the role of information in the decision making cycle of international postgraduates and the information requirements at each stage are provided in line with objectives 1, 2 and 6. The author proposes a new model of the decision making cycle at the end of the chapter.

Objective 1: Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation

Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.

Objective 6: Provide conclusions on the role of information within international postgraduates' decision making cycle and the information requirements at each stage

### 6.1 Rigour and Rationality of Information Searching and Decision Making Processes Pre Purchase

This section explores research questions 3 and 15. It draws conclusions on the degree of rigour and rationality that international postgraduates employed as they progressed through the decision making and information searching processes on their way to purchase. A Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology is proposed and the level of informedness of international postgraduates is discussed.

Research Question 3: To what extent was the approach to the decision making cycle and information searching process rigorous and rational?

Research Question 15: How informed were postgraduates during the process of making a purchase choice?

The rigour and rationality of the information searching and decision making processes of international postgraduates are topics which have been largely unexplored in the literature. The current author's study therefore adds to the body of knowledge in this area. The findings agree with Towers and Towers' (2018) research amongst both home and international postgraduates regarding



choice sets, and the impact of time on the decision making process. The degree of rigour of the information searching process was also impacted by the time available and information overload led to a shortcut to the final decision and an information satisficing strategy. These findings agree with those of Case, Given and Mai (2016).

Table 6.1 below presents the data on the breadth of the information search which was measured by the number of sources and types of information used by participants as they chose a university (see Table 5.7). The breadth of the search varied from a couple of sources such as WOM recommendations from friends and the agent to numerous WOM and online sources. Similarly, the number of sources in each category ranged from one friend to an extensive search of websites through Google. The number of types of information collected by participants was between two and ten types.

The depth of the information searching and decision making processes were measured by the amount of time that participants spent searching for information to evaluate universities. In Table 6.1 the time used spanned from a few hours to two days to two years, with the most frequently mentioned period of time being two months followed by one month. The level of informedness of participants therefore varied from some participants who had a large amount of information prior to making a purchase and those that made their decision based on just a few sources and types of information within a short time period.

In terms of the breadth of the decision making process Table 6.1 shows that the number of UK universities that were evaluated by participants in their choice sets was between one and 50. Participants made an application to between one and nine universities with 16 participants applying to one university and 14 applying to more than one university.

From the analysis of the breadth and depth of the decision making and information searching processes the current author categorised types of decision makers and information searchers as indicated in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Typology of Decision Makers and Information Searchers

P#	Types of Decision Maker and Information Searcher	Number of information sources	Number of information types	Main Source of information	Number UK university evaluate	Number UK university apply to	Time evaluate information (month)	Participant Country of Origin	Participant Gender	Participant Age
P9	New systematic shortcut	10	5	Online	50	9	25	India	Male	22
P10	Local limited	7	3	Friend	2	1		Vietnam	Female	22
P11	Experienced systematic	9	10	WOM	3	1	3	Malaysia	Male	22
P12	Connected limited		4					Thailand	Female	26
P13	Local semi systematic	6	2	Online	3	1	2	Indonesia	Female	21
P14	New systematic shortcut	10	9	Online	8	1	1	Mauritius	Female	22
P15	Local systematic	10	5	Rank	4	4	3	Kenya	Female	24
P16	New systematic shortcut	8	5	Online	5	5		Syria	Male	22
P17	New systematic	6	3	Online	9	3	24	USA	Female	28
P18	New semi systematic	4	3	Online	3	3		Russia	Male	23
P19	New semi systematic shortcut	6	2	Family	3	3	1	Bangladesh	Male	26
P20	New semi systematic	5	5	Family	1	1	24	Bangladesh	Male	25
P21	New semi systematic	5	3	Friend	2	1		Ghana	Male	29
P22	New systematic shortcut	6	6	Staff	3	1	8	USA	Male	23
P23	New systematic	8	3	Friend	4	3		China	Female	39
P24	Connected semi systematic	8	3	Friend	4	1		Thailand	Male	26
P25	Experienced Limited	3	4	Staff	2	1	2	Vietnam	Male	23
P26	New systematic	6	4	Google	6	3	2	China	Female	27

Table 6.1 Typology of Decision Makers and Information Searchers contd.

P#	Types of Decision Maker and Information Searcher	Number of information sources	Number of information types	Main Source of information	Number UK university evaluate	Number UK university apply to	Time evaluate information (month)	Participant Country of Origin	Participant Gender	Participant Age
P27	Connected systematic shortcut	8	6	Friend	5	2	2	Thailand	Male	26
P28	New systematic	3	6	Online	8	3	2	Thailand	Female	25
P29	Experienced limited	7	4	Friend	1	1		Vietnam	Male	24
P30	Connected limited	6	10	Friend Father	2	2	1	Vietnam	Female	22
P31	Connected semi systematic	5	3	Agent	3	1		Vietnam	Female	23
P32	Connected semi systematic	3	8	Agent	5	1	1	Thailand	Female	28
P33	Connected limited	3	3	Friend	1	1		Thailand	Male	26
P34	Connected limited	2	6	Friend	1	1		Thailand	Male	24
P35	Experienced limited	7	9	Friend	2	1		Vietnam	Female	23
P36	New systematic	4	7	Online	50	2		Bangladesh	Female	29
P37	Experienced semi systematic	8	3	Agent	3	3		Brazil	Male	33
P38	Connected systematic	10	6	Friend	2	1		Thailand	Female	24
P39	Connected systematic shortcut	9	10	Friend	3	2		Thailand	Female	25

Source Author's Analysis 2020

This proposed typology links to the factors that impacted on the information searching and decision making processes which are discussed in section 6.2. In order to classify the different types of information searcher and decision maker certain categories were defined as shown in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 Categories of Information Searcher and Decision Maker in Typology

<b>Category 1 DMP, ISP</b>	<b>Overview</b>	<b>Description</b>
Systematic	Wide range of sources and types of information gathered and/or rational approach to decision making	Prospective postgraduates who spent time gathering and evaluating information. Information search had breadth and depth. Time was spent going through the stages of the decision making process and the decision taken was based on rational evaluation. The decision to undertake a postgraduate qualification was a more complex decision with higher risk and involvement.
Semi Systematic	Reasonable range of sources and types of information gathered and/or reasonably rational approach to decision making	Prospective postgraduates who did spend some time evaluating alternative universities and making a decision. A reasonably wide range of sources and types of information were gathered. Some perceived risk in the decision
Limited	Minimal range of sources and types of information gathered and/or less rational approach to decision making	Prospective postgraduates who were not as involved in the decision and did not perceive the purchase of a postgraduate qualification to be high risk. They undertook limited information search. The decision making process was not as rational and decisions might be made due to emotional criteria and shortcuts taken
Shortcut	The final decision is made unduly quickly due to one specific piece of information or a gut feeling	Prospective postgraduates who curtailed the decision making process and came to a quick decision
<b>Category 2 Awareness</b>	<b>Overview</b>	<b>Description</b>
New	Previously unaware of the University	Prospective postgraduates who had not heard of the University previously. They did not know any students who were current or previous students at the University and so lacked WOM sources to provide information and recommendations. The decision to undertake a postgraduate qualification was a more complex decision with higher risk and involvement.
Connected	Knowledge of current or previous students at the university. May have studied at a partner university	Prospective postgraduates who were aware of the university. They may have studied a degree at a partner institution which was not the University degree, or they knew current or previous students at the university from whom they could obtain WOM information.
Experienced	Studied the University courses in the UK or at a partner institution	Prospective postgraduates who studied the University courses at a partner institution or studied jointly between the UK and partner institutions
Local	Constrained by the need to study in the area near the University	Prospective postgraduates who had family or partners in the local area which encouraged them to study there. Or students who previously studied locally and wished to remain in the area.

Source Author's Analysis 2020

As shown in Table 6.2 under category 1 participants were classified according to the extent to which they performed a rigorous search for information and approached the decision making process in a rational manner. This was on a spectrum from the most rigorous information search and rational decision making processes which was termed 'Systematic' through 'Semi Systematic' to the least rational decision and non-rigorous search which was classified as 'Limited'. 'Systematic' participants were the most informed about the decisions they were taking having performed a rigorous search for information and spent time contemplating their decisions. Participants who were classified as 'Shortcut' aborted the information searching and decision making processes, were less rigorous and often approached the processes in an emotional rather than a rational manner.

Under category 2 participants were classified according to whether they were aware or had knowledge of the University on a spectrum of 'New' to 'Connected'. 'New' participants were unaware of the University, did not know any of its students and perceived the greatest risk in the decision making process. 'New Systematic' participants perceived the most risk and performed the most systematic search for information and approached the decision making process in a rational manner, evaluating different universities on a number of different criteria. Overall, they were the most informed participants. 'Connected' participants were aware of the University due to WOM recommendations which often came from friends and family that knew the participants and whom the participants trusted. These recommendations were the most important source of information and once received often led to a less rigorous information searching process and a less rational approach to decision making. Such participants were classified as 'Connected Limited'. 'Experienced' participants had studied the University courses in the UK or at a partner institution and 'Local' participants were constrained by the need to study in the area near the University. The information searching and decision making processes of these participants could range from systematic to limited and from rational to emotional.

Table 6.3 provides examples of participants who are typical of the information searcher and decision maker types identified.

Table 6.3 Examples of Participants by Type of Information Searcher and Decision Maker

Types of Information Searcher / Decision Maker	Description	Quote
Participant 33: Connected Limited	Participant 33 decided to study a Masters degree in the UK having undertaken a language course in London prior to his undergraduate degree. He only considered the University based on his friend's advice who was an alumnus of the University. He reduced the perceived risk of studying alone by choosing the university that his friend was due to study in. He undertook minimal information search through Google looking at the course, the city and rankings. His decision was based on emotional factors.	P33: <i>'I haven't looked at any others. Just [the University] as I have friends to come with so I am looking only [the University] [...] I finished my undergraduate bit later so I am scared to come here alone so I am looking for a friend [...] Yes she [friend] decided to come here so I followed her.'</i>
Participant 27: Connected Systematic Shortcut	Participant 27 systematically researched the four universities that had a joint postgraduate degree with a Thai university he knew. He gathered a range of sources and types of information in order to evaluate the universities. However in order to make the final decision he took a shortcut. He admitted that he did not know as much information as he wanted to but a friend who had studied at the university recommended it to him. He received an offer from the university ahead of an alternative university he had applied to. He decided to accept the offer before he heard from the other university.	P27: <i>'The [Thai University 1] provided me with the course and the modules, the subjects. But I have not know as much information as I wanted to know. But someone said [the University] is good [laughs]</i>  <i>Interviewer: So who said that?</i>  P27: <i>'My friend also study here before like two years before and he said it is good, good living, good for studying.'</i>
Participant 35: Experienced Limited	Participant 35 decided to return to the university due to her positive experience of studying as an undergraduate there, the ranking, the learning environment and the discount she received off the fee as she was a previous student. She relied on WOM recommendations from the partner university staff and her friends who had studied postgraduate courses there and did not research the courses available at the University. She did not perceive any risks in returning to study at the University.	Interviewer: <i>'So did you look for any information about the postgraduate courses that [the University] offered?'</i>  P35: <i>'No'</i>
Participant 36: New Systematic	Participant 36 had no knowledge of universities in the UK and no WOM sources of information. She systematically filtered the list of all UK universities down to 50 using a range of choice factors. She then formed a shortlist of 3 universities by screening out the 50 universities on the basis of a number of criteria. She searched solely online for information through Google searches, university and rankings websites. She was the only member of the DMU and had to finance the qualification herself, so she perceived it to be a high risk decision.	P36: <i>'It took me a lot of time because I had to think a lot about travel, different things like the fees, the living expenses, the city, and the programme curriculum of course, because, I want to study in the UK but I want to study the right programme that is right for me.'</i>

Table 6.3 Examples of Participants by Type of Information Searcher and Decision Maker contd.

Types of Information Searcher / Decision Maker	Description	Quote
Participant 9: New Systematic Shortcut	Participant 9 researched 50 universities using a large number of sources and types of information. He was unaware of UK universities and systematically chose 9 universities to apply to and received 9 offers. He took a shortcut to make the final decision by relying on gut instinct. He chose C University as it was the only university he had visited and he received his first offer from them.	P9: <i>'In the initial stages it was very confusing because there are 50 mouths saying 50 different things to you and at the end it becomes your choice only because people also tend to confuse you [...] So you know, there's all the aspects comes under one roof and it creates a chaos in your mind. So I would say I just went with my gut feeling.'</i>
Participant 20 New Semi systematic	Participant 20 researched studying in Canada but his grandfather offered him accommodation near to the University and recommended the University to him. This curtailed his search for information on other universities and he focused on finding out information about the University which he had not heard of previously. He used just a few sources of information, relying on the website and reviews from the University's alumni and an agent who he met online. The types of information he used were limited to location, ranking and finance.	Interviewer: <i>'OK so you looked at the website, you went to the agent's office, you spoke to your grandpa. Any other sources of information you used to help you make your decision? Any social media?'</i>  P20: <i>'No I'm afraid not'</i>

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 6.4 shows the numbers of each type and the classification of participants by type in this study.

Table 6.4 Number of Information Searcher and Decision Maker Types

Decision Maker and Information Searcher Types	Number of participants	Participants
New systematic	5	P17, P23, P26, P28, P36
New systematic shortcut	4	P9, P14, P16, P22
New semi systematic	3	P18, P20, P21
New semi systematic shortcut	1	P19
Local systematic	1	P15
Local semi systematic	1	P13
Local limited	1	P10
Connected systematic	1	P38
Connected systematic shortcut	2	P27, P39
Connected semi systematic	3	P24, P31, P32
Connected limited	4	P12, P30, P33, P34
Experienced systematic	1	P11
Experienced semi systematic	1	P37
Experienced limited	3	P25, P29, P35

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The author hypothesised that despite living in an information rich world there was a lack of rationality and information used when making significant high involvement decisions. It can be seen from the previous analysis that half of the sample (n15) performed systematic searches for information but then five of these participants took a shortcut to the final decision, based on emotional rather than rational criteria. The majority of the participants who performed systematic searches were 'New' prospective postgraduates who were unaware of the University and so needed to gain the knowledge required to make a decision. Within this group of 'New' postgraduates there were participants who admitted that their level of informedness was low when they made the final decision.

The remaining half (n15) of the sample did semi systematic (n8) or limited (n7) information searches. Those participants whose search for information was limited were either 'Connected' (n4), 'Experienced' (n3) or 'Local' (n1) prospective postgraduates. This group relied more heavily on WOM recommendations and were the most likely to question whether they had made the right decision. They reflected that they would approach high involvement decisions in the future with more rigour, less reliance on WOM sources of information and more rationality. This is further discussed in section 6.4. The author therefore agrees with her hypothesis that for the majority of postgraduates there was a lack of rationality and information used during the information searching and decision making processes.

This study fulfils research questions 3 and 15. The Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology proposed by the current author illustrates the level of rigour and rationality employed during the decision making and information searching processes by different types of postgraduates. It contributes to an understanding of the level of informedness of prospective postgraduates when making their decisions as to which country, city, university and course to attend. This typology can be used as a tool to help universities understand the different segments of international postgraduates and provide them with the breadth of sources and types of information required at the right time. Recommendations are made in section 7.1.



## 6.2 Factors impacting on Information Searching Process and Decision making Cycle

This section draws conclusions on the factors that impacted on the information searching process and the decision making cycle of international postgraduate students in line with objective 4 and research question 8.

Objective 4 Assess the factors that influence the information searching process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates

Research Question 8: What factors influenced the information searching process and decision making cycle of postgraduate students?

The factors that influenced information behaviour and the decision making cycle of postgraduates in the author's study are similar to those found in the literature (for example Robson and Robinson 2013, Vrontis, Thrassou and Melanthiou 2007). However there are additional factors identified by the author as impacting on the information searching process and decision making cycle of prospective international postgraduates when choosing a university: the prospective postgraduate's work experience, source of income, experience of studying abroad, cultural norms, family factors including the location of family members, their role in the DMU and the education of siblings and lastly WOM recommendations from influencers. Factors influencing the post purchase stage of the cycle have not been previously investigated. This study therefore adds to the current research.

Table 6.5 shows the factors that impacted on the information search process and on the complete decision making cycle of participants from need recognition to post purchase evaluation. Some of the factors were identified in previous literature as shown in Tables 2.3 and 2.19. Other factors have been newly uncovered by the current author's research. Together these factors influenced the rigour of the information searching and decision making processes in terms of their breadth and length and the rationality with which postgraduates approached these processes.

Table 6.5 Factors impacting on the Information Searching Process and the Decision making Cycle

<b>Decision making unit member</b>	<b>Factors previously identified in the literature</b>	<b>New factors from current author's research</b>
<b>Postgraduate student</b>	Age	
	Gender	
	Country of Origin	
		Work experience
	Role in DMU	
		Source of income
	Perceived risk	
	Personality	
		Experience of studying abroad
		Experience of travel
	Cultural norms	
	Time	
<b>Family</b>	Parental education	
		Siblings' education
		Family members' location
		Family role in DMU
<b>Influencers</b>		WOM recommendations

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The factors that influenced prospective postgraduates as they progressed through the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle and searched for information are now discussed.

With reference to the profile of postgraduates and how this influenced the information searching and decision making processes, those participants who were older, female and with work experience were more likely to undertake a systematic and rigorous information search and take more time to evaluate alternative universities and consider their purchase.

With regards to the role of the participant in the DMU, those participants who were the sole members of the DMU and made the decision to study a postgraduate degree by themselves (n8) or were financing the degree (n3), perceived that there was greater risk in the purchase. There were other participants who similarly perceived a greater risk in the purchase of a postgraduate qualification due to their situation and personality. These groups of participants conducted a more extensive search for information and more thoroughly considered the decisions they were making. Their level of cognitive

dissonance was potentially higher especially if their expectations had been formed from impersonal sources of communication. If the source of income for their postgraduate degree was the participants' parents (n29) or a bursary (n1), partner (n1) or employer (n1) there was often less perceived risk in making the decision and less time was spent gaining information and making the decision.

The country of origin of participants impacted on the degree of involvement of parents in the decision to attend the university. Parents from Asian countries were more influential in the DMU and participants felt more supported when making the decision of university to study at. The desire amongst prospective postgraduates from Asian countries to study with their friends and individuals from the same country often led to a relatively straightforward and quick decision making process. In this situation often the universities to be evaluated were those provided to them by agents or staff at partner institutions. Participants would perform a limited information search looking at certain types of information concerning the rankings, and reputation of the university and the course to help them decide. They would then check entry requirements, course modules and entry dates. From their peer group they would obtain information on the lifestyle and teaching environment at the university to see if they would be able to graduate successfully.

Linked to the country of origin, cultural norms influenced the decision making process of participants. Those from collectivist cultures tended to involve a wider range of family and friends in the DMU and rely on them for WOM recommendations so curtailing the decision making process and reaching a decision more quickly. One participant's fatalistic attitude and emotional approach to making the final decision were linked to his cultural norms.

The personality traits of participants, linked to the desire not to experience a new challenge or adapt to a new environment, limited the time spent searching for information on universities that they were not familiar with. These participants wanted to return to study at the University or chose the UK institution that had awarded them an undergraduate degree. The decision was therefore a quick one to make and little information was required.

Experience of travelling overseas and studying abroad in the University, partner institutions or other universities led to participants having more confidence and perceiving less risk in making the decision of which university to attend. This linked to the 'Experienced' type of participant. Those who opted to return to the University to study tended to use fewer sources of information and relied on the recommendations of their friends and current students. The decision was often made quickly and without much rigour.

Time impacted on the decision making and information searching processes. The majority of participants who spent longer making the decision to study at the University had a more rigorous and rational decision making process and consulted more types and sources of information (see section 6.1).

The roles that parents, other family members and influencers played in the DMU impacted on the degree to which participants perceived a need to search for information and spend time contemplating their purchase. Influencers such as agents, friends, current students, alumni, siblings and other family members provided WOM recommendations to participants. These participants were classified as 'Connected'. Participants who relied on these recommendations went through a less intensive information searching and decision making process. Those participants who did not have WOM sources of information from influencers to advise them tended to spend more time making the decision and searching for a wider range of sources and types of information.

Parents who took on the role of decider or trusted the advice of other family members as to which university the participant should attend, also influenced the degree of effort that participants would make to gather information and evaluate it. Those participants, whose parents let them make the decision themselves without demanding much justification, tended to do a less rigorous information search. Equally those participants whose parents had decided that they should go to the UK to study did not perform an in-depth search for information. The more influential parents were in the DMU and in making the final decision, the less effort participants tended to make.

The location of family members, such as grandparents, and partners who could provide accommodation and other support to participants whilst at university, impacted on the degree of information search. These participants were classified as 'Local.' Participants tended to limit their research to those universities which were located near to the family and those recommended by them. Consequently, less time was spent searching for information and making the decision.

The educational background of the participants' parents and siblings also impacted on the decision making process of participants. Those participants whose parents had not been to university were more likely to be told by their parents that they were going to study in the UK and where they would study. If a sibling who had already studied in the UK gave advice to their parents as to where the participant should study, then their recommendations would often be adopted by the parents. These scenarios led to less rigorous information searching and decision making processes by participants.

The factors that influenced the information searching behaviour of postgraduates in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle whilst participants were at university are now explored. Some of the same factors discussed above impacted on the level of rigour with which participants looked for academic and practical information when studying.

Participants who had prior experience of studying at the University or a partner institution had less need to search for academic and practical information. This was compounded by the fact that they often joined friendship groups that could help them quickly access any information they required. Travelling abroad also lessened participants' need to undertake a rigorous search for information. The country of origin of participants impacted on the degree to which participants had easy access to information. Large cohorts of students from certain countries, for example Thailand or Vietnam, facilitated the formation of friendship and study groups to provide any missing information.

The converse was true. Those participants from countries which were poorly represented at the University, who did not have prior experience of travel or

study abroad and had not joined friendship or study groups, were more likely to undertake rigorous information searches at university.

This study fulfils objective 4 and research question 8. This study extends the current research as it is the first time that a model of the decision making cycle has been devised that shows the factors that impacted on both the information searching and decision making processes. These factors are pictured as impacting on the current author's proposed decision making cycle model in section 6.9.

Universities need to understand the factors that impact on the decision making cycle of postgraduates as it enables them to group postgraduates into segments and provide them with the types of information they require through the optimal channels. Recommendations are provided in section 7.1.

### [6.3 Kuhlthau Information Search Process Stages linked to the Decision Making Cycle](#)

In this section the stages of Kuhlthau's (1993a) Information Search Process (ISP) model and the tasks, feelings thoughts and actions experienced at each stage are linked to the information search behaviour of participants and to the stages of the decision making cycle in line with objectives 2 and 6. The iterative and cyclical nature of the information searching process is also be considered in line with research questions 2 and 14.

Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.

Objective 6: Provide conclusions on the role of information within international postgraduates' decision making cycle and the information requirements at each stage

Research Question 2: To what extent were the decision making and information searching processes iterative and cyclical?

Research Question 14: How did the postgraduates' experiences of information searching affect future information searching behaviour?

Kuhlthau's ground breaking ISP model was chosen in the current author's study as she is one of the most influential and cited authors in the field of information behaviour and other fields and her model offered the opportunity to look at the information searching process of postgraduates from different perspectives; cognitive (thoughts), affective (feelings), actions (physical) behaviour (tasks), and investigate the role of uncertainty. The ISP model has been tested numerous times by Kuhlthau and other scholars in different contexts and with different groups of individuals. However, Kuhlthau's work has not been cited in peer reviewed marketing or consumer behaviour journals or used by authors looking at the decision making process for goods or services. The author perceived an opportunity to test Kuhlthau's model in a new context, that of prospective international postgraduates making decisions pertaining to the purchase of a high involvement product and looking for information in the post purchase stage whilst at university.

Conclusions are now drawn on the links between the stages in Kuhlthau's ISP model and the stages of postgraduates' decision making cycle which are shown in Table 6.6. As participants progressed through the decision making cycle, they gathered information at each stage of the ISP to help them make informed choices; initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation. However, the extent to which they spent time progressing through each stage, collecting information and then evaluating it, varied by participant. This concurs with Kuhlthau's (2008) study which found that students approached the ISP in different ways, and some might skip stages.

Table 6.6 Kuhlthau Information Search Process (ISP) linked to Decision Making Cycle Stages

Stage	Appropriate task and description	Feelings (Affective)	Thoughts (cognitive)	Actions (physical) in stages	Stages in decision making cycle
Initiation	Recognise: lack of knowledge of topic	Uncertainty	General and vague	Seek background information	Need recognition
Selection	Identify: topic and approach to take	Optimism		Seek relevant information	Evaluation of alternatives
Exploration	Investigate: information on general topic	Confusion, Frustration, Doubt			
Formulation	Formulate: explore information on focused topic	Clarity	Narrowed /clearer	Seek relevant or focused information	(Application)
Collection	Gather: information on focused topic	Sense of Direction, Confidence	Increased interest		
Presentation	Complete: search and use findings	Satisfaction or disappointment	Clearer or focused		
					Purchase Post Purchase evaluation

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Kuhlthau (2004 p.82)

The initiation stage mirrored the need recognition stage of the decision making cycle as in both stages participants' need for a postgraduate qualification was triggered. In the initiation stage participants acknowledged that they had a lack of knowledge of postgraduate qualifications and the universities that offered them so they should search for information to enable them to make an informed decision. These findings reflect Kuhlthau's studies (1988a,1988b,1991,1999, 2001). The triggers to recognising the need for postgraduate study were the same triggers that led to the start of the information search process (see section 6.6.1). At the end of the initiation stage, participants entered the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision making cycle. The evaluation of alternatives stage spanned the rest of Kuhlthau's stages up to presentation.

In the Selection stage participants identified how they were going to undertake the search process in terms of the sources and types of information to access. In order to do this, they might undertake some information search to enable them



to decide on the way forward, such as speaking to their friends and other WOM sources. Participants planned different search strategies with some deciding to rely on WOM sources of information whilst others planned to undertake an extensive search of online sources. This agrees with the findings of Kuhlthau (1991) as she acknowledged that searchers would use both formal, organised sources of information and sources from everyday experiences such as WOM sources.

During the Exploration stage participants started to investigate countries and universities to gain an understanding of the options available. They broadly searched for information about studying in different countries and put together a potential list of universities based on certain criteria, for example rankings, which they could then research further. Some participants looked at information on different types of courses as they were undecided as to which course to choose. Their objective at this stage was to obtain enough information which would enable them to narrow down their search in the next stage of the ISP. Sources of information included WOM and online sources. The main types of information were university reputation and ranking.

In the Formulation stage participants searched for additional information which would enable them to decide on the country to study in and the courses they wanted to study so that they could form a shortlist of universities. Participants might research the cities linked to the universities to help them make their decision of where to study. Both online and WOM sources were used to explore the options available. Types of information included university reputation, rankings, course curricula, fees, entry requirements, student population, student lifestyle, academic staff, teaching quality, facilities, employability, student satisfaction and cost of living.

Having decided on a country to study in, the fifth stage of Collection was the stage where participants continued to search for information to decide which of the universities and courses they would apply to. Participants would apply to, on average, one to three universities and would potentially receive more than one offer. They might then undertake additional information searches to decide on

the offer that they would accept and revisit previous sources and types of information. This shows that information searching was an iterative process.

In the Presentation stage participants progressed into the purchase and post purchase evaluation stages of the of the decision making cycle. They made the final decision as to which university and course they would choose. Linked to the post purchase stage they would decide how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with their purchase. After purchase participants would return to earlier sources and types of information to reassure themselves that they had made the right decision to reduce cognitive dissonance.

This study has addressed research question 2 concerning the iterative nature of the information search process. Participants revisited prior stages in Kuhlthau's ISP model and reviewed the sources and types of information they had accessed previously when making a decision to purchase a postgraduate qualification and then in the post purchase stage to gain reassurance.

Once at university participants remained in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle and they would start to search for information on the personal and academic aspects of their university experience. Information searching was found to be a continuous process throughout the participants' time at university. Participants would go through Kuhlthau's information search process many times, returning to the initiation stage at the start of each information search. Whether any of the stages were missed out and the length of time spent at each stage depended on the level of importance and involvement with the type of information required and the number of sources that needed to be consulted in order to obtain the information.

The feelings experienced by the qualitative participants as they progressed through the stages of the information search process are now compared to Kuhlthau's research findings.

Kuhlthau (1991) found that in complex information seeking tasks individuals' feelings of uncertainty grew as they searched for information and then decreased during the later stages of the task with focus formulation and

construction. However, this was not the case with all individuals, as discussed in Kuhlthau's 2008 study where students experienced different emotions during the information search process. Some students did feel uncertainty throughout the time searching for information, and this often depended on how they had engaged with the process.

Many participants perceived the decision to study at a university abroad as a high-risk decision and they did not have prior experience of making such an important decision. They engaged in complex information seeking and relied heavily on the information search to inform the choices they made. Errors in the search process could have serious consequences if the wrong choice of university and course was made. Those who did not have WOM sources of information to guide them, and those that had to undertake the search process alone experienced higher levels of perceived risk.

The greater the search for information, in terms of breadth and length, the more participants acknowledged feelings of uncertainty and anxiety whilst going through the process. Those who planned to evaluate a large number of universities, against a longlist of criteria and through a variety of sources, were overwhelmed by the task ahead of them. They approached the information search process in the Initiation stage with apprehension. In the Selection stage they often used WOM sources of information to give them advice on how to undertake the search to help relieve their feelings of uncertainty. For those who did not have any WOM sources to consult, the task became even more daunting. Few participants felt optimistic about the search process at this stage as they started to look for information.

This finding is contrary to Kuhlthau's original 1983 research where feelings of optimism were more common in the selection stage (Kuhlthau 1991). However, Kuhlthau's 2008 study did acknowledge that there were those who approached the search for information in the selection stage with apprehension.

For many participants their uncertainty continued during the Exploration stage and they reported feelings of confusion, doubt and frustration. This was especially the case when they were gathering large quantities of data which

needed to be evaluated. When participants had a list of options regarding which country to study in, which course to choose and which university would best meet their needs, they often felt overwhelmed with the choice available to them. Gathering new information to inform their decision that then conflicted with previous information, or was inconsistent with it, added to their confusion and frustration. These findings agree with Kuhlthau's studies (1991,2008).

The dip in confidence that individuals in Kuhlthau's (2005) studies felt in the exploration stage led to them wanting to abandon the search. At this stage some participants who felt overwhelmed would take a shortcut to reach a decision and skip the next few stages.

There were participants who did not undertake such a comprehensive search for information in the Exploration stage. They might have known that they wanted to study in the UK and they often relied on the advice of friends, agents and university staff to provide them with an initial shortlist of universities.

Alternatively, they had prior experience of studying in the University. They were therefore considering a smaller number of options in terms of universities and courses, and at this stage they did not report feelings of confusion or doubt.

Other participants tried to avoid feelings of stress and uncertainty by performing the information search as quickly as possible in the Exploration stage so they could make a decision.

For Kuhlthau (1991) the Formulation stage was the turning point in the process when individuals began to feel less uncertain, more confident and have a sense of clarity. Some students in Kuhlthau's 2008 study were optimistic and confident at the start of this stage, whereas others still felt confused and uncertain, but these feelings diminished over the project.

Some participants in the formulation stage felt confident with the information search process and some continued to feel anxious and confused which concurs with Kuhlthau's 2008 research. Those participants who had started off with a lesser number of options in terms of countries, courses and universities, and had systematically screened out various options to end up with a shortlist, felt more confident than those who continued to be faced with a large number of options

to narrow down. Equally those who relied on WOM sources of information to help them were less confused and more confident that they were gathering the information needed to reach their decision. For those participants who were unsure whether they had gathered the information they needed to make an informed and correct decision the uncertainty and anxiety continued throughout this stage.

Similarly, in the Collection stage there were participants who still lacked the confidence that they had undertaken an adequate information search. They were uncertain that they had the information they required to make a decision. They did not feel that they knew what direction they should take in terms of searching for further information. These feelings resulted in some participants stopping searching for information and taking a shortcut to the final decision. Other participants were anxious because they felt they had not had enough time to perform a comprehensive information search and evaluation of alternative universities.

These findings are contrary to Kuhlthau's (1991) study as she found that the collection stage was when most individuals felt less uncertain and more confident. However, the findings agree with the 2008 study as some individuals still felt uncertain.

Kuhlthau (1991) described the final Presentation stage of the process as one in which individuals would feel satisfied and relieved if the search had been successful and disappointed if not. Many participants could not decide on their satisfaction levels regarding the information search process until they had experienced life at the university they had chosen. It was only when they had started to study at the university that they could reflect on the information search process and the choices they had made and decide whether they were satisfied with what they had done. They could then establish whether they would replicate the search and decision making processes in the future.

The actions linked to each stage of the model are now compared to the actions of the qualitative participants. Participants who performed a systematic search

for information did undertake the same actions as identified by Kuhlthau (1991) as they went through the search process.

In the Initiation stage participants started off searching for background information and then in the Selection stage they looked for relevant information to help them decide how they were going to approach the information search process. In the Exploration and Formulation stages they then accumulated a range of types of relevant information from a variety of sources on countries, universities, courses and cities to study in. They would relate the new information gained to that which was already known. Reflecting on the information they had collected allowed them to form new constructs. Having screened out a number of options from their lists in terms of countries and courses, they would then seek pertinent and more focused information on a fewer number of options in terms of universities, cities and courses. They used the information they gained to narrow down their search to one or more options of universities to apply to in the Collection stage. In the Presentation stage they all made a final decision as to which university to study in based on the evaluation of the sources of information they had carried out.

The thoughts of participants as they progressed through the ISP stages, which corresponded with the thoughts outlined in Kuhlthau's (1991) model, are now discussed. In the Initiation and Selection stages of the information search process participants' thoughts about which country, university and course to choose were unclear and vague. As they gathered information in the Exploration stage their thoughts centred on being adequately informed about the options of studying in different countries and universities. As participants progressed through the Formulation stage, they gained more knowledge and their thoughts became clearer and more focused. They were able to screen out countries and reject universities from their lists. Their understanding of the options available developed from being more factual to more analytical as they approached the end of the search. Kuhlthau (1991) found that gaining a focus regarding the information to search for either occurred suddenly or progressively. For the participants as constructs became clearer, they gained a focus progressively.

In the Collection stage all participants wanted to come to a decision as to which universities to apply to and their thoughts were focused on finding information to achieve this. Their interest in reaching a final decision grew and with this they had a clearer sense of direction. As they reached the Presentation stage, participants' thoughts were focused on gaining information to enable them to purchase the chosen university qualification.

The experiences of participants with the information search process and their level of satisfaction with the information search undertaken are now explored. This links to the last stage in Kuhlthau's model, Presentation. The impact of these experiences on future information searching behaviour are investigated in line with research question 14.

The degree to which participants were satisfied with the information search process that they had undertaken varied between participants. These findings agree with Kuhlthau's 2008 study. She found that students who went through all the information search process stages were more likely to feel satisfied at the end of the process. Students who skipped stages and did not try and build explanations tended to have negative feelings throughout the search process culminating in frustration.

Participants did learn from the information search process that they had undertaken, and their experiences affected the way they planned to search for information in the future. The participants who had systematically and rationally gone through the ISP model stages were satisfied with their information search process and the choice of university they had made. Their positive experience of information searching meant that they would search for information in the same rigorous way in the future. The more rigorous their information search process was in terms of breadth and depth, the more confident they were in the process they had gone through. Whereas those participants who did not spend time at each stage or took a shortcut to the final decision and skipped stages, were less certain with the decision they had taken and felt negative emotions at the end of the process. It was not until they arrived at the university that they knew whether they had made the right decision. The participants who had not undertaken a rigorous information search process often voiced regret at the

decision they had made to attend the university. Those who were dissatisfied with the information search process that they had undertaken and the decision they had made had learnt from this and were more likely to approach the information searching process in a more rigorous manner in the future.

This study has fulfilled research questions 2 and 14. Postgraduates' experiences of information search did affect future information searching behaviour in a continuous cyclical manner.

Kuhlthau (1993b) identified zones of intervention that were times during an individual's information search process when services and systems could intervene to help them find the information they required. This concept could be linked to the information search process of postgraduates. Universities could intervene at various stages in the information searching process to provide postgraduates with the information they needed at that time. Section 7.1 makes recommendations to universities on the sources and types of information they can provide to potential postgraduates at various stages of the information searching process to ensure that prospective students have the information needed to make an informed decision.

Conclusions are now drawn in line with objectives 2 and 7 on the rationale for choosing Kuhlthau's model on which to build the current author's proposed decision making cycle model.

Kuhlthau's ISP model reflected the information searching process of prospective postgraduate students when making the decision where to study a postgraduate qualification and when studying at university. Kuhlthau acknowledged that individuals in her studies approached the search for information in different ways, with varying levels of rigour and that some individuals skipped stages in her model. She also found that feelings throughout the process differed between individuals in terms of the degree of uncertainty and confidence felt when going through the stages of the process. The model therefore has the flexibility to adapt to the information searching behaviour of different people and can be used to effectively represent the diverse information search processes found amongst postgraduates in the qualitative research. Kuhlthau's model has also been seen



to link effectively to the stages of the postgraduates' decision making cycle as participants searched for information to help them make their decisions at each stage. Placing Kuhlthau's model in the inner ring of the decision making cycle reflects this.

Previous information seeking models including Kuhlthau's (1993a) model were criticised for being sequential and linear (for example Robson and Robinson 2013) and cyclical models were proposed (see Marcella and Baxter 1998). The qualitative findings showed that information searching was a continuous cyclical and iterative process rather than a linear process. The author therefore proposes that the information searching process is pictured as a cyclical process which answers criticism made regarding linear LIS models.

#### 6.4 Decision Sequence and Iterative, Cyclical Decision Making Process

In this section research questions 1,2 and 13 are addressed.

Research Question 1: What were the sequence of decisions taken before enrolling at university?

Research Question 2: To what extent were the decision making and information searching processes iterative and cyclical?

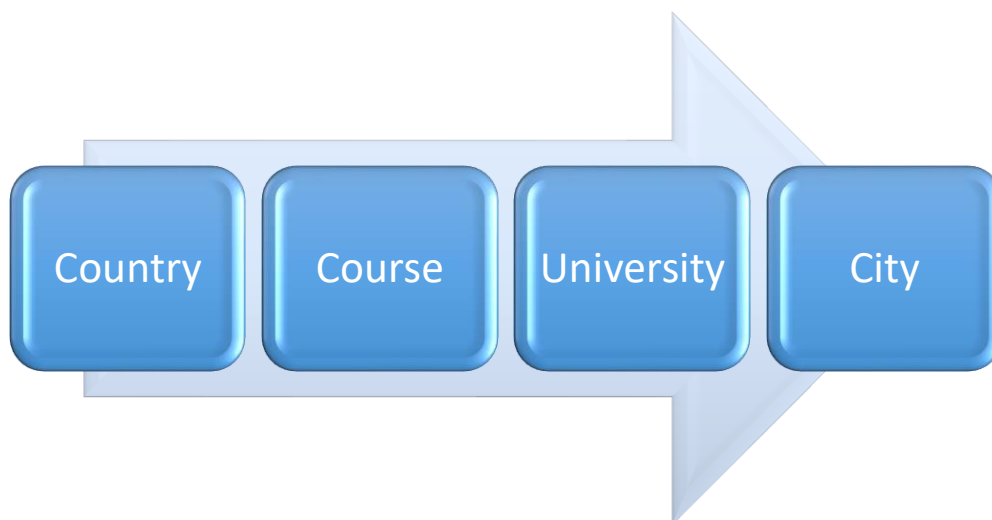
Research Question 13: What have the postgraduates learnt about the decision making process that will inform future decisions?

Firstly, conclusions are drawn on the sequence of decisions made by prospective postgraduates as they progressed through the decision making cycle on the way to purchase which links to research question 1 and adds to the current knowledge on the topic.

'New' prospective postgraduates who were unaware of universities that they could study in and had no prior experience or connection to a university approached the decisions that they needed to make in a logical order and in a rational manner. Figure 6.1 shows the sequence of decisions that they made. The first decision was the country to study in, followed by the course to study,

then the university and finally the city which was of lesser importance. Participants were aware of the fact that certain universities had a good reputation for certain courses so it was more important to firstly choose a course and then secondly choose the university that delivered that course well. This was the sequence of decisions found by Manns and Swift (2016) but not by QS (2019g).

Figure 6.1 Sequence of Decisions by 'New' Prospective Postgraduates



Source Author's Analysis 2020

If participants had a shortlist of universities from a certain country given to them by the agent or partner staff, then they would not investigate countries to study in. Some participants decided on the course they wanted to do and then looked at the universities on their list offering those courses and the cities linked to the universities. However, many looked at the universities on their lists and the courses they offered simultaneously, and then at the city the university was in.

Some participants knew that they wanted to return to the University or study at the university that had provided their undergraduate degree, so they just had to decide on the course that they would study at the UK university that they were familiar with.

Research question 1 has been fulfilled. Alternative sequences of decisions were identified in this study which have not been discussed in the literature, concerning those postgraduates who were given shortlists of universities by their agent or partner university staff or those postgraduates who had previously studied at a UK university or undertaken the UK university's undergraduate degree at a partner university. Recommendations concerning the information that universities could provide to prospective postgraduates as they are making their decisions as to which country, city, university and course to choose are provided in section 7.1. The recommendations acknowledge the importance of building relationships with agents and partner institutions in order to provide a pipeline of future postgraduate students.

Conclusions regarding the iterative nature of the decision making process are now discussed in line with research question 2. Participants moved backwards and forwards through the evaluation of alternatives, application, purchase and post purchase stages of the decision making process as they revisited previous decisions they had made concerning the country, city, university and course to attend and the information they had evaluated to reach these decisions.

Participants would form a shortlist of certain universities from a longer list during the evaluation of alternatives stage and then some would add completely new universities to their shortlist later on, therefore moving backwards in the process. Similarly, they applied to a number of universities in the purchase stage and then, because of certain factors, went back to the previous evaluation of alternatives stage to investigate new universities. Having purchased the postgraduate qualification participants would also return to decisions made in previous stages to reassure themselves that they had made the right decision. Research question 2 has been further addressed. Both the information searching and decision making processes were found to be iterative.

The discussion now focuses on what postgraduates learnt from the decision making process to inform future decisions in a cyclical manner, in line with research questions 2 and 13.

Those participants who were satisfied that they had made the right decision

based on a rigorous and rational evaluation of alternative countries, cities, universities and courses stated that they would repeat the same process again. Other participants were dissatisfied with the decision they had made and they felt that their experiences would alter their future behaviour. They claimed that they would approach the decision making process for a high involvement product in a different way moving forward by evaluating additional alternative options more thoroughly and giving themselves time to make a considered decision. For example, Participant 22 planned to think more critically when making new decisions and appraise more options rather than choose the first option that came to mind. Participant 17 had learnt from the decision making process that she should take account of unexpected factors when making future decisions.

Participant 9 had also learnt from the decision making process he had undertaken. He felt that the process was time consuming and frustrating and he realised that he could have made the decision much more effectively by evaluating less alternatives. The next time he made the decision to study a new postgraduate qualification he reduced the number of universities he considered from fifty to nine. He was satisfied with the alternative way that he had approached the decision. Research questions 2 and 13 have been fulfilled. Postgraduates had learnt from making their decisions which would inform future decisions so the decision making process was cyclical in nature.

Based on her research the current author agrees with cyclical decision making models proposed by marketing scholars such as Towers and Towers (2018). She does not feel that the traditional DMP model effectively represents the iterative and cyclical decision making process of those making a high involvement decision. Her proposed cyclical model reflects her findings.

### [6.5 Pre purchase Information Sources and Types](#)

In this section conclusions are drawn on the sources and types of information required by prospective postgraduates as they progressed through the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making cycle and made their decisions regarding choice of country, city and university to study in.

The information requirements of influential members of the DMU are also discussed in line with research questions 4 and 5.

Research Question 4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?

Research Question 5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?

Manns and Swift (2016) and Moogan (2020) acknowledged the importance of WOM information when deciding on a university to attend. The findings agreed that WOM sources were important as the purchase of a postgraduate degree was perceived to be a high risk purchase. Reliance on WOM sources reflected the connectedness of individuals in the digital era and how they were influenced by their peer groups. WOM sources were perceived to be more credible, impartial and less biased and therefore trusted by participants which agreed with Marcella, Baxter and Walicka's study (2019).

The findings showed that parents (n30), friends (n16), agents (n17) and staff at partner institutions (n6) were the most influential sources when participants decided which country, city, university and course to choose. The importance of parents as a member of the DMU of prospective international students has been acknowledged (Zhu and Reeves 2019). However, the roles parents adopted in the DMU and the sources and types of information they required in these roles has not previously been researched. Similarly, the other influential members of the DMU when purchasing a postgraduate qualification and their information requirements have not been examined until now.

Parents influenced 30 out of 39 participants and so were the most influential members of the DMU. They performed various roles when helping participants make the decision as to which degree to purchase. They acted as initiators triggering a need for postgraduate study when they encouraged or told participants that they should study a postgraduate qualification. This was often the case when the participant's father had not gone to university themselves and

wanted their children to benefit from a postgraduate education. Parents were the deciders who helped participants to choose the final course to purchase and the buyers who paid for the postgraduate qualification with 29 out of 34 participants being financed by their parents. Parents were therefore found to have a much more significant role in the decision making process regardless of whether participants came from collectivist cultures or not which adds to the body of knowledge in this area.

The information requirements of parents as members of the DMU were varied. The majority of parents expected their children to search for information on the options for postgraduate study and then report back to them. Only one participant mentioned that her father actively searched for information. Parents wanted recommendations from other parents and family members regarding which universities to choose for postgraduate study. They were interested in information concerning university rankings, employment opportunities, levels of safety at the university and the student lifestyle in order to ensure that their children would be safe and happy. This information was not always easy to find. Parents who took on the role of decider or trusted the advice of other family members, also influenced the degree of effort that prospective postgraduates would make to gather information and evaluate it. The more influential parents were in the DMU and in making the final decision the less systematic was participants information search and the decision making process was approached in a less rigorous manner.

Friends, who were current students or alumni, played the role of influencers in the DMU. They often triggered the need for postgraduate study amongst participants and were cited as the most important source of information for 12 participants whilst progressing through the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle. This is in contrast to Manns and Swift's (2016) findings. Friends who had studied at UK universities were best placed to provide information on the 'real experience' of studying at these institutions to participants. For participants selecting a university became a lifestyle choice and they solicited information from their friends on the university environment and the 'atmosphere' to gain an understanding of whether the lifestyle would suit them. Information was provided by friends on the teaching quality, teaching style,

assessments, learning environment, how they engaged with friends and lecturers and what life was like on the campus, in the city and whilst travelling to other places. The quality of the contact with academic and non-academic staff and how helpful and friendly the staff were, were also important types of information that friends could pass on to participants. Friends were able to reassure participants about employability after study and provide guidance on the information search process, safety in the city, the University's reputation for business courses, university facilities and the level of technology and modernity of the university.

Friends would pass on WOM information to participants or post their videos and photos of their life at the university, in the city or as tourists on their social media accounts which their friends would then follow. Linked to a positive student experience and lifestyle, friends also advised participants on the ease of adaptation to the UK culture and the likelihood that they would make friends and join friendship groups so they would not be lonely. Participants trusted their friends to give them impartial and credible information and if they knew them personally, they could provide advice as to whether they would be able to cope with the demands of academic study, successfully complete their postgraduate degrees and have a positive experience whilst at the university.

The concept of a friend was broad as identified by Towers and Towers (2018). Friends on Facebook who were unknown to the participant, apart from having studied in the same undergraduate institution as they had, would be consulted for their experiences of studying at the universities in participants' choice sets. Using friends to provide recommendations on where to study often led to a curtailment of information searching and a shortcut to the final decision without participants fully evaluating the universities they could attend.

Friends did not have information requirements when advising prospective postgraduates as they had direct experience of studying at the university. Universities do however need to consider how they could stimulate WOM recommendations from their current or previous students. Recommendations are made in section 7.1.

Agents were identified in the literature as becoming an increasingly important source of information as participants made their decision as to which university to study in (QS 2019g). In the qualitative research different types of agents were identified; independent educational agents, university agents, academic staff taking on the role of agents in partner institutions and a football agent.

Of particular note in this study is the role of agents and partner university staff as gatekeepers in the DMU. For 11 participants agents and staff provided lists of universities to investigate and these lists often formed the complete choice set of universities that were considered. It is therefore important for UK universities to establish partnership agreements with agents and universities overseas and provide them with the information they require so they can recommend the university to prospective postgraduates.

Agents and staff at partner institutions were also influencers in the DMU and were an important source of many different types of information throughout the participants' decision making cycle. They handed out prospectuses and provided all the information that participants required as they evaluated universities, made applications, purchased a degree and prepared for study overseas. Agents applied to universities on behalf of the participants, filled in accommodation requests and advised on visa interviews and paperwork making the decision making process easier and less stressful. Agents built relationships with participants over time as they got to know their needs and became a trusted source of information that was recommended to friends. Participants mentioned that they had received information from agents concerning the university's unique selling proposition, facilities, courses, modernity, employability rating, student satisfaction, fees, payment procedure, application process, accommodation, requirements for IELTS test, advice on the recognition of the qualification by home country authorities, health checks, weather, preparation for the visa interview and working while studying. From partner staff they also received the information they required including detailed information about the course modules and how to undertake academic study at the University.

Lecturers in the home university were the most important source of information amongst prospective Chinese international postgraduate students (Manns and



Swift 2016). The findings confirmed the significant role that lecturers and other academic staff in home universities had played when participants were contemplating postgraduate study, evaluating universities and making a final decision. Lecturers helped to form the choice set of a participant by recommending universities to investigate. They provided advice as to which universities would be suitable according to the academic level of the participant as they often had experience themselves of studying overseas or working with UK universities. They could reassure participants that they would be able to cope with academic study at postgraduate level. Participants regarded them as a credible and trustworthy source of information that they could rely on and as such the decision as to which university to attend was often based on the lecturer's advice.

Employers were the third most important source of WOM information for quantitative participants. However, in the qualitative study employers were not referred to as a key source of information by participants contrary to the literature (Moogan 2020). This was because few participants had worked prior to postgraduate study and those that had worked often wanted to change career.

Hesketh and Knight (1999) indicated that prospective postgraduates desired contact throughout the decision making process with a representative of the overseas host university. This study shows that the current prospective postgraduate of today would have progressed through the decision making cycle to application before they contacted a university representative to seek advice to fill out the forms and submit the paperwork. Many participants made their final decision without ever contacting the university and would rely on other online and WOM sources of information.

Online sources were frequently used by participants as members of the digital generation which agrees with the literature (Towers and Towers 2013, Moogan 2020). The exception to this were the Chinese international postgraduates in Manns and Swift's (2016) study.

The university website was the most important source of online information during the pre purchase stages which agrees with the literature and the

quantitative study (Renfrew et al 2010, Moogan 2020). Participants searched for information on the course curricula, fees, entry requirements, rankings, employability, lifestyle, accommodation, the city and every other aspect of their future student experience. University websites impacted positively or negatively on participants' perceptions of the university dependent on the ease of navigation, images portrayed, provision and clarity of information required. The videos and images on the website were remembered the most as tangible proof that the university delivered the quality service required.

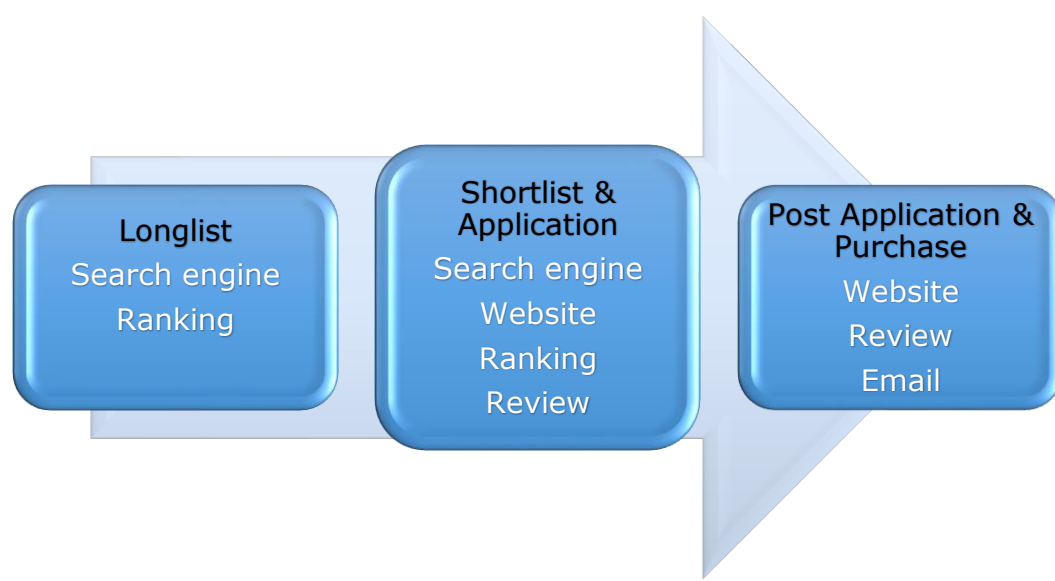
Rankings' websites were acknowledged in previous research and the quantitative study as a valuable source of information for prospective postgraduates especially Asian students (Teichler 2011). Participants agreed that rankings were both an important source and type of information. Rankings were perceived as credible, trustworthy sources which, like Google searches, allowed participants to build up longlists and shortlists and decide on the final university to attend. This was despite the fact that participants could not remember which ranking websites they used which suggested that they did not evaluate the quality of the source of the rankings themselves, as they did not have the interest or energy to do so, which agrees with Teichler's (2011) findings. For participants who did not know anyone who had studied at the university, the rankings were a more important source and type of information as they helped them to differentiate between universities. Rankings were also used as a sign of quality which was perceived to be a more effective indicator than a university's reputation.

Internet search engines were a source of information to prospective international postgraduates in the literature and to participants (Moogan 2020). Google was the preferred internet search engine followed by Baidu in China. Participants appeared to trust Google to provide them with credible websites through which to obtain rankings, reviews and general information as they were forming lists, evaluating universities and deciding which course to purchase. On the whole participants could not remember which websites they were directed onto and did not question the credibility of those websites because they trusted Google itself. To build up lists of universities or courses to evaluate they used search terms such as 'rank', 'top' and 'best'. They also looked for information on cities and tourist attractions near to universities.

Online student reviews were confirmed by academic and industry sources to be important (Towers and Towers 2013, QS 2019g). Quantitative respondents rated student comments posted in chat rooms, forums, blogs and websites as the fifth most important source of information. Participants agreed that online reviews by students who were currently studying at a university or who were alumni were important as they could gain a true picture of what life would be like when studying at the university and living in the city. This was especially the case for those participants who did not have any friends studying at universities overseas. Reviews on websites such as Student Room or in social media such as Facebook were perceived as providing a credible view of the advantages and disadvantages of studying at the university. Participants could not name the review websites but still perceived the reviews to be unbiased and trustworthy sources of impartial information. Online reviews were used to help eliminate universities from shortlists in the later stages of the evaluation of alternatives stage.

Figure 6.2 summarises the most popular online sources used by participants.

Figure 6.2 Decision Making through Online Sources



Source Author's Analysis 2020

Figure 6.2 shows that during the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making cycle participants used online sources to formulate longlists, eliminate universities to form shortlists, decide on universities to apply to and then which offer to accept.

According to the industry and academic literature social media was becoming an increasingly important source of information for prospective postgraduates (Rekhter and Hossler 2019). This conflicts with the qualitative findings where the majority of participants did not rely on social media as an information source. One reason for this might be because participants knew friends who had first-hand knowledge of the university and finding out their opinions was more valuable than encountering unknown students online. The fact that none of the participants went onto student chat rooms, forums, or blogs, when this was identified as the fifth most important source for international respondents in the quantitative research, reinforces this view.

Participants did access YouTube videos and Instagram posts through the university website itself. Viewing these videos and images of the university and city helped participants to understand the university and the student lifestyle, reduce any apprehensions that they had and make them feel that they belonged. However only a few participants, who did not know any students at the University, actively went onto social media to find out information. One participant used Facebook to locate those who had previously studied at her institution and had attended the university so she could ask their opinions. Another participant found individuals and groups through social media who could give her advice.

According to QS (2019g) email was the most popular channel for communication for prospective students during all stages of the decision making process which was contrary to the qualitative findings. Most participants only used email just before applying to universities to gain direct advice and then once offers had been obtained. The email contact tended to be initiated by participants who were genuinely interested in the institution. They were often ready to apply, awaiting confirmation of their place at university, wanting to progress their application or obtain a visa.

The printed prospectus was found to be a useful source of information in older literature that focused on undergraduate students (Renfrew et al 2010). Industry research indicated that international postgraduates preferred online prospectuses which their parents also accessed (QS 2019g). Participants had received prospectuses from agents but only one participant valued it as a source of information that she could continually refer to. She formed an emotional bond with the University by looking at the text and images in the prospectus.

In the literature and the quantitative study, the perceived importance of open days and visits reflected the views of UK based prospective postgraduates. The majority of participants were based overseas and did not visit the university or attend an open day. For those participants who lived near the university, only one decided to visit the university to ask for advice on her visa application. One other participant visited the university for a tour, but this did not influence his decision to attend.

Only two participants had visited educational fairs in their home countries however they did have a favourable impact on them. One participant gained a positive impression of a university, that they later attended, from the enthusiastic representative at the fair. The other participant visited a fair organised by her agent and formed her choice set of ten universities from the visit.

Other sources of information identified in the literature such as The British Council, organisations representing the host country and offline media such as newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, billboard, mail drops and flyers were not mentioned by participants as sources of information they had used.

In conclusion Google searches and country, city and university websites were used to obtain factual information regarding the weather, the size, demographic and ethnic profile of the student population in a country, city or university, a country's visa policy, entry and exit regulations, the duration of postgraduate study, a city's location, crime rates, a university's ranking, course curricula, employability and satisfaction statistics, tuition fees, entry requirements, start

dates and facilities.

It was the less factual and more intangible information that was more difficult for participants to access. Participants turned to WOM sources to gain information on the reputation of the country's educational system, university or course, the environment in the city or the university, what the temperature and the weather felt like, the student lifestyle, support from academic and non-academic staff, teaching quality and style, the possibility of friendship groups, the quality of facilities, the feeling of safety and the effect of a new culture on the student. Information like this would influence the employability of postgraduates and reflected the reality of life whilst studying in the university which would impact on their student experience and satisfaction levels.

Participants who knew current students or alumni of universities were able to ask them to gain the information they desired. For those that did not know any students to ask they turned to online reviews, but these reviews did not provide them with the depth of insight that participants gained from talking to friends.

This study has fulfilled research questions 4 and 5 concerning influential sources and types of information and the information needs of DMU members and adds to the body of research on these topics. Recommendations on the influential members of the DMU to target and the WOM, online and offline sources and types of information to provide to prospective postgraduates and other segments are provided in section 7.1.

## 6.6 Decision Making Cycle Stages

Participants searched for information throughout the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle; need recognition, evaluation of alternatives and purchase. The following sections are structured by stage and provide conclusions

Research Question 4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?

Research Question 5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase at university by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?

on the sources and types of information required by postgraduates as they progressed through the stages in line with research questions 4 and 5.

### 6.6.1 Need Recognition Stage

The first topic to be considered is the sources of information that were used to trigger a need for postgraduate study in the need recognition stage of the decision making cycle. In previous academic studies the discussion focused on motivation to study a postgraduate degree and the trigger for need recognition was not examined. This study therefore fills a gap in the research

The qualitative research found that the triggering event was linked to impersonal sources of information such as job adverts or WOM sources of information from members of the decision making unit.

Parents, siblings, family members, friends, lecturers, agents and employers who were part of the DMU were WOM sources of information that were instrumental in highlighting the need to participants for a postgraduate degree. Parents either encouraged their children to undertake further study or instructed, even forced, them to do so. Siblings recounted positive experiences of their time as postgraduates and inspired participants to contemplate further study. Friends encouraged and cajoled the prospective postgraduates to study at the same institution as they were going to attend. Lecturers played an important role in highlighting opportunities for postgraduate study to participants through class interaction or informational events and reassuring potential postgraduates that they would be able to cope with the demands of the course. Agents ran educational fairs that encouraged participants to think about studying a postgraduate degree and employers often encouraged their staff to undertake postgraduate study.

Secondly, regarding the timing of need recognition, Towers and Towers (2018) found that the need for a postgraduate qualification was recognised between one month and four years pre enrolment. They acknowledged the need to further investigate this topic.

In the qualitative study the timing of need recognition was found to vary significantly between participants and depended on their age, work experience, prior travel to the UK, prior study in a UK university, family experiences of travel and study abroad and whether the parents had attended university themselves.

The time period between need recognition and enrolment at university was between two months and six years. The majority of participants recognised they had a need to study a postgraduate degree after they had completed their undergraduate or previous degrees. This could be from the date of graduation to up to seven years afterwards.

For other participants their need was triggered whilst studying at university and many of them recognised the need to investigate postgraduate study in their final year at university. 15 out of 39 participants studied a postgraduate degree immediately after their undergraduate studies and these students are a core target audience for universities.

The research found that the longer the time period between initial recognition of need and enrolment, the more thorough and rational was the approach to the decision making process (see section 6.1).

The third topic to explore is motivation to undertake postgraduate study, as this links to the types of information to provide to prospective participants to help trigger the need for a postgraduate degree. Out of the extensive list of motivations identified by the literature and the quantitative scoping study and presented in Table 2.18 only a few motivations were mentioned in the qualitative study.

Improved career prospects were the main motivation for undertaking a postgraduate qualification for 29 of the 39 participants. This agrees with the literature. Linked to the improvement of career prospects was the desire to gain or update skills to become more employable (n5). Participants wanted to be successful in job interviews, enhance their job opportunities and earnings, advance their careers, apply for certain jobs either in their home countries or the UK, or change their career path. For those who had already been offered jobs by



previous employers the postgraduate degree would give them the competencies to progress within their companies and earn a higher salary.

Participants were aware of the competitiveness of the job market in their home countries having scanned job adverts, been to interviews and applied unsuccessfully for jobs. The overseas postgraduate qualification was perceived as a means of differentiating themselves from students who had studied an undergraduate degree or postgraduates who had not been abroad to study.

Participants chose the course which would give them the knowledge and skills they required for employment in the workplace or in their own businesses. For them there was an economic argument for studying a postgraduate qualification. They were currently investing in a study programme which would reap financial and career progression rewards in the future.

Participants were not motivated by personal reasons to undertake a postgraduate qualification, such as to make a personal impact on society, or gain a theoretical perspective. Only one participant was interested in pursuing a career in academia which disagrees with the literature. Motivators from the quantitative research, such as enabling the student to study further in a specific field of interest or study for personal satisfaction were not mentioned by participants. The only personal motivation mentioned by one participant was 'to make my family proud' (P16).

Participants were also motivated to study a postgraduate qualification to improve their English language skills and cultural awareness. An understanding of different cultures would prove to be of benefit when interacting with foreign workers and business clients. The quantitative research highlighted Asian students' motivation to pursue postgraduate study to improve their English. Whilst this was not the most important motivator for participants, it was certainly a reason to study in the UK and was linked to the need to improve their performance in the workplace and in their own businesses. Limited previous research has explored the development of English language skills and cultural awareness as a motivator (see Wu 2014).

Lastly, participants were motivated to undertake postgraduate study to equip them to become entrepreneurs. The qualitative sample was unusual in that ten out of the 39 participants were children of entrepreneurs, 12 participants wanted to set up their own businesses and six participants were planning to help run their family business. There were therefore 14 out of 39 participants whose prime motivation was to undertake a postgraduate qualification to gain the skills and knowledge required to return to their home countries and run their family business or set up their own business. This motivation has not previously been identified in the literature.

In order to explain the entrepreneurial nature of the sample there are three factors that could be considered. Firstly, research has shown that the children of entrepreneurs are more likely to become entrepreneurs themselves which has been found in this study. Secondly it could be argued that in developing Asian countries it is the parents who own their own businesses who can afford to send their children to the UK to study. Lastly, the prevalence of entrepreneurs in these emerging economies is also an inspiration to the younger generation and encourages them to want to set up their own businesses or make a success of their family business.

In conclusion, the findings on triggering need recognition, its timing and the motivators amongst international postgraduates to study a postgraduate degree add to the body of knowledge on this topic. These findings impact on the information sources universities could use to trigger a need, the types of information universities should provide to prospective postgraduates to attract them to study at their institution and their segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies. Recommendations are made in section 7.1.

#### 6.6.2 Evaluation of Alternatives and Purchase Stages

This section draws conclusions on the important types of information prospective international postgraduates required when making decisions regarding the country, the city, the university and course to choose, how many universities to

apply to and which university offer to accept. This section addresses objectives 2 and 6 and research questions 4 and 5.

Firstly, the types of information required when deciding on a country to study in are explored in order of importance. Currently 17.2% of the UK's population of postgraduate students come from Asia with India, China, Pakistan and Taiwan as the countries sending the largest proportion of postgraduate students to the UK (IBIS 2016). The USA is another country that accounts for a high proportion of UK postgraduates.

China, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Indonesia and Kenya are predicted to be nine out of the top ten growth markets for outbound students up to 2027. Vietnam, Malaysia, Russia, Brazil and Syria also had over 40,000 outwardly mobile international students studying abroad in 2017 (UNESCO 2018). These are the markets that could be targeted by the UK Government and institutions to persuade their citizens to study in the UK. Participants evaluated Australia, America, Canada and New Zealand as potential countries to study in, making them the UK's direct competitors.

Country reputation for educational quality was an important type of information for participants, which agrees with the literature (Rudd, Djafarova and Waring 2012). Participants from Mauritius, Syria, Ghana, China, Vietnam, Thailand and Bangladesh had a positive perception of the reputation of the UK education system and the ranking of the institutions, which provided a reason for them to study in the UK.

The duration of the degree programme was identified in the literature and the findings as being a type of information that informed the choice of country (Saiti, Papa and Brown 2017). Participants were attracted to the UK as a study destination due to the one year degree programme compared to longer programmes in Australia, Canada and the USA. In Thailand postgraduate study took three years as students worked alongside their studies. Shorter programmes saved participants time and money and enabled them to start working earlier.

Participants wanted information on career prospects in their home countries or foreign markets if they obtained a postgraduate degree from a certain country which agrees with Singh and Jack's (2017) study. Countries to study in were chosen based on the perceived value of the degree by home country employers. Participants stated that employers in Vietnam, Thailand and Jordan had a positive perception of the UK education system which led to increased employment opportunities when postgraduates returned home to find work.

An established population of overseas students was a reason for participants to choose a country which agrees with Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). Those from collectivist cultures wanted to study in countries with a high proportion of students from their home country so they would have friends and a support network on arrival. For this reason, many Indonesians, Chinese, Cambodians and Bangladeshis went to study in Australia as many of their nationality were studying there.

Prospective students looked at information on the level of tuition fees for postgraduate study in different countries according to the findings and the literature (Gatfield and Chen 2006). Participants had accessed information on fees in different countries and had made the decision to study in the UK due to lower tuition fees than in America and Australia.

The opportunity to improve their English language skills and learn about different cultures influenced participants' choice of country as mentioned in the literature (Zhu and Reeves 2019). Participants were planning to work in international organisations or run their family business, thereby liaising with foreign customers and suppliers, so good language skills were required. For some participants it was a conscious decision to choose the UK as Cambridge English was used in their home countries. Participants also wanted information on the cultural differences between the host countries and home country to ascertain how easy it would be to adapt to the culture when studying in certain countries overseas.

The geographic proximity of the host country to the home country was of importance to participants as identified in the literature (Manns and Swift 2016).

Participants wanted to be able to return home relatively easily, especially if there was an emergency.

The country's visa policy in terms of the ease and speed of securing a visa to study in the host country, opportunities to work in the country whilst studying and the possibility of applying for immigrant status and working after graduation were types of information required by international students according to the literature and the findings (Singh 2016). Participants were encouraged to consider Canada, Australia, the USA and Ireland as study destinations due to their more lenient policies on remaining in the country after graduation and obtaining work. Participants also wanted to find out the number of times that they were allowed to exit the country to return home.

Participants wanted to study in countries that they perceived to be safe with low crime rates such as Australia. For this reason, one participant chose not to study in America. Canada and Australia had positioned themselves as safer countries in which to study as an international student contributing to an increase in international student enrolment (IBIS 2016).

International postgraduates wanted information on the weather in different countries to inform their choice (Zhu and Reeves 2019). The majority of participants came from tropical countries and they voiced their reluctance to study in the UK as they perceived it had a cold, dark and foggy climate. A comfortable climate which would not cause them any respiratory or other illnesses was desirable.

The types of information required by prospective international postgraduates when deciding on a city are now discussed in order of importance. Most previous studies have focused on the choice factors of importance when deciding on a university and a city together (for example Cubillo, Sánchez and Cerviño 2006) whereas this study explored the types of information of importance when specifically choosing a city to study in.

For participants the most important factor when choosing a city was its environment, as this was linked to the quality of lifestyle they would have as a

student. They were looking for a city that was peaceful, quiet, tidy, healthy, clean and easy to live in. At the same time, they wanted a city that was relatively lively with activities for young people. These findings agree with the literature (Wu 2014). For participants night life in the city was not important when deciding where to study, contrary to the literature (Calikoglu 2018).

The location of the city was often a key type of information when deciding where to study according to participants, but this was not mentioned in the literature. Participants were interested in information about the proximity of the city to the countryside, the coast, to other major cities such as London and details of local tourist attractions.

Participants wanted information concerning safety and security in the city that the university was located in, especially if they were coming to the UK alone. Certain towns such as London and Birmingham were considered to be unsafe cities whereas the University city was perceived to be safer because of the low crime rate. Previous studies have mentioned safety on the university campus rather than in the city (for example Nicholls 2018).

The average rent and living costs in the city were types of information that participants looked for when deciding on a city to study in. The cost of living was previously linked to university choice (for example Lee and Sehoole 2015). The University city was perceived to be a relatively expensive city to study in compared to other cities which were further north.

Participants actively used information about the weather in different areas to help them choose potential cities to study in which has not been previously identified in the literature. Cities in the North of England and Scotland were avoided and cities in the South chosen because of their better climate.

The size of the city in terms of its population was not considered in the literature as impacting on choice of city. Participants assessed the size of cities and decided if they wanted to live in a city which was larger or smaller than what they were used to.

Participants were also interested in information about the creative aspects of the city, opportunities to network with creative and business contacts and the presence of local industries. The ethnic profile of the population was researched to see how many people there were from their home countries who could potentially support them whilst in the UK.

The sources and types of information required by international postgraduates when deciding on a university and a course are now explored. Many studies have looked at the factors of importance to international students and undergraduates when choosing a university and a course to study. However, this study fills a gap in the research as it focuses specifically on international non-EU postgraduate students and the types of information they needed.

Information on course curricula was the most important type of information for participants when choosing a course and university (n27). This had not been previously highlighted in the literature. Often participants chose the subject or course that they wanted to study as a first step and then searched for information on universities offering those subjects and courses. Then information on modules and options offered for each identified course was compared.

The modules offered varied from one university course to another and so became a point of differentiation between universities. Some participants had researched courses thoroughly and could talk knowledgeably about differences in course curricula between universities. Participants wanted well-structured and comprehensive information on course modules on the website that would enable them to easily compare courses. Participants identified certain courses that they wanted to study; Global Marketing, Public Relations and Corporate Communications along with modules in digital marketing.

Rankings were frequently mentioned as an important type of information when participants screened universities and made their final decision (n20) as discussed in section 6.5. Student satisfaction statistics were also used by participants to compare universities.

Important types of information for participants and quantitative respondents were the international reputation of the university (n10), the department (n5) and the course in agreement with the literature (see for example Souto-Otero and Enders 2017). Information on overall reputation was often used alongside the reputation for business or the course in order to compile lists of universities, screen universities from shortlists and make the final decision as to which university and course to enrol in. A good reputation was perceived to indicate that the university was delivering a quality educational service and that students were satisfied. The more positive the reputation of the university, and the course, the more likely it was that employers in the home country would be aware of the benefits of studying at the institution amongst graduates. This increased the likelihood of postgraduates obtaining employment and gaining a higher salary when they returned to their home countries

The university's reputation was built up over time as alumni from the university returned to their home countries having had a positive student experience, obtained jobs and recommended the university to others. They then informally became recruiters of the university's graduates. As the university's reputation increased a virtuous circle was created as more students, family and agents recommended the university to prospective postgraduates as a place to study which in turn increased awareness of the university's reputation. Having a body of satisfied alumni working in the home country meant that participants relied less on impersonal sources such as websites covering reputation and rankings and more on WOM recommendations to make the final decision.

The cost of attending university in terms of tuition fees, discounts and the availability of financial support such as scholarships were important types of information for participants which agrees with the literature (Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka 2010). Participants wanted to gauge which universities offered value for money, which universities to reject from their shortlists and which universities to apply to. The relationship between an established reputation, good rankings and higher tuition fees was acknowledged. For those participants choosing universities with lower fees there was the appreciation that lower fees did not necessarily equate to a lower quality educational experience. That was why WOM recommendations from satisfied students, agents and employers were



valued as a means of ascertaining what the student experience would be like and what was an appropriate fee for that service.

Information on the facilities offered in terms of the accommodation, buildings, classrooms, sports centre and student union and the level of technology used in the classrooms, computer labs and library were required by participants. Modern facilities and technology impacted positively on participants' perceptions of the quality of the university and its teaching staff as identified in the literature (QS 2019). Participants formed an emotional attachment to the modern business building and appreciated that the high technology facilities and library impacted positively on their student experience.

Participants wanted to find information on the entry requirements for different institutions to make sure their qualifications would be accepted as identified by Liu (2010). UK Universities varied as to whether they required a 2:1 or 2:2, an IELTS test and the score required. Some universities allowed undergraduates to go straight onto an MBA programme without work experience which made them an attractive option for participants. Participants were discouraged from applying to American universities due to the additional test requirements.

Considering that the most important motivator to study a postgraduate qualification at university was to improve career prospects it is not surprising that information concerning employability was identified as a key type of information in the literature and the quantitative and qualitative research (Hemsley-Brown 2012). For participants the university's reputation in the home country was also important as it linked to the participant's ability to obtain a job. Many participants were focused on studying qualifications that would lead them into the jobs they wanted in their home countries or overseas. They were therefore interested in finding out information on how successful the university was regarding the employability of its graduates, opportunities for work experience, placements and part time jobs whilst at the university and how the careers service supported postgraduates to find jobs. They also looked for information on the types of careers postgraduates studying certain courses went into, the employability skills they would develop when studying a course, careers fairs, opportunities to network with employers and to build business contacts.

The literature did not identify the desire amongst prospective postgraduates to have information on the ethnic composition of the student population in a university. However, the participants used this information to help them decide which university they should choose. For many of the participants, universities that had an ethnically diverse population of UK, European and international students had a unique selling point. Participants wanted to mix with international students to improve their English language skills, network with potential business partners and learn about different cultures which would help them when working on an international basis.

Many universities were targeted by students from certain countries because they wanted to have a community of students to support them which would impact positively on their student experience. This was especially the case with participants from collectivist cultures such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand. The disadvantage of a large cohort of students from certain countries meant that students did not have as many opportunities to interact with students from different countries and learn about other cultures.

Callender and Jackson (2008) were the only scholars that referred to the fact that prospective students wanted information on the lifestyle and experience of being at the university. Other authors focused on the learning environment rather than the lifestyle. For the participants, studying at university was a lifestyle choice so they wanted information on the university environment and the 'atmosphere' to gain an understanding of whether the university would suit them and if they would have a positive experience. To this end they solicited WOM information from their friends or followed them on social media to ascertain how students learnt, how they studied, how they engaged with friends and lecturers and what life was like on the campus, in the city and in tourist destinations. Linked to a positive student experience and lifestyle, participants also wanted to know how easy it had been for participants to adapt to the UK culture and the learning environment in the university.

Flexible entry throughout the year, with the availability of a January start date to commence postgraduate studies, was identified by participants and Mazzarol and

Soutar (2002) as a type of information required. Equally some participants wanted to find out if they could study for part of their postgraduate degree in their home country. Information about these topics helped participants to select universities on their shortlists and reject others.

Contrary to the literature, none of the participants mentioned academic reputation in terms of the experience, qualifications and prominence of academic staff as being an important choice factor (Wu 2014). However, participants perceived that the reputation of academic staff for being responsive to students' needs was important. They were interested in ascertaining whether the lecturers were friendly, approachable and supportive as they played a key role in helping to deliver a positive student experience and lifestyle. They also wanted to find out if lecturing staff were easily contactable and responded quickly to email queries or could be visited in their offices. Participants also looked for information on the helpfulness and friendliness of non-academic staff. These staff were perceived to be important in supporting the postgraduate on arrival and throughout their student journey.

In agreement with the literature participants wanted information about the teaching quality and the learning environment as this impacted on their ability to learn, pass assessments and get the most out of the student experience (Nicholls 2018). Participants were also interested in knowing whether they would gain the knowledge and practical skills through the teaching at the institution to prepare them for the working environment or to run their own businesses. Postgraduate study was differentiated from undergraduate study because it involved the application of theory in practice and enabled students to use their creativity and imagination. The UK teaching style was perceived favourably by those participants that had studied in their home institutions where independent thought and the expression of one's own ideas were not encouraged.

Information concerning the size of classes, the staff student ratio and whether teaching was by lecture, workshop or tutorial were also required by participants. Participants wanted to be able to interact in smaller classes which were run as workshops allowing time to apply theory in practice. The modes of assessment were an important type of information as some participants preferred

coursework whereas others had a preference for exams. The literature also highlighted weekly hours of teaching contact time (Renfrew et al 2010), expected workload and the extent of teaching by graduate students (Mellors-Bourne 2014) as important types of information.

Participants placed significant importance on the relationship between the partner institution and the UK university when choosing a university. This had not previously been highlighted in the literature (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002). Such a relationship meant that participants knew that they would gain a place to study at the UK university, that the application process would be simpler as they could go to an agent who could apply on their behalf and they did not need to sit an IELTS test. The popularity of the institution amongst their peer group meant that they would have friends who were going to be at the university and a support network when they arrived. They would also have a network of alumni working in their home country and recommending postgraduates as potential new recruits to employers.

Lastly, other types of information recognised by previous authors in the literature review that were not discussed by qualitative participants included: student dropout rates, opportunities to study abroad, the university's age, university unions, opportunities for contact with counselling services or student support or with doctors whilst at university (i-graduate 2013).

This section considers the sources and types of information required when applying to a university. The literature failed to emphasise the importance of university communications during and after the application process, the sources and types of information required by prospective postgraduates and the impact of a quick and straightforward application procedure on converting prospective postgraduates into purchasers. Participants applied to between one and nine universities and found the application process to be very time consuming. Some participants opted to apply for one university at a time whereas others were worried that they would not be accepted or applied through agents, and so filed more applications.

The speed with which universities processed the participants' applications and offered them a place was crucial as it led to the enrolment of the maximum number of students. Nine participants received an offer from the University quickly, and often before other universities, and this led them to purchase their postgraduate degrees from the University.

For participants who had studied at partner institutions the application process was simpler and they often had agents who applied on their behalf free of charge.

During the application process participants accessed information on how to apply by emailing university staff and talking to university representatives and agents. They would use Google searches, university websites and online reviews to gain advice on accommodation, visa applications, transport and student life. For some participants the information provided through the appropriate channels convinced them to accept their offer. This has implications for university marketers.

This study answers research questions 4 and 5 and adds to the body of knowledge regarding the information requirements of international postgraduates in the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle. Table 6.7 provides a summary of the sources and types of information required by prospective international postgraduates. Recommendations on university communications are provided in section 7.1.

### 6.6.3 Post Purchase Evaluation Stage

Conclusions regarding the sources and types of information used by postgraduates in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle once they purchased a degree are discussed below in line with research questions 6 and 7.

Research Question 6: What sources of information were accessed in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?

Research Question 7: What types of information were required in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?

There was a period between purchasing a degree and arrival at the University which participants acknowledged was a difficult time. The sources and types of information required by postgraduates during this time have not been addressed in the literature.

The sources of information used by participants pre arrival included the University portal, welcome website, emails to university departments such as accommodation, visa and finance and to the international office concerning all aspects of living in the UK. Participants also used agents who were supportive in helping them apply for accommodation and visas and process the paperwork required. If the participant was studying a joint degree with the partner institution, then lecturers there would provide additional information in order to ease their transition into the university and the UK. The University website was used to reassure participants that they had made the right decision.

Participants were satisfied with responses to their queries by email in terms of the content and the prompt reply. However, there was a feeling that the University could do more to communicate with international postgraduates between purchase and arrival. Participants wanted to gather all the information they needed to ensure a smooth transition into the University and student life. The types of information they looked for concerned the visa application and interview, accommodation, tuition fees, deposit, course details, transport, health and wellbeing, timetable, restaurants, local tourist activities, employment, finance, health checks, the weather, tips before coming to the university and how to stay safe. Participants felt that the university could be more proactive in communicating more tailored information to international postgraduate students as a group as their needs were different from undergraduate or UK based postgraduate students. This is discussed in section 6.7.

Once at university participants needed to access the right types of information through relevant sources in order to be able to answer any queries they had regarding academic study and living at the university.

The need for international students at university to be able to access information on everyday life and academic study, that was relevant and trustworthy, has been acknowledged in the literature (Sin 2015). However, the focus has been on international students in general rather than specifically international postgraduate students. This study fills a gap in the research.

Participants used both online and WOM sources of information. The University's hubs and media such as the website and Blackboard virtual learning environment answered many of participants' questions easily and effectively. Current postgraduates, and other students studying at the university, were a valuable source of information on all aspects of the student experience and academic study. Academic and non-academic staff were praised for the level of support they offered to participants when they had a query about any aspect of their academic or student life. For participants, whose English language skills made email communication more difficult, face to face interaction with a lecturer to answer their academic queries was preferred.

Jeong (2004) identified that English language proficiency impacted on the ability of international students to access the everyday information they required. Many of the participants in the qualitative study struggled to cope with the demands of written assignments due to their language capability. Those participants with weaker English skills tended to remain in groups with friends from their country and so missed out on opportunities to talk to other students and practice their English.

Whilst at university, one of the participants' major concerns was how to achieve a high mark in their assessments. They required academic information which they felt was missing. There were also gaps in information provision concerning practical information required as discussed in section 6.7.

The desire to become part of the international postgraduate student community was evident amongst many participants and they wanted the university to put in place mechanisms by which this could be achieved, such as Facebook groups and events where they could interact with fellow postgraduates, build their network, gather support and gain access to the pool of information available (see section 6.8). The need to meet other postgraduates at the beginning, and start to build a relationship with them, was important as there was a feeling that they were 'all in the same boat together' and ready to make friends. After that there were fewer opportunities to meet new friends, in class or on campus, as many postgraduates tended to just come into the University for their scheduled sessions.

This study fulfils research objectives 6 and 7 and adds to the body of knowledge on this topic. Recommendations for university communications are made in section 7.1.

#### 6.6.4 Relative Importance of Sources and Types of Information at each stage

Table 6.7 is a summary of the most important sources and types of information used by participants as they progressed through the decision making cycle.



Table 6.7 Sources and Types of Information used in Decision Making Cycle stages

Action	Categories of Sources	Sources of Information	Types of Information
<b>Need Recognition stage</b>			
Trigger need for postgraduate study	WOM sources	Parent, sibling, other family member, partner, friends, lecturer, agent, employer, members of the local community	Motivation to undertake postgraduate study: Employability, English Language, culture, entrepreneurial skills Reassurance of capability to undertake postgraduate study
	Online/Offline	Job advert, job pages, educational fairs in home country	
<b>Evaluation of Alternatives and Purchase stage</b>			
Country choice	WOM sources	Family, friends, agents, academic staff, employers and students	Reputation and quality of the UK education system, duration of study, likelihood of employment, profile and size of the overseas student population, tuition fees, type of English, distance from home country, culture, visa policy, exit and entry regulations, weather, age profile of postgraduates, safety
	Online sources	Google searches, rankings websites, online reviews	
City choice	WOM sources	Friends, students and relatives who had lived in the city	City environment, location, safety, weather, the cost of living, city size, industry profile, ethnic mix.
	Online sources	Google searches, city websites, online reviews	
Course and University choice	WOM sources	Friends, family, agents, academic staff at previous institutions, employers, staff of the host university	Course curricula, ranking, tuition fees, university's overall reputation, joint studies with other institutions, entry requirements, facilities, friendship groups, reputation for business and the course, teaching quality, employability after graduation, January start, ethnic mix of student population, student lifestyle, academic and non-academic staff support
	Online sources	Rankings websites, university websites, Google searches, social media, online reviews, email	
	Offline sources	Prospectus, visit to the University, a printed booklet, educational fairs in home country	

Table 6.7 Sources and Types of Information used in Decision Making Cycle stages contd.

Action	Categories of Sources	Sources of Information	Types of Information
<b>Post Purchase Evaluation Stage</b>			
Pre Arrival	WOM sources	Agents, partner university staff, host university staff	Visa application and interview, accommodation, tuition fees, deposit, course details, transport, health and wellbeing, timetable, restaurants, local tourist activities, employment, finance, health checks, the weather, tips before coming to the university, what to bring and safety
	Online sources	University Website, University Portal, Email	
At University	WOM sources	University hubs, academic staff, non-academic staff, current students, societies, friendship groups, study groups, student ambassadors	Academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, SPSS, marking criteria for assessments, campus navigation, student ID, grades, job opportunities, employability skills, IT, English language tuition, accommodation, transport, restaurants, shopping, tourism, social activities, registration with doctor, Schengen visa.
	Online sources	University website, Blackboard, Google searches, email, library	

Source Author's Analysis 2020

### 6.7 Gaps in Information Provision and the Influence of Information Provision on Satisfaction and Expectations

This section addresses objective 3 and research questions 10,11 and 12.

Objective 3: Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction

Research Question 10: Were there any gaps in information provision during the stages of the decision making cycle?

Research Question 11: To what extent did the information provided structure the expectations of postgraduates?

Research Question 12: How did the information provided influence the level of postgraduate satisfaction?

Previous literature has not explored any gaps in information provision for postgraduates pre and post purchase and the impact of missing information on satisfaction levels. The role that information provided by universities played in informing the expectations of students about a course and their satisfaction levels whilst at university was acknowledged in the literature (for example Arambewela and Hall 2006) but this is not reflected in questions in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and as such is a relatively unexplored area. The author's study adds to the body of research.

The majority of participants did not mention any gaps in information provision during the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle. They were able to obtain the information they required to make a decision as to which postgraduate qualification they should choose, and they were satisfied with the level of information provided by the University.

Some participants mentioned that they had provided information to prospective postgraduates as these students had not been able to find the information from other sources. Prospective postgraduates were missing information on the university application process, any fees or additional information that were involved when applying and the ease of the application process for those that

had studied at partner institutions. Potential postgraduates also required information on whether different religions were supported at the university, if courses were accredited by external bodies such as ACCA, and how safe it was in the university. One participant also lacked information on whether the course was recognised by her home government but obtained this information from her agent.

Pre arrival, participants felt that information was missing, and they would have been less anxious and more satisfied with the University if they had been provided with this information. Many participants felt apprehensive about studying a postgraduate qualification at the University and were uncertain as to whether they had made the right decision. They needed reassurance that the choice they had made was a positive one, that they would be able to cope with the demands of academic work, enjoy student life, make the desired friends and contacts and fulfil their goals. They also wanted information that would help to build their knowledge of the University before arriving to make them better prepared, such as information on the health and wellbeing services, campus navigation and a virtual tour of the campus. Details of what they should bring with them was also considered to be useful information. Some participants wished that they had been provided with information prior to their departure on the differences between their home country and the UK for academic study, referencing and doing assessments. This would have helped them to prepare for academic study to allow them to adapt more quickly to the new study environment and succeed in their assessments.

Participants understood the need to meet fellow students and to adapt to the University environment as soon as possible on arrival, therefore information on societies, tailored welcome events and induction sessions would reassure them that they would adjust to the challenges of being a student, meet other students and not be lonely. They valued the opportunity to talk to the University directly, to have all their questions answered. They recommended giving postgraduates pre arrival the opportunity to communicate with university representatives through, for example, a personal call by WhatsApp, a dedicated Facebook group, a Twitter account, interactive communication through Reddit and Quora and email.

Participants were also eager to connect with other postgraduates going to the University from their home countries and other postgraduates on their course through social media accounts and Facebook groups. Those from collectivist cultures were especially keen to start to build up their friendship groups before arrival and so they were eager to attend pre departure events arranged by the partner universities in their home countries. On arrival they desired opportunities to meet fellow postgraduates through welcome events, city and campus tours, a buddy system, cultural and language exchange events and English language tuition. The provision of such information through online interactive sources and the running of events would lead to increased satisfaction levels amongst postgraduates.

Having arrived at the University the majority of participants were satisfied with their experience with ratings of between six and ten, with most participants scoring eight or above. Participants were asked if they were in desperate need of information or were missing any information whilst at university. Most participants replied in the negative as they had all the information they required and were satisfied hence the higher ratings.

However, there were instances when participants did experience gaps in the information provided whilst at university. This led to participants feeling anger, frustration and dissatisfaction with the university experience and lower levels of satisfaction. This was the case for participants who were struggling to find accommodation and wanted information on how to find somewhere to live. Other participants missed information on how to obtain part time or graduate jobs, how to develop their employability skills, how to understand the IT used at the University or how to gain English language tuition. There were participants who needed practical information to help them shop for food, register with a doctor, gain a Schengen visa, end their accommodation contract or use public transport. Finally, there were those participants who had issues with the Finance department and could not find information on how they should proceed to remedy the situation. The sources used to provide the information were also criticised by participants. Rather than text heavy emails they wanted messages relayed through video.

Participants reported experiencing the most difficulty in trying to obtain information to understand the requirements of the lecturers for their assessments as they wanted to gain high marks. They felt that information was missing on academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, SPSS and marking criteria for assessments. In order to obtain missing information to help with assessments, participants were given the opportunity to email to arrange appointments with lecturers or visit them in their offices at certain times. However, some participants from countries such as Vietnam, with poorer organisational and time management capabilities, wanted to be able to drop in and see their lecturers at any time, as they had done in their previous institutions. The lack of information to help with assignments and restricted access to lecturers had the most negative impact on participants' satisfaction levels.

There were certain groups of participants who missed out on receiving information more than others. Those participants who arrived at the University out of term time, lived alone off campus, did not have friends or peers from their home country to advise them or did not join societies based on nationality were more likely to have information needs that were not met. Practical information concerning transport, food shopping and logging into email and the IT systems was missing for these students. Those without friendship or study groups tended to find it harder to access the information to complete their assessments successfully. Participants who were younger, had not travelled or worked abroad previously, or had not studied in an overseas or partner university, tended to be those that lacked information the most. Students from Africa were singled out as a group that had poorer IT skills and needed additional information and tuition.

In previous studies international students' expectations were found to be a key determinant of their satisfaction levels (Arambewela and Maringe 2012, Beloucif, Mehafdi and Komey 2018). The author's qualitative findings agree with these studies as when the information provided was such that the expectations of participants were exceeded, they had higher levels of satisfaction. Miscommunication of information led to incorrect expectations and dissatisfaction.

For those participants who lacked WOM information, from current or previous students, the University's media became even more significant as sources of information on the student experience. Participants interpreted the information provided on the website and other university controlled sources of information and structured their expectations accordingly. Any miscommunication of information concerning the University and their lifestyle there led to lower satisfaction levels. For example, information provided concerning the services provided by the University careers service was found to be incorrect which led to students being dissatisfied as they were not gaining the support that they were expecting. Many of the participants who missed out on WOM information pre arrival voiced their disappointment with elements of the student experience as it was found to be different from that which they expected. This meant that the satisfaction levels of this group were lower than those participants who had been informed by students who had experience of studying at the University.

Equally, levels of participant satisfaction were found to be higher if expectations were exceeded. Participants were not aware from the information provided to them how modern and technologically advanced the Business School building was or how good the range and quality of library facilities were. This miscommunication led to participants speaking about the surprise and satisfaction they had felt on arrival when experiencing these facilities. This demonstrates how expectations were structured by the information received prior to arrival which impacted on satisfaction levels.

This study has fulfilled objective 3 and research questions 10, 11 and 12. The qualitative study has illustrated how important it is for universities to ensure that they provide all the information that prospective postgraduates need so the university is not rejected from shortlists. Equally the information provided through the University's media should paint a true picture of what life would be like as a student studying at the university otherwise satisfaction levels will be impacted. Gaps in information provision were perceived to be the most critical once postgraduates had purchased a degree and were awaiting the start of their course. Universities should maintain a dialogue with postgraduates during this time and provide them with the sources and types of information required.

Vulnerable groups should be identified on arrival and any gaps in information provision should be filled. Recommendations are made in section 7.1.

### 6.8 Pool of Information

In this section conclusions regarding the contribution of international postgraduates to the pool of information available during the decision making cycle are discussed in line with objective 5 and research question 9.

Objective 5: Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decision and studying at university

Research Question 9: How did postgraduate students contribute to the pool of information throughout the cycle?

The importance of WOM communication and recommendations from friends to prospective and current postgraduates as a credible, impartial source of information has been acknowledged in the literature (Moogan 2020). This study extends the current research by looking at the valuable contribution friends and acquaintances, who were international postgraduates, made to the pool of information available to other postgraduates throughout the stages of the decision making cycle.

In the qualitative research satisfied current or previous postgraduates, that were friends or acquaintances of participants, were information providers giving WOM recommendations on countries, universities and cities to study in and courses to attend. They also provided WOM communication to reassure participants that they would be able to cope with the demands of studying at the University and that they would form friendship groups so they would not be lonely. Between the purchase of the postgraduate qualification and arrival at the university, postgraduates provided practical and academic WOM information to participants on all aspects of student life and helped allay any fears that they had. As information providers they contributed to the pool of information available to prospective postgraduates.



Once the participant had arrived at the university postgraduates contributed their advice to the pool of information to support them through their student experience, aid their adjustment to the new environment and overcome any acculturative stress that they were feeling. Postgraduates provided practical information concerning accommodation, restaurants, transport, leisure activities, tourism, shopping, food and exploring the city. They also taught new arrivals how to operate the IT systems, log into emails and Blackboard and process the paperwork required. They were an important source of information throughout the post purchase stage when their peers were trying to understand academic requirements or how to do the assessments, write reports, prepare for exams and manage their time.

The availability of such a pool of information was a positive factor for participants in their role as information searchers and helped them to decide which university to attend and how to succeed in the university environment. Those postgraduates from collectivist cultures or from countries that sent a large number of postgraduates to the University were more likely to have access to the pool of information provided by postgraduates which would increase their satisfaction levels. As alumni they would then be more likely to recommend the University to future students, become information providers and contribute to the pool of information available to prospective postgraduates. A positive, virtuous cycle of communication was created amongst postgraduates in their roles as information providers and information searchers. Participants who did not belong to friendship or study groups or societies did not have access to the pool of information available and found it harder to adjust to university life and succeed in assessments.

The author has answered research question 9, achieved objective 5 and extended the current research. International postgraduate students made a significant contribution to the pool of information available to other postgraduate students throughout the decision making cycle and placing the information pool at the core of the author's proposed model reflects this. Recommendations on how universities can encourage postgraduates to contribute advice and recommendations to the pool of information available to other postgraduates pre and post purchase are provided in section 7.1.

## 6.9 Proposed Model of the Consumer Decision Making Cycle

In this section the current author proposes a new model of the consumer decision making cycle in line with objective 7.

Objective 7: To contribute to the understanding of information behaviour by evolving a decision making cycle model

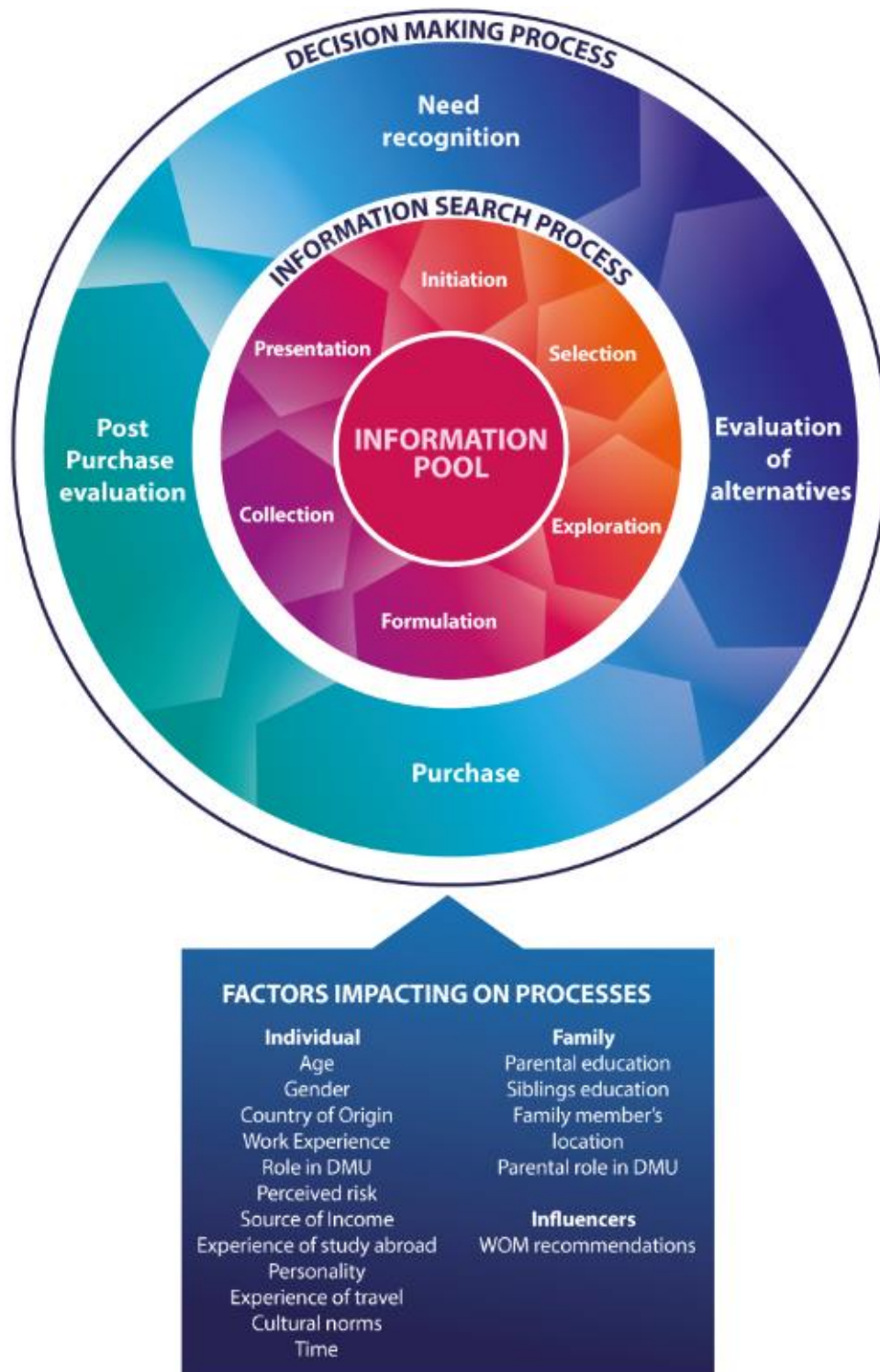
The current author has responded to the request from marketing academics firstly for a new theoretical model to represent consumer decision making as the current models do not represent consumer behaviour in the digital era where individuals are increasingly connected and informed. Secondly there is also demand for a new international postgraduate decision making model which reflects the decisions they make. The author has also considered critique from LIS scholars regarding the linearity of models of the information search process and their suggestion that information search behaviour in alternative consumer decision making scenarios should be considered.

Having evaluated the literature, undertaken the quantitative scoping study and qualitative research the author proposes the following Iterative Decision Making Cycle model in Figure 6.3.

This unique model is cyclical which reflects the iterative and continuous nature of both the decision making process in the outer ring, and Kuhlthau's Information Searching Process in the inner ring. Information search is positioned in the inner ring as it is undertaken through all the stages of the decision making process and informs each decision made. Consumers move backwards and forwards, in an iterative manner, throughout the decision making and information searching process stages as they make high involvement decisions. This is indicated by the arrows facing both ways. The experiences gained from making a decision and searching for information then inform the next decision and information search in a continuous manner, hence the processes are portrayed as cyclical. At the centre of the model is the information pool. Consumers gather information that they then contribute to the pool of information which other consumers use when

they are searching for information. The box at the bottom of the model lists the factors that are pictured as impacting on both the decision making and information searching processes.

Figure 6.3 Iterative Decision Making Cycle Model



The model will now be discussed in detail. The model is unique in that it combines the linear model of the decision making process and Kuhlthau's linear ISP model to create a new cyclical model. It therefore combines theory from both marketing and LIS scholars.

The proposed model fills a gap in the research as it more accurately reflects consumer decision making in the current era and overcomes the limitations of previous consumer decision making models. It also considers information search behaviour in an alternative context, that of students making the decision to study a postgraduate qualification and looking for alternative types of information in the post purchase stage whilst at university. Information search is portrayed as being a cyclical process and so addresses some criticisms of linear LIS models.

The focus of this study was on international non-EU postgraduate students who had made the decision to study in an overseas institution. These prospective postgraduate students needed to make a series of decisions regarding the country, city and university to study in and the course to choose. The purchase of a postgraduate qualification for international students was a life impacting, high involvement purchase with high levels of perceived risk.

Findings from the qualitative research showed that prospective postgraduates went through the stages in the decision making cycle in the outer circle as they made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification. They recognised that they had a need to obtain a postgraduate degree, evaluated different countries, cities, universities and courses, made applications to universities and then accepted an offer in the purchase stage. At the heart of their decision making cycle was information search, shown as the inner circle. Prospective postgraduates progressed through the stages of the information search process to a greater or lesser extent as they gathered the information they needed to inform their decisions.

The findings showed that the post purchase evaluation stage started when prospective postgraduates accepted their offer of a university place and lasted until they graduated from the university. During their time at university

postgraduates continually evaluated their level of satisfaction with the decision they had made to join the institution. Considering the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle as lasting throughout their time at university has not been proposed before in previous models.

The current author has therefore fulfilled her vision of developing one model that describes the whole student decision making cycle and represents the complete student journey from the point at which prospective international postgraduates recognised a need to study a postgraduate qualification through to graduation.

The model reflects the qualitative findings that potential postgraduates went through the stages in the decision making cycle at varying speeds and levels of intensity. Some spent a considerable amount of time at each stage in the decision making process as they make a rational and logical decision before they accept a place at university. Others moved quickly through the stages on the way to the final decision and their decision making process was less rational and more emotionally based. The length of the post purchase stage also varied dependent on when they accepted their place at university and when they graduated.

The model also reflects the information search behaviour of prospective postgraduates. Kuhlthau's ISP model in the inner ring has the flexibility to accommodate postgraduates who undertake differing levels of information search in terms of breadth and depth. It covers those postgraduates who spent a considerable amount of time progressing systematically through each stage as they looked for sources and types of information to make their final decision of university. It also accommodates those postgraduates that performed a less rigorous search and skipped stages. Each postgraduate student was different in terms of the time that was spent during each of the stages in the ISP model and whether they went through all the stages each time they searched for information and the model can be used to represent these differing behaviours. This is also the case when postgraduates were looking for information whilst at university to help them make academic and practical decisions.

The current author hypothesised that the decision making process was cyclical and continuous rather than linear and this has been shown to be the case. The decision making process is therefore referred to as a cycle and it is portrayed in the model as being circular rather than linear.

The circular nature of the decision making process is evidenced by three sets of findings. Firstly postgraduates revisited prior stages of the cycle during their decision as to which university and course to choose. The arrows in the outer circle are both forward and backward pointing to represent the findings that the decision making process was iterative and postgraduates went backwards and forwards through the stages.

Secondly the model is cyclical because this better represents consumer decision making. The linear decision making models assumed that the decision making process for a high involvement product, such as a university qualification, was planned and rational and that consumers made one decision after another in a sequential fashion. The qualitative findings suggested that postgraduates made multiple decisions at the same time in terms of the country, city, university and course, took shortcuts, returned to previous decisions and made decisions based on emotions to make decision making simpler. This circular model reflects these findings.

Thirdly the model is cyclical as decision making was a continuous process with one decision informing the next decision as postgraduates learned from the decisions they made. Similarly, postgraduates' experiences with information search affected their future information searching behaviour.

This is the first consumer decision making model based on the DMP model which does not feature information search as a stage in the decision making process positioned after need recognition and before evaluation of alternatives. The current author hypothesised that information search took place throughout the stages of the decision making process. This was confirmed in the qualitative findings. The current author's model shows information search in the inner circle to demonstrate that searching for information is a continuous process that occurs at every stage in the cycle; need recognition, evaluation of alternatives,

purchase and post purchase evaluation. Information search in the inner circle turns more frequently than the outer circle as after postgraduates have searched for information pre purchase they then undertake multiple information searches post purchase whilst studying at university.

Kuhlthau's ISP model stages are pictured at in the inner ring of the model; initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation. Postgraduates progressed through some or all of these stages in an iterative manner as they searched for information to help them make their decisions as they moved through the cycle. The backwards and forwards arrows indicate the iterative nature of the information search process takes as postgraduates revisited previous information sources and types of information.

Previous scholars have not examined information search linked to the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle. This model reflects the qualitative findings that showed how important information search was during the post purchase stage. After purchasing a degree, postgraduates looked for information to reassure them that they had made the right decision of university and course and to prepare themselves for study. Once they had arrived at university postgraduates would search for academic and practical information on a daily basis. The inclusion of post purchase information search in the model allows the current author to explore the links between post purchase satisfaction or dissatisfaction and information search.

The current author also used the model to explore the contribution consumers such as postgraduates made to the pool of information available to other postgraduates during the stages of the decision making cycle. The information pool is located at the core of the model as postgraduates contributed information to the pool and acquired information from the pool as they progressed through the stages of the decision making process. Postgraduates therefore took on the roles of both information searcher and information provider. As information searchers prospective postgraduates would use the information in the pool when they were deciding on a country, city, university and course. Similarly, whilst at university postgraduates acquired information from the pool when they were searching for answers to their queries. As information providers prospective or

current postgraduates and alumni contributed information to the pool of information available to other postgraduates. A virtuous circle of communication was created by prospective, current and previous postgraduates who provided information to the pool during all the stages of the cycle. This circle of communication is reflected well in the circular nature of the decision making cycle model with the information pool at its core.

Overall it is argued that the proposed new circular model of the consumer decision making cycle more accurately portrays the consumer decision making process and demonstrates the central role of information search throughout the process.

This is the first study to investigate the factors that impacted on international postgraduates' information search processes and their decision making cycle at the same time. These factors are listed in the box under the model. The factors identified impacted on the breadth and depth of the information search process when investigating where to study and then in the post purchase stage whilst at university. These factors have also been found to influence the degree of rigour and rationality with which postgraduates actively engaged in the appraisal of different universities during the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making process and then in the post purchase stage.

The age, gender, country of origin, role in the DMU, perceived risk, personality and parental education of prospective postgraduates influenced search and decision making behaviour as identified in the literature as did the time available to make the decision. Additional factors that were found in this study to have a strong influence on information search behaviour pre and post purchase and the depth and breadth of the decision making process were the prospective postgraduate's cultural norms, their source of income, prior experience of working or studying and travelling abroad, the location of their family members and the educational experiences of their siblings.

The roles adopted by family members in the DMU and WOM influencers also impacted on the information search and decision making processes of the prospective postgraduate. This had not been investigated in previous research.



This model can be used to show that parents, other family members and WOM influencers, such as friends, agents and academic staff, impacted on the degree of rigour of the information search conducted during the decision making process up to purchase, the time spent making the decision and the thoroughness with which universities were evaluated. These DMU members contributed to the pool of information available to prospective postgraduates.

In the post purchase stage, when postgraduates were at university, there were previously unexplored factors that impacted on the rigour with which they performed their information searches. These factors were the postgraduate's country of origin, prior experience of studying at the University or a partner institution and travelling abroad. The presence of WOM influencers such as friends and other postgraduates impacted on the degree to which postgraduates needed to search for information whilst at university. These influencers contributed to the pool of information available to these postgraduates so they were instrumental in providing the information that they needed, and helped to make the search for information a simple one.

Overall this research has provided new insights and contributes to our understanding of the role of information in the decision making cycle of international postgraduates and the factors which impact on postgraduates' information searching and decision making processes which are part of the decision making cycle.

### 6.10 Summary Conclusions

To conclude on the key findings from this study, the author has evolved a new approach to thinking about the interaction between information, purchase and consumption. She proposes a new conceptual model; the Iterative Decision Making Cycle Model. This unique model is a useful addition to the models already provided as it is a research based model which provides a framework that can be used to explore information searching behaviour within the context of making complex decisions pertaining to the purchase of high involvement and high risk goods and services. It is an iterative and cyclical model which more accurately reflects consumer decision making and information search in the current era and

overcomes the limitations of previous consumer decision making and LIS models which were often sequential in design. The model reflects the findings from this study that some consumers approached the decision making and information search processes in a systematic and rational manner while others proceeded with less rigour, took shortcuts and made decisions based on emotional criteria.

The unique model builds on theoretical models from marketing and consumer behaviour scholars and Kuhlthau, a LIS scholar, to create the new cyclical model. It is therefore unlike other models as it includes both decision making and information seeking theory. In creating a model built on the research surrounding well established models the author answers LIS scholars' criticism (see for example Todd 2017) that LIS research fails to build on existing theory and creates new models that are not useful.

This study builds on Kuhlthau's work. Kuhlthau (1991) acknowledged the use by an information seeker of formal and everyday sources of information but she did not consider the types of information sources used, the role of the information provider, an individual's information needs or the contextual factors of the search that led to the person recognising that they had a need for information (Case, Given and Mai 2016). This study adds to the current body of knowledge in the field of LIS as it investigates a postgraduate student's information needs in terms of the sources and types of information required, the role of the information provider and the contextual factors that impacted on the search for information. By looking at the role of information in making a decision, rather than focusing on information seeking behaviour, and the information seeker this study provides an insight into how information is used by the postgraduate and so it is grounded in real life experiences.

In this study the Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology of consumers is proposed, based on the decision making and information searching processes of postgraduates, and taking into account the factors that impacted on these processes. This typology will be of use to information providers to help them understand the information requirements of different segments such as 'new', 'experienced' and 'connected' prospective postgraduates who would benefit from tailored information.

This study found that despite living in an information rich world many postgraduates did not perform an in depth search for sources and types of information and were not well informed when making their final decision. WOM sources of information, especially from current students, alumni and agents, were very important to prospective postgraduates when making the decision to study at a university. Their recommendations contributed to the pool of information available to postgraduates pre purchase. Once at university postgraduates would provide information to the pool available to current and prospective postgraduates. A virtuous circle of communication was therefore established whereby the pool of information supported postgraduates and encouraged future applicants to the university. Parents played an important role as members of the decision making unit along with other family members, employers and partner university staff which made them important segments to target with appropriate information.

The interconnectedness of members of the DMU in this digital era and their reliance on online sources of information such as websites, rankings and reviews was evident. These sources were perceived to have credibility regardless of their origins. Reputation and rankings were key indicators used to choose potential universities, but for those with access to WOM sources the experiences of current students and alumni were more important when choosing a postgraduate qualification.

Experience of work, travel or study abroad, income sources, cultural norms, DMU roles, siblings' education, family member location and WOM recommendations were additional factors highlighted in this study that impacted on both the information searching and decision making processes. Gaps in information provision were found in the post purchase stage before postgraduates arrived at university and when they were studying which impacted on their experiences and satisfaction levels. Information pre arrival also structured postgraduates' expectations of the university experience.

### 6.11 Contribution to Knowledge

As discussed above this study makes an academic contribution to knowledge firstly by proposing a new model of the Iterative Decision Making Cycle and a Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology of international postgraduate students. Secondly it builds on the work of Kuhlthau and extends her ISP model into another context. The model succeeds in bringing information behaviour research into the marketing discipline and demonstrates the value of this research to other contexts, in this case the process of making the high involvement decision to purchase a postgraduate qualification. The author has benefitted from the insights gained from studying LIS research when constructing her model and she has been surprised that this has not been done previously by marketing and consumer behaviour scholars. She urges other marketing researchers to proactively evaluate LIS concepts and theories and review their potential to fill possible gaps in their discipline. Conversely LIS scholars could do more to communicate their research to marketing researchers.

Thirdly this study adds to the body of marketing, consumer behaviour and LIS literature and explores topics that have not previously been researched. It investigates the information requirements of international non-EU postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle, gaps in information provision and the impact of the information provided on expectations and satisfaction levels. Membership of the DMU of international postgraduates, the information requirements of influential members, the contribution of postgraduates and WOM influencers to the pool of information and the factors that impacted on both the information searching and decision making processes were previously unexplored areas of research which the author has investigated. The decision making process has been further explored by researching the sequence of decisions made, the iterative and cyclical nature of the process and the degree of rationality and rigour employed when searching for information and progressing through the decision making process.

This study makes a practical contribution. The model is of practical value to those that provide information, such as universities or the Government communicating with prospective international postgraduates. The model helps

information providers to appreciate the links between the information searching and decision making processes and so leads to a better understanding of how consumers seek and use information and the types and sources of information required at different stages in the decision making process. Recommendations are made to the UK Government and universities on targeting and marketing communications strategies to attract a greater number of international postgraduates to study in the UK and ensure that information is provided to them, so they are satisfied with their student experience.

Comprehensive details regarding the key findings from the study and the contribution made to academic knowledge, universities and the Government, linked to the objectives and research questions, are presented in appendix 20.

In chapter 7 recommendations will be made.

## CHAPTER 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter recommendations are made to universities based on the analysis of the literature, the quantitative scoping study and qualitative research. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

### 7.1 Recommendations to Universities

Based on the evaluation of the literature, the research findings, the conclusions and the proposed model, the following broad recommendations are made to universities. Detailed recommendations are provided in appendix 21.

Exploration of each of the elements in the proposed decision making cycle model; the iterative, cyclical and continuous nature of the model, the decision making process stages of need recognition, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post purchase evaluation, the sources and types of information gathered during the information search process and the factors impacting on both processes, has contributed to the formulation of these recommendations.

#### **Segmentation and targeting**

These recommendations are based on the investigation of the factors that impacted on the rationality and rigour with which participants approached the decision making and information searching processes and their level of informedness, linked to objectives 1 and 4 and research questions 3, 8 and 15, and the influential members of the DMU linked to objective 2 and research questions 4 and 5. This research led to the construction of the Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology. Investigation of the information needs and experiences of postgraduates once at university linked to objectives 2 and 3 and research questions 6, 7 and 10 allowed the identification of vulnerable groups. The following recommendations concerning important segments for universities to target are based on this research.

- Universities should segment prospective postgraduates according to the proposed Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology, identify

influential DMU segments such as parents, employers, agents and partner university staff and target them with tailored communications messages through appropriate media channels at the time they are needed.

- Once postgraduates have purchased a degree, they should receive the types of information they require through appropriate sources to reassure them that they have made the right decision and to prepare them for study.
- On arrival at university different segments of postgraduates should be defined based on vulnerability and the right sources and types of information provided to help them adjust to the university environment and provide support throughout their time at university.

### **Need recognition**

Investigation of the sources and types of information that triggered a need amongst prospective postgraduates at stage one of the decision making process, in line with objective 2 and research questions 4 and 5, led to the following recommendation.

- The need for postgraduate education amongst segments of prospective postgraduates could be triggered by the following information sources; advertisements in media offering jobs, undergraduate events in the university, partner university and in country events, stimulation of WOM amongst current students and alumni and educational fairs. The types of information needed by potential students and influencers to inform them of the benefits of studying a postgraduate degree at the university should be provided through these appropriate media channels.

### **Communications messages to motivate study**

The following recommendations are based on the research into the motivation of postgraduates to study a postgraduate education during the need recognition stage in line with objective 2 and research question 5. Research on the influence of information on postgraduates' expectations linked to objective 3 and research question 11 also contributed to these recommendations.

- Messages to international postgraduates to trigger the need for study should focus on the three key motivations to study a postgraduate qualification; employability, English language skills and cultural understanding and entrepreneurship. Communications messages should then position the university as best fulfilling these postgraduates' needs in order to attract them to study at the institution.
- Universities should fulfil the promises made to prospective postgraduates whilst they are at university and provide them with the support and information required to develop their employability and English language skills and gain the competences and knowledge required to become entrepreneurs.

### **Media channels for prospective postgraduates**

The following recommendations link to exploration of information sources and the pool of information. Researching objective 2 and research question 4 led to the exploration of the most important and influential sources of information for prospective postgraduates during the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making process. Objective 5 and research question 9 looked at the contribution of prospective, current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information pre and post purchase.

- WOM sources of information are the most influential channel for prospective postgraduates and WOM recommendations and information should be stimulated amongst the following groups: friends who are current students and alumni, parents and other family members, agents, academic staff at overseas and partner universities and employers
- Universities should actively connect current and prospective postgraduates together and encourage communication by alumni of the benefits of studying at the university to employers, prospective postgraduates and industry representatives by running networking events in the foreign country, mentoring schemes and social media groups
- Video and written testimonials from current students and alumni recommending the university should be produced on the following: student lifestyle, academic study, staff and level of support offered, the ease of adaptation to the university environment and climate, the



development of English language capability and cultural understanding, friendship groups, opportunities to gain work and business experience and employment and entrepreneurial activity after graduation

- Online sources of information are key to the decision to choose a university and course so universities should ensure that their website answers every question a postgraduate has pre and post purchase, that rankings and online reviews are as favourable as possible and that search engine optimisation is achieved through Google and Baidu.
- Universities should ensure that the information provided through their media channels paints a true picture of what life is like as a postgraduate studying at the university so that postgraduates' expectations are correctly structured.

### **Communications messages to prospective postgraduates**

Recommendations are made based on an appraisal of the types of information required by prospective postgraduates during the evaluation of alternatives and purchase stages of the decision making process in line with objective 2 and research question 5.

- Universities and the Government should highlight the positive reputation that the UK's education system has, that it is a safe country to study in, fees are lower, the length of the degree is shorter, there are opportunities to mix and form friendship groups with a diverse international student body and that the employability of international postgraduates in home and overseas markets is enhanced by studying at a UK university.
- University messages should be positioned as coming from postgraduates with experience of the university and should focus on the most important types of information required by prospective postgraduates including the course curricula, reputation of the university and department, rankings, employability after graduation, student satisfaction, lifestyle and ethnic mix and the city the university is in.
- Universities should ensure that the application process is quick and easy and that offers are made quickly without requirements for additional fees or information. If the application process for prospective postgraduates

studying at partner institutions is easier and quicker, then this should be communicated to this segment of students.

### **Post purchase communications for enrolled postgraduates**

In the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making process the sources and types of information required by enrolled postgraduates were investigated in line with objective 2 and research questions 6 and 7, which led to the following recommendations concerning communications pre arrival, on arrival and at university.

#### **Pre arrival communications**

- Pre arrival communications from universities should reassure prospective international postgraduates that they had made the right decision in applying to the university and would allay any concerns about the transition to postgraduate study, living at university and finding friends once they arrived. Information should be provided on how to prepare for academic study and living in the country.
- Universities could help to establish communications channels to support a community of international postgraduate students who could help each other during their student journey such as social media groups, links to societies and pre departure events.
- Parents and supporters of postgraduates could be targeted with information that they would want to know about the university and student life such as its reputation, employability record, safety and the student lifestyle.

#### **On arrival communications**

- On arrival, universities should run tailored international postgraduate events and communications activities to help the transition, build a community and allow students to network with each other. Buddies, social media groups, society events, PALs and academic personal tutors would help new arrivals to meet new students and feel supported.
- A tailored induction based on the academic and practical information needs of segments of new arrivals could be provided to help them develop the skills and knowledge they require for university life

### At university Communications

- Universities should ensure that whilst at university postgraduates obtain the information and level of support they need and encourage them to access the pool of information provided by other postgraduates as information provision impacts on postgraduates' satisfaction.
- Universities could identify groups of postgraduates with enhanced informational needs and provide them with the additional information and support that they need to achieve academic success and enjoy their student experience.

## 7.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research are included in Table 7.1 below

Table 7.1 Recommendations for Future Research

<b>Recommendations for future research</b>
There is an opportunity to test the model with a wider student population such as undergraduate and postgraduate students from further courses and nationalities including European students
Future research could be undertaken in a number of different universities to gain a broader insight into the decision making cycle of international postgraduates from different courses and explore whether viewpoints are similar
Research could be carried out linked to the model amongst international postgraduates choosing to study a qualification in countries other than the UK to ascertain why they chose to study outside the UK and understand the image of the UK as an educational destination
UK home postgraduates who perceive the purchase of a postgraduate degree to be a high involvement purchase could be included in a future study to test the model
Universities could conduct their own research across different departments, courses and amongst students from different countries based on the model and the findings of this study. This would provide them with an insight into their international student population and their information needs
The model could be tested in different contexts with different groups of consumers making a high involvement purchase of a product or service to prove its viability as a consumer decision making cycle model
Influential members of the DMU such as parents, agents and partner university staff could become participants in a future study to assess their information requirements when supporting prospective international postgraduates to make the decision where to study
The factors impacting on the decision making cycle could be included in future research amongst consumers making a high involvement decision to establish their applicability in other contexts

Source Author's Analysis 2020

### 7.3 The Author's Key Learnings

The author's key learnings from the research process are set out in Table 7.2 below. The practical things that the author would do differently next time she undertakes research and how her attitudes to the research process have changed are also considered.

Table 7.2 Author's Key Learnings

<b>I learnt</b>
How to search for literature in a systematic manner
How to take a reflexive approach when conducting research which included cultural reflexivity
The adoption of a reflexive approach led to the methodology evolving as I progressed through the study and resulted in me making many changes to the way I conducted the research.
How to construct a questionnaire, a likert scale and the impact of automatic response syndrome
How to conduct qualitative interviews
The importance of having a semi structured interview guide which included multiple probes in order to keep the conversation flowing
How to achieve a narrative style of interviewing when writing an interview guide and conducting an interview
The importance of building a relationship with participants from certain countries in order to maximise the value of the interview
The difficulty of obtaining participants for interview without offering them incentives
The impact of culture on the collection of interview data and the subsequent need to adapt questioning styles for each participant
The difficulty of conducting interviews and gaining in-depth insight into participants feelings
The awareness that participants were reluctant or unable to express their feelings due to language and cultural barriers
The need to assess data saturation after each interview
The difficulty with transcribing a non-English speaker's interview recording
The considerable length of time it took to transcribe and analyse data and then write up the findings and the final dissertation
How to write academically and the styles required when writing the different chapters
The importance of having an in-depth understanding of methodologies
How to truncate 160,000 words into 80,000 words
The importance of having an excellent PhD supervisor
How lonely the experience of doing a PhD is

Table 7.2 Author's Key Learnings contd

<b>Practical things it would have been easier if I had done</b>
Set up excel spreadsheet for review of literature and decided on systematic search criteria from the start
Focus on previous studies on postgraduates and international students rather than university students in general
Shorter interview guides
Follow interview guide more closely in interviews
Transcribe, analyse data, identify themes and produce saturation tables as I go along
Obtain time during teaching schedule to conduct research and review the situation after each interview. Review interview guide alongside aim and objectives after each interview to make sure I keep on track regarding the data gathered
Not to expect those with poorer English to express their feelings and provide the rich data that native speakers offer
Have fewer objectives and research questions
Apply for research ethics approval early on
<b>How my attitudes to research changed</b>
I started off with a positivist philosophy which evolved into an interpretivist philosophy as I recognised the value of in-depth qualitative research
I realised the importance of evolving my methodology as I consciously recognised challenges
I began to understand the need to revisit the aim and objectives constantly and amend them if necessary
I moved to a narrative style of interviewing as I started to realise its value in uncovering feelings
I evolved my style of interviewing and the topics covered in interviews as I encountered cultural and language barriers amongst participants
It was later on in the study that I realised the value that I myself brought to the qualitative research process due to my understanding of international non-EU postgraduates and their cultures. Having enjoyed teaching such students for 31 years, travelling to 65 countries worldwide and appreciating the impact of culture on their role as interviewees I was well placed to interview them. During the interviews I learnt that I possessed the ability, openness and flexibility to adapt the interview for each participant. The fact that I had taught some of the international non-EU postgraduates I interviewed, that some interviewees were introduced to me by my students or I recruited them directly in classes meant that I had already built up a relationship with them which further helped when conducting the interviews.
I doubted if I would gain valuable insights as the study progressed and I encountered challenges but I now understand that self doubt is an important part of the research process. It was not until I set out in a final table the academic and practical contribution that my study has made that I fully realised how interesting my research will be to others and how much is new about the study including the conceptual model of the decision making cycle which can be used on so many levels and the typography.

Source Author's Analysis 2020

In conclusion a unique new model which shows the important role of information in the consumer decision making process for a high involvement product has been proposed; the Iterative Decision Making Cycle Model. Prospective

postgraduates acknowledged the importance of the decision they were making to study a business qualification in an overseas university and the risk and uncertainty involved:

*P21 'Yes it was a huge decision. It is sometimes I consider it was an outrageous decision. Now I consider that. And my parents sometimes they don't get it but I got up and I'm here.'*

Information search has been positioned in the inner ring of the model as the search for information was crucial throughout the stages of the decision making process from the time consumers recognised a need for the educational service through experiencing the service and finally graduating. Information behaviour theory has therefore been moved into a new domain and the insights gained have been combined with the findings from marketing and consumer behaviour theory to create this unique model. The model reflects the cyclical, iterative and continuous nature of the decision making and information searching processes and accommodates the lack of rationality and rigour with which many consumers performed the information search and made the decision. Placing the pool of information at the core of the model links to the role of postgraduates as both information searchers and information providers who contributed the information they had gathered to the pool of information available to other postgraduates who then used this information.

A new Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology has been proposed based on the factors that impacted on consumers' information searching and decision making processes. This typology may be used to segment consumers such as prospective postgraduates. It can also help to identify vulnerable postgraduate groups in order to provide them with the information they need through the correct channels so they can make informed decisions, adapt to university life, be satisfied with their experiences and overcome any challenges they have:

*P3 'At the beginning I did not foresee a challenge. It's good to see a new country. No one told me about how it was going to be challenging, what it was going to be like to study in the UK. I would have loved someone to tell me that.'*

A postgraduate education had a significant impact on the lives of students in this study and their experiences can help to tailor future marketing communications strategies by the Government and universities to ensure that postgraduates receive the information they require to fulfil their true potential:

*P2 'Well I think that my postgraduate study changed my direction in life and that is what makes me most satisfied.'*

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 Reports on Postgraduates and International Students

Table 8.1 Reports published on Postgraduate and International Students since 2009

Report funding	Name of report
HEFCE 2009	Report of the sub-committee for Teaching, Quality, and the Student Experience
BIS 2009	Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy
Universities UK 2009 Boorman and Ramsden	Research report: Taught Postgraduate students: market trends and opportunities.
Sutton Trust 2010	The social composition and future earnings of Postgraduates: interim results from the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics
HEPI 2010 House	Postgraduate Education in the United Kingdom
HEFCE 2010 Oakleigh Consulting and Staffordshire University Renfrew et al	Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher education.
BIS 2010 Smith et al	One Step Beyond: Making the most of Postgraduate Education
BIS 2011	Students at the Heart of the System.
BIS 2011	The Returns to Higher Education Qualifications
BIS 2012.	Funding for higher education in England for 2012-13: HEFCE grant letter from BIS
HEA 2012	Higher Education Academy Position Statement: Information about Postgraduate Taught Courses
HEC 2012	Postgraduate Education: An independent inquiry by the higher education commission, Policy Connect
NUS 2012	Steps Towards a Fairer System of Postgraduate Funding in England
House of Lords 2012	Higher Education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects
British Academy 2012	Postgraduate Funding: The Neglected Dimension.
Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) 2012.	Attracting international students: equitable services and support, campus cohesion and community engagement
Sutton Trust 2013	The Postgraduate Premium: Revisiting Trends in Social Mobility and Educational Inequalities in Britain and America
HEFCE 2013a	Postgraduate education in England and Northern Ireland: Overview Report
HEFCE 2013b	Trends in transition from first degree to postgraduate study: Qualifiers between 2002-3 and 2010-11
HEA 2013 Wakeling and Hamden-Thomson 2013.	Transition to higher degrees across the UK: an analysis of national, institutional and individual differences
HEFCE 2013 International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate)	Understanding the information needs of postgraduate taught students and how these can be met
HEFCE 2013c NatCen Social Research 2013.	The feasibility of conducting a national survey of PGT students

Table 8.1 Reports published on Postgraduates and International Students since 2009 contd.

Report funding	Name of report
BIS ESRC Welsh Government Wales 2013	Access all areas? The impact of fees and background on student demand for postgraduate higher education in the UK.
BIS 2013	Exploring student demand for postgraduate study
BIS 2013 Mellors-Bourne, Humphrey, Kemp and Woodfield	The wider benefits of international higher education in the UK
HEFCE 2014 CRAC and iCeGS Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott	Understanding how people choose to pursue taught postgraduate study
HEA 2014 Soilemetzidi, Bennett and Leman	The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
Universities UK 2014	Postgraduate Taught Education: The Funding Challenge
HECSU 2014 Universities UK Artess, Ball, Forbes and Hughes	Taught Postgraduate Employability and Employer Engagement: Masters with a purpose
HEFCE 2014a	Guidance on providing information for prospective taught postgraduate. Annex A
HEFCE 2014 Clarke and Lunt	International comparisons in postgraduate education: quality, access and employment outcomes
BIS 2015	Consultation on support for postgraduate study
Scottish Government 2015.	Taught Postgraduate Review: Working Group Final Report
HEFCE 2015 Strike and Toyne 2015 (eds.)	Widening Access to Postgraduate Study and Fair Access to the Professions: Working together to ensure fair access to postgraduate taught education.
HEFCE 2015 Wakeling, Hancock and Hampden-Thompson (in Strike and Toyne 2015)	Widening Access to Postgraduate Study and the Professions: Understanding the Student – Consortium Strand Report
HEFCE 2015 Banahene and Sykes (in Strike and Toyne 2015)	Information, advice and guidance and employer engagement
HEFCE ESRC 2015 Wakeling	Final Report to ESRC and HEFCE. Programme Analysis of HEFCE's Postgraduate Support Scheme
HEA 2015 Mellors-Bourne, Mountford-Zimdars, Wakeling, Rattray and Land	Postgraduate transitions: Exploring disciplinary practice.
HEFCE 2015 Diamond, Evans, Sheen and Birkin	UK review of information about higher education: Information mapping study
HEA 2016 Leman	Trends in the taught Postgraduate experience. The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
BIS 2016	The future of universities in a knowledge economy



Table 8.1 Reports published on Postgraduates and International Students since 2009 contd.

<b>Report funding</b>	<b>Name of report</b>
HEFCE 2016b	Review of information about learning and teaching, and the student experience: Summary of responses to consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions.
Universities UK 2016	International Taught Postgraduate Students: The UK's Competitive Advantage
QAA 2017	UK Quality Code for Higher Education
Universities UK 2017	International students in higher education: The UK and its competition
QAA Scotland 2017	Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review Reports 2013-16: The Postgraduate Student Experience
Universities UK 2018	The Scale of UK Higher Education Transnational Education 2015-16
HEPI 2018	Higher Education Policy Institute 2018 Economic benefits of international students by constituency
Scottish Government 2018	The Impact of International Students in Scotland: Scottish Government response to the Migration Advisory Committee's consultation on the impact of international students in the UK
Migration Advisory Committee 2018	Impact of international students in the UK
HM Government 2019	International Education Strategy: global potential, global growth

Source Author's Analysis 2020

## Appendix 2 Supplementary Literature Review

### Information Sources

This section contains additional information on the literature pertaining to the information sources used by undergraduate and postgraduate students when searching for a university.

In this section the research on students' information needs are reviewed. Many Governments have attempted to provide relevant information to prospective undergraduate and postgraduate students to enable them to assess and choose institutions (Baldwin and James 2000). In 1998 the Australian Government published 359 performance indicators for HEIs covering the characteristics of students, staff, teaching and research, quality and efficiency measures, inputs, 'throughputs' and outcomes to help prospective students choose institutions and courses (DETYA 1998).

In the UK during the last 20 years various Governmental and educational bodies have published reports that have stressed the need for students considering entering higher education, including postgraduate students, to have access to the information they required to make an informed choice (HEFCE 2009, BIS 2009, BIS 2010, National Student Forum 2008, House of Commons 2009, CBI 2009, QAA 2009, HEC 2012, Mellors-Bourne 2013b, HEA 2012, HEA/NUS 2012, Wakeling et al 2015). The UK funding bodies (HEFCE, the Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland) have been researching the information needs of taught postgraduate students since 1999 (Mellors-Bourne 2014). One of the reasons these reports have been commissioned was to attract more international students to the UK (QAA 2017, HEPI 2018, Scottish Government 2018).

The reports concluded that potential postgraduate students found that the information concerning courses and institutions was fragmented and hard to access as there was no centralised application system (Mellors-Bourne 2013, HEA 2012, i-graduate 2013). It was therefore difficult to make comparisons between courses and the HEA (2012) argued that more use should be made of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).

Based on the research undertaken, new guidance was issued by HEFCE (2014a) to encourage HEIs to improve the information that was provided to prospective postgraduate students regarding course choice. They also launched a new online resource entitled 'Steps to Postgraduate Study' which provided information to prospective postgraduate students and indicated to them where their questions could be answered (HEFCE 2015).

The latest data from the UK Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) (2017) was gained from 84,255 taught postgraduate students of which 28,248 were international non-EU students. It showed that international non-EU postgraduates were more satisfied with information provision compared to other postgraduates. 88% found information on course choice was easy to find and useful and 82% thought that the information was accurate.

However, Diamond et al (2015) noted that the types of information required by prospective students and the sources of information consulted were changing continually which indicated that more up to date research was required. The current author's study researches the types and sources of information used by international postgraduate students when deciding to study at an overseas university and so provides more up to date information.

With regards to academic research, the types of information, such as rankings, consulted by undergraduate rather than postgraduate students have been researched; Moogan et al (1999), Briggs and Wilson (2007), Davies et al (2010), Diamond et al (2012), Slack et al (2014). A number of studies have looked at the sources of information used by prospective students when researching courses and institutions with a focus on potential undergraduate students: Bonnema and Van der Waldt 2008, Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton 2004, Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis 2005, Goff 2004, Simões and Soares (2010), Wiese, Jordaan and Van Heerden 2010, Johnston (2010), Davies et al (2010), Connor et al (1999), Moogan and Baron (2003), Usher et al (2010), Schimmel et al (2010), Armstrong and Lumsden (2000), Hooley et al (2013), Cremonini et al (2008), Dyke et al (2012), Slack et al (2014), Teng 2015, Le, Robinson and Dobebe (2019).

Helmsley Brown and Oplatka (2015) did a review of the literature on university choice and concluded that the majority of the research had focused on single institutions and undergraduate students who were attending universities in their home countries. There was a need for research to be carried out amongst postgraduate students from different countries across multiple institutions to identify segments of students and their information needs. This study fills a gap in the research and explores the information needs of international non-EU postgraduate students when making the decision to study at an overseas university.

The information sources used by international postgraduates are now considered. Some prospective postgraduate students were already aware of universities as they had studied there previously, had lived in the region or had the universities in their evoked sets from undergraduate study (Towers and Towers 2018). Other students become aware of universities through searching online, an agent, blogs, ratings, reviews or by WOM recommendations from family, friends and lecturers (Soutar and Turner 2002, Mazzarol and Soutar 2007). Universities needed to ensure that they used the correct channels of communication to reach these two different segments of postgraduate students; those who were aware of the university and those who were not aware (Towers and Towers 2018).

The literature pertaining to postgraduate information sources are now further reviewed. i-graduate (2013) found that postgraduates required access to WOM sources of information about a university. They wanted to be able to speak to a member of the faculty about the specifics of the course, to a graduate who had experience of doing the course or to a student at the institution who had a similar demographic profile to themselves and could answer their questions about living there as a student. Postgraduates desired unbiased information and were wary of student ambassadors and claims of rankings on university websites. They valued independent league tables as an important source of information. Those who had never studied at the university had different information needs from current students and wanted an independent centralised resource where they could compare courses and universities.

In Renfrew et al's (2010) study, both undergraduates and postgraduates agreed that the 'prospectus/university website' was the most important source of information followed by family and friends. Postgraduates found formal visits and interviews less useful than undergraduate students. The sample size was only 120 postgraduate students from two UK HEIs and the list of sources used were biased towards undergraduate sources such as UCAS, Unistats and school teachers. Postgraduates' information sources such as employers, educational agents or international student fairs and online sources such as social media were not included. Combining the website and the prospectus together provided no measure of the importance of the website.

In Subramaniam, Yusoff and Othman 2014's study of home and international postgraduates studying an MBA at a university in Malaysia the sources of information with the most reach and influence on their decision to study there, in order of importance were; university website, published rankings, family and friends followed by current students.

Royo-Vela and Hünermund 2016 conducted research amongst postgraduates in Germany and Spain to ascertain the marketing communications media that students used at each stage of the decision making process based on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. They found that interactive marketing communications tools such as social media, search engines and university websites had the most impact and led to changed perceptions of the university and attitudes towards the brand. Details of the international profile of the sample, if any, were not disclosed.

In Towers and Towers (2018) study of a mix of UK and international postgraduates who were researching study in the UK, important sources of information included online reviews, online rankings, other students, staff blogs, Twitter and open days.

This study provides up to date research on the information sources used by international non-EU postgraduates, the relative importance of the sources used and the breadth of the information search in terms of the number of sources utilised.

Digital sources of information are now reviewed. Increasingly universities are using digital media as part of their recruitment strategies (Barnes and Lescault 2011). QS Digital Solutions (2016) surveyed 200 marketers working in HEIs. They reported that 75% of marketers felt that digital channels were a high priority for student recruitment. 46% forecast that their digital marketing budget would increase in the next year and the focus was on the HEI's website design and optimisation, email marketing and social media as channels of communication.

Research has been carried out by higher education consultants on the preferred digital sources of information amongst prospective postgraduate and undergraduate students (QS 2019a, QS 2019b, QS 2019c, QS 2019g, QS 2016, 2015a, 2015b, Chegg 2014, Higher Education Marketing 2017).

In QS's (2019g) research of prospective international students, online sources were identified as the most important sources of information when deciding where to study. University websites and internet searches were the most preferred sources. Nearly half the sample used online rankings followed by course finder websites and social media. An online prospectus was preferred to a print alternative and the prospectus would be shown to parents by a fifth of the sample.

Increasingly the website was the most important source of information for prospective students (Renfrew et al 2010, QS 2019e). University marketers were designing their websites to attract users on a global basis and give them the ability to access the website on any device, especially mobile phones (QS 2016). Prospective students were forming their first meaningful impression of the university through the website (QS 2019c, QS 2015b) and it became a source of information that impacted on postgraduates' perception of the university (Moogan 2020). Chegg (2014) found that the website was very influential in the discovery stage of searching when prospective US undergraduates were learning about universities and finding universities that could fit with their needs. However prospective students were frustrated with university websites as they were difficult to navigate lacked information and furthermore emails were not responded to (QS 2015b).

Higher education institution review sites and online directories were found to be useful by 73% of US students (QS 2015b). Email was found to be the most popular channel of communication for prospective students at all stages of the decision making process and a speedy response to email was crucial. 62% of prospective students expected a full response by email within 24 hours of making an enquiry (Hobsons 2017) and 91% wanted the response to be personalised (Chegg 2014). Prospective international students expected at least weekly contact after making an enquiry, after application and after an offer was made (Hobsons 2017). Moogan (2020) agreed that students were influenced by the university's speed of reply to emails.

Teichler (2011) found that online rankings were an important source of information for Asian students when considering where to study. He questioned whether students had the interest or energy to interrogate rankings tables in a meaningful manner. QS (2019g) also found that although the majority of international students claimed that rankings were an important source of information, their relative importance was less significant than teaching quality, subject reputation, being welcoming to international students and scholarships. Rankings were considered to be more important in Saudi Arabia, China and Hong Kong than in other countries. In North America and Canada rankings were of relatively low importance whereas in Malaysia, Thailand and India rankings were of medium importance. However, there was a low level of understanding as to how rankings were calculated (QS 2019g). Souto-Otero and Enders (2017) analysed ISB data from 29,741 international students from over 150 countries studying in the UK, USA, Netherlands and Germany. They agreed that when deciding on a study destination, rankings were not as important a type of information as expected. Rankings achieved eighth place as a choice factor after reputation, quality of teaching, fees and safety. For students from collectivist cultures, such as African and Asian students, rankings in league tables were more important than in other countries such as the UK where rankings were of low importance to students.

The rate of adoption of social media has been 'staggering' and its popularity continues (Constantinides and Stagno 2012 p.2, Zote 2019). In 2019 Facebook was the most popular social networking site with 2 billion active users.

Instagram attracted a younger audience and the number of active users had grown to 1 billion. YouTube was the second most popular website after Google and above Facebook. Twitter remained an important platform and LinkedIn was used by its niche audience (Zote 2019).

Academic research is increasingly looking at the role of social media as an information source amongst prospective students and its impact on university recruitment strategies (Le, Robinson and Dobebe 2019, Rekhter and Hossler 2019, Bukhari et al 2018, Galan, Lawley and Clements 2015, Constantinides and Stagno 2012, Constantinides and Stagno 2011, Palmer 2013, Teng 2015, Belanger, Bali and Longden 2014, Hamid et al 2016). Social media sites have been found to increase the number of students recruited and enhance interaction between universities and students (Mattson and Barnes 2009, Hayes, Ruschman and Walker 2009).

Rekhter and Hossler (2019) found that videos and images on social media helped potential undergraduate students 'to see' a university which was unknown to them, solidify their choice of university, reduce apprehensions they had about studying abroad and help them to feel that they belonged to the university.

Hobsons (2017) recognised the increasing importance of social media as an information source and identified that 80% of prospective students used social media when researching a university to attend. Moogan (2020) agreed that social media was an important source of information for international postgraduate students. Similarly, the importance of social media as an information source when international undergraduate students were choosing to transfer their studies to an overseas university was highlighted (Rekhter and Hossler 2019). Galan, Lawley and Clements (2015) identified the social media used by European postgraduate students as they progressed through the information search and evaluation of alternatives stages of the decision making process when deciding to study in Australia. The most popular social media were Facebook, YouTube and blogs followed by LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. Bukhari et al (2018) studied the use of social media by predominately undergraduate international students and found that social media was used as



an information source once students felt overloaded with information from websites and could no longer find the detailed and accurate information they required. They would interact with their friends on social media to have their questions answered. However, research amongst secondary school students found that social media was of low relative importance as an information source (Constantinides and Zinck Stagno 2011, Le, Robinson and Dobele 2019).

Chegg (2014) found that after the discovery stage prospective students used social media to interact with current or former students and HEI admissions advisors to gain further information regarding the university. 75% of prospective students wanted to start the conversations with admissions officers and only 4% of students wanted social media to be the first point of contact with a university. Over half the students used Facebook to get a better feel for the HEIs to which they had already applied. They wanted to see if the students who attended the university were similar to them and whether they would like them. It was therefore important to encourage peer to peer interactions on social networks and listening to prospective students on these networks was essential.

### Types of Information

This section discusses additional literature concerning the types of information required by prospective international postgraduate students and the provision of information to meet their needs.

Diamond et al (2015) found that there were certain types of information that undergraduates could access, but which were not widely available to postgraduate students, namely information regarding student satisfaction, graduate destinations and comparisons of providers. There was less information regarding postgraduate courses, merely a general course description, award and fees and often prospective students were asked to make enquiries to the university department offering the course.

Respondents to the HEFCE (2016) consultation on changes to information provided by institutions noted that postgraduate students had a need for more qualitative information at a course level, as opposed to data from a quantitative NSS type survey. Prospective international postgraduate students wanted to

gain an idea of what their life at the university would be like and what the employment and other opportunities could be after studying there (i-graduate 2013).

The current author conducted research in 2002 amongst postgraduates and many of the findings echo the views of academics writing today. Potential MBA students required information which enabled them to rank the various MBA programmes for quality. The rankings used included ratings by employers, the proportion of MBA graduates employed and the average salaries of graduates (Dill 1997, Chapman 1993).

Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that conventional measures of the academic credibility of a department, contained in a university's literature, did not provide postgraduates with all the information they required. Applicants were interested in the reputation of the university, its courses and staff, but they also wanted to find out about the personal, social and pastoral side of the educational experience which was not easily represented in print. Such information could be obtained through more direct contact with universities. They recommended the appointment of a member of the academic staff as a 'gatekeeper' who would be a direct focal point of contact. The gatekeeper would reply to queries, provide details of the application process, advise applicants as to where they could access further information and make appointments for visits and interviews. They also suggested that postgraduate applicants could be provided with the email addresses of current postgraduate students so they could obtain their views directly. The perception would be that these students would provide authentic information. Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that postgraduate students wanted an invitation to visit the department, to speak unsupervised to current students and ask questions. They wanted to gain a real impression of the institution rather than see a glossy façade. They argued that 'visibly caring for students was the best basis on which to market postgraduate programmes' (Hesketh and Knight 1999 p.162)

Postgraduate students in the US also displayed a need to speak directly to students and gain a realistic picture of what university life was like. They wanted to find out more about the student experience by watching videos of actual class

sessions, participating in simulated class sessions and meeting current students and administrative staff (Ashar and Lane 1996).

More recent industry research has found that in the search stage only about half of the prospective students were interested in reputational information or ranking of institutions (Chegg 2014). Prospective students found that the institutions' websites lacked the information that they were looking for. They wanted information on the programme, admissions and student life (QS Digital Solutions 2015, Chegg 2014).

Industry research from QS (2019g) found that the most valued types of information amongst prospective international students when making their decision were the experience and qualifications of the teaching staff, information on accommodation, advice on how to apply, the opportunity to speak to current international students to have their queries answered, information on work placements, visa guidance, stories about current or previous international students, meetings with admissions staff at fairs, virtual tours of the university, images of the university, live online chats with university staff and video stories.

The types of information specified by international postgraduate students in QS's report reflects the growing need amongst millennials to engage with brands in a different way and for types of information that contained inspiring content and stories about the service being offered rather than university controlled messages (Hall 2018).

The choice factors used by students are now considered as they link to the types of information required. Choice factors have been widely discussed in the literature with reference to student choice models and the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision making process. Understanding the factors of importance to international postgraduates when deciding whether to study abroad and the country, institution, city and programme to choose, helps universities to provide prospective students with the types of information they require through the correct sources during all stages of the decision making process. This section reviews the previous literature on choice factors of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The factors influencing the decisions prospective students make when choosing between universities have been researched but much of the literature focuses on undergraduate students. However, an analysis of the choice factors of undergraduate students can highlight the types of information required by prospective students.

Quantitative surveys amongst students to ascertain the choice factors of importance when selecting universities have been undertaken since 2000 in Australia, Canada, China, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, Korea, Malaysia, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, UK, USA and Vietnam: Hung et al (2000), Patitu (2000), Harker et al (2001), Imenda and Kongolo (2002), Price et al (2003), Bornholt et al (2004), Dawes and Brown (2004), Donaldson and McNicholas (2004), Imenda et al (2004), Menon (2004), Perna and Titus (2004), Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis (2005), Zimbroff (2005), Shanka et al (2005), Briggs (2006), Domino et al (2006), Maringe (2006), Niculescu (2006), Porter and Umbach (2006), Whitehead et al (2006), Briggs and Wilson (2007), Menon et al (2007), Bonnema and van der Weldt (2008), Callender and Jackson (2008), Chen (2008), Cho et al (2008), Keskinen et al (2008), Ozdemir and Hacifazlioglu (2008), Chung et al (2009), Park (2009), Ivy (2010), Padlee et al (2010), Abubakar et al (2010), Carter and Curry (2011), Wilkins and Huisman (2011), Dunnett et al (2012), Horstschräer (2012), Hoyt and Howell (2012), Kettley and Whitehead (2012), Lopez-Bonilla et al (2012), McCarthy et al (2012), Sierra Sánchez (2012), Sojkin et al (2012), Wilkins et al (2012), Jung (2013), Zain et al (2013), Nicholls (2018), Le, Robinson and Dobebe (2019).

Qualitative studies of choice factors have been carried out amongst students in Australia, Israel, Finland, UK and the USA: Strayer (2002), Pasternak (2005), Gatfield and Chen (2006), Oplatka and Tevel (2006), Baker and Brown (2007), Maringe and Carter (2007), Pyvis and Chapman (2007), Brooks and Waters (2009), Brown et al (2009), Griffin et al (2012), Hemsley-Brown (2012), Calikoglu (2018), Moogan (2020), Zhu and Reeves (2019).

Secondary data studies on factors influencing student choice have taken place in Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, UK and USA: Oosterbeek et al (1992), Davies and Guppy (1997), Bratti (2002), Hagy and Staniec (2002), McGregor et al (2002), Leslie (2003), Sá et al (2004), Thomas (2004), Drewes and Michael

(2006), Gormley and Murphy (2006), Siegfried and Getz (2006), Dooley et al (2012), Sá et al (2012).

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) did a systematic review of the literature on student choice factors when choosing a university. They found 2000 citations from which they chose 75 journal articles, written between 1992 and 2013 regarding factors of importance to domestic and international undergraduate and postgraduate students when choosing a university.

The Push-Pull model of international student choice is now reviewed.

The decision making process of international postgraduate students was perceived to be more complex than that of home students and needed to take into account push factors as to why the student would leave their home country and pull factors regarding why they chose to study in a certain overseas country (McMahon, 1992, Wilkins and Huisman 2015). These push and pull factors led to the need for certain types of information to be provided to prospective international postgraduate students.

Lee (1966) first used a push-pull model to explain the factors that impacted on people's decision to migrate from one country to another. McMahon (1992) was one of the first researchers to recognise the push-pull concept when he examined the flow of international students leaving eighteen developing countries to study abroad in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Push factors encouraged an international student to consider leaving their home country and studying abroad so they were 'pushed' out of their home country. Whereas pull factors operated within a host country and made it more desirable for an international student to study and live there (Altbach 2004, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012, Wiers-Jenssen 2019).

McMahon (1992) found that the push factors impacting on international students were the level of economic wealth and availability of educational opportunities in the developing home country, the priority the home government placed on education and the degree of involvement of the home country in the world economy. Pull factors included economic links between the host country and home country, the support the host nation gave to international students through scholarships or other assistance, the relative size of the home and host

country economies and the degree to which the host country was politically interested in the home country and supplied foreign assistance or had cultural links.

The push-pull model has become the most common model used by educational researchers to examine the flow of international students, their decisions or motivation to study in a foreign country and their choice of country (Chen 2007a). The concept has since been used by various researchers: Baldwin and James, 2000, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002 Shanka, Quintal and Taylor 2006, Li and Bray, 2007, Maringe and Carter 2007, Chen 2007a, Chen 2007b, Chen 2008, Bodycott, 2009, Abubakar, Shanka and Muuka 2010, Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012, Lee and Sehole 2015, Ahmad and Hussain 2017b, James-MacEachern and Yun 2017.

Factors that influenced the international student's decision to study overseas are now considered. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) used the push-pull concept in their study of students from Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia who had chosen to take a course in post-secondary education in Australia. They identified a comprehensive list of factors that influenced international students' decision to study overseas, factors influencing their choice of destination country and institution.

Further studies into factors that influenced the undergraduate and postgraduate students' decision to study overseas were added to Table 8.2 and divided into pull and push factors. Some of the factors that pushed an international student to study abroad such as a lack of educational opportunities or political and economic problems at home then became one of the factors that pulled them to study overseas.

Table 8.2 Factors influencing International Students' Decision to Study Overseas

Factors influencing decision to study overseas	Author
<b>PUSH FACTORS</b>	
Overseas course better than local / Home low educational quality	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Chen 2008; Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012
Difficult to gain entry at home	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Wilkins 2011a
Course not available at home / lack of opportunities/ limited places	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Calikoglu 2018; Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012; Singh 2016
Political and economic problems in home country	Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012
Employer preference for overseas education	Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012
Limited career prospects at home	Chen 2008
Home country lacks research facilities	Chen 2008
<b>PULL FACTORS</b>	
Enhanced employability post graduation	Brooks and Waters 2011; Bamber 2014; Singh and Jack 2017, Chen 2008; Daily, Farewell and Kumar 2010; Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman 2012; Bodycott 2009; Wilkins and Huisman 2011a; Gatfield and Chen 2006; Li and Bray 2007; Wu 2014; Lee and Sehoole 2015; Foster 2014; Calikoglu 2018
Gain better understanding of the West	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Rudd, Djafarova, and Waring 2012
Intention to migrate	Mazzarol and Soutar 2002
Academic and professional growth	Li and Bray 2007; Singh and Jack 2017
Economic benefits/ earnings	Li and Bray 2007; Foster 2014
Individual internationalisation	Li and Bray 2007
Enhanced social status	Li and Bray 2007; Manns and Swift 2016
Intellectual stimulation	Zhou 2015
Greater political freedom and stability/ environment	Zhou 2015; Singh 2016
Learn Language	Movondo et al 2004; Singh and Jack 2017; Chen 2008; Wilkins et al 2012
Learn English Language	Singh 2016; Bodycott 2009; Padlee, Kamaruddin and Baharun 2010; Wilkins and Huisman 2011a; Mpinganjira 2012; Wu 2014; Gong and Huybers 2015; Foster 2014
Contribution to home country on return	Singh and Jack 2017
Opportunity to gain freedom from family/ Get away from home	Chen 2008; Lee and Sehoole 2015
Gain cultural awareness / multinational classmates	Chen 2008; Wilkins et al 2012; Bodycott 2009; Wilkins and Huisman 2011a; Wu 2014; Lee and Sehoole 2015; Manns and Swift 2016; Calikoglu 2018; Altbach 2008
Financial support from home Government or agency	Chen 2008
Desire to stay with family/ follow them	Li and Bray 2007; Singh 2016
International education is valued by home country / reputation	Chen 2008; Manns and Swift 2016
Awareness of the lessened relevance of domestic education	Li and Bray 2007
Increasing internationalisation of domestic institutions	Li and Bray 2007
Advanced research facilities	Altbach 2008

Source Author's Analysis 2020

### International Student Challenges

This section considers the challenges for international postgraduates when studying in an overseas university.

Firstly, the adjustment of postgraduate students to the foreign country and university is discussed. Ward and Kennedy (1999) studied adjustment and cross cultural adaptation and proposed that there were two adjustment domains; psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Psychological adjustment related to psychological well-being and included depression and anxiety. Psychological well-being was described as "the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively" (Huppert 2009 p. 137). Sociocultural adjustment was defined as "the ability to 'fit in', to acquire culturally appropriate skills, and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment" such as social support and belonging (Ward and Kennedy 1999 p.660).

The acculturative stress international students may suffer from is now considered. Acculturative stress was one of the concepts used when trying to understand international students' psychosocial challenges during acculturation and was the most common stressor discussed in the literature (Alharbi and Smith 2018). Berry (1970) first introduced the concept of acculturative stress as an alternative to the term culture shock (Oberg 1960). He defined acculturative stress as "a response by people to life events that are rooted in intercultural contact." (Berry, 2006, p. 43). Subsequent researchers of international students have used this concept because it includes the psychological stressors in culture shock such as anxiety and depression but also provided four strategies to handle acculturation experiences (Li, Wang and Xiao 2014). Acculturative stress is often measured by the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) which has 36 items divided into subscales: perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, stress due to change (culture shock), guilt and non-specific (Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1994)

Postgraduates often experienced acculturative stress when they lived and studied in a foreign country as they had to cope with two or more cultures at the same time (Berry 2006). Postgraduates became anxious and frustrated when



they tried to cope with the discrepancies between their cultural values and those of the host country (Sumer 2009). Ang and Liamputtong (2007) found that if postgraduates' acculturative stress was not addressed in a timely manner, it would have negative consequences for them.

The adjustment of postgraduate students is now considered. Postgraduate students often differed from undergraduates in terms of their age, maturity levels, future goals, relationship status and years lived away from home (Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018). This linked to life course theory (Elder 1998) which stated that life experience, age and social cohort impacted on an individual's psychosocial adjustment outcomes during transition (Elder and Shanahan, 2006).

Research has found different psychological and sociocultural adjustment outcomes for undergraduate students compared to postgraduate students. Li et al (2013) studied the acculturation process of Chinese postgraduates and established that they had lower levels of depression and stress than Chinese undergraduate students. Han, Pistole and Caldwell (2017) found that postgraduates when compared to undergraduates had greater academic success despite adjustment challenges.

Although the degree to which postgraduates experienced psychosocial adjustment challenges might vary from that of undergraduates, the same challenges applied as illustrated by a review of the literature on postgraduate students: James 2018, Shafaei and Razak 2018, Busher, Lewis and Comber 2016, Chien, 2016, Quan, He and Sloan 2016, Shafaei and Razak 2016, Shafaei, Razak and Nejati 2016, Young et al 2013, Desa, Yusooff and Kadir 2012, Terraschke. and Wahid 2011, Wu and Hammond 2011, Brown and Holloway 2008, Barron, Baum and Conway 2007, Woodrow, 2006, Wu 2006.

International student adjustment is now discussed and the reviews previously undertaken are identified. Research interest in the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of both undergraduate and postgraduate international students when studying in another country has increased in the last decade. According to Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi (2018) there were 237 peer

reviewed articles on international student adjustment on PsycINFO and Academic Search Premier databases from 1999 to 2008 compared to 744 articles from 2009 to 2018.

The oldest review of adjustment amongst international students was carried out by Church (1982). He summarised the unique issues that short term visitors or sojourners, such as international students, might face. In 2006 Andrade investigated the factors that influenced the adjustment and academic achievement of international students in several countries. He found that English language proficiency and culture caused adjustment challenges, and that international student achievement was impacted by English proficiency, educational background and academic skills.

Table 8.3 summarises the reviews of international student adjustment that have been carried out between 2011 and 2018. The reviews focus on predictors of psychosocial adjustment and adjustment issues or stressors.

Table 8.3 Literature Reviews of International Student Adjustment 2011-2018

Author	Number of studies analysed	Date	Sample of international students	Findings from review
Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018	30 quantitative	2009-2018	International undergraduate students in the US	<b>Psychosocial adjustment outcomes:</b> acculturative stress, social belonging, psychological adjustment, depression and anxiety <b>Predictors of international students' psychosocial adjustment outcomes:</b> <b>Psychological (wellbeing):</b> age, gender, belonging/social support, acculturation strategy, English ability, racial discrimination <b>Sociocultural:</b> level of university (4-year vs 2-year), academic intervention focused on understanding U.S. social and academic norms, discrimination, belonging, social interaction, challenges with English
Alharbi and Smith 2018	38 quantitative	1989-2017	International undergraduate and postgraduate students in English-Speaking Countries	<b>Stressors:</b> Acculturative stress (perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, change, guilt), English-language proficiency, perceived discrimination, loneliness, academic stress <b>Predictors of academic success and cultural adaptation:</b> age, gender, ethnicity, coping strategies, social support, personality traits, length of stay <b>Mental Health:</b> Perceived stress, depression, well being
Zhang-Wu 2018.	21 quantitative	2000-2016	Chinese international students in US	<b>Adjustment issues:</b> Language barriers, acculturation, intercultural communication, social networks
Mesidor and Sly 2016		1998-2014	International student in the US	<b>Adjustment issues:</b> Academic, cultural, social, and psychological adjustment issues: psychological distress (homesick, depression, anxiety)
Li, Wang, and Xiao 2014	18 quantitative	2000-2011	East Asian international students	<b>Predictors of Psychological wellbeing:</b> age, gender, length of stay in host country, English proficiency, intercultural competence, attitudes toward seeking help, perceived discrimination, depression, acculturation, social support, anxiety, homesickness, acculturative stress, psychological stress, psychological distress, perfectionism, social cultural adjustment difficulties
Smith and Khawaja 2011	94 qualitative and quantitative	1984-2010	International students	<b>Acculturative stressors:</b> Language, educational, socio cultural, discrimination, practical (finance, accommodation)
Zhang and Goodson 2011	64 quantitative	1990-2009	International undergraduate and graduate students in US	<b>Predictors of psychosocial adjustment:</b> Stress, social support, English language proficiency, region/country of origin, length of residence in the U.S., acculturation, social interaction with Americans, self-efficacy, gender, personality.

The adjustment challenges of international students are now reviewed. Research has been carried out on adjustment challenges for international students concerning plagiarism (Duff, Rogers and Harris 2006, Zimmerman 2012), friendship (Gareis 2012), belongingness (Glass and Westmont 2014), mental health (Liu 2009, Lu et al 2014), psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong 2006), social integration (Spencer-Oatey et al 2017), acculturative adjustment (Wang et al 2012) and language (Murphy and Potvin 2017, Sawir et al 2012). The QAA (2014) report 'Assuring Quality for International Students Studying in the UK' and the Higher Education Authority (2014) guidance on pre-arrival and pre-sessional support for international students acknowledged that international students needed to be recognised as a unique group of students and that universities could help them prepare for some of the problems they might face. Adjustment challenges impacted on international student satisfaction and universities should consider how they would support international students through the challenges that they faced (Sam 2001).

Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi (2018) recently reviewed thirty quantitative studies from 2009 to 2018 that analysed the adjustment of undergraduate international students in US universities. They found that the most commonly researched psychosocial adjustment outcomes were acculturative stress, social belonging, psychological adjustment, depression and anxiety. Table 8.4 summarises the adjustment challenges for international students as identified in the literature reviews in Table 8.3.

Table 8.4 International students' Adjustment Challenges identified in Literature reviews

<b>Adjustment challenges</b>	<b>Authors of Literature reviews</b>
<b>Academic stress</b>	Alharbi and Smith 2018, Mesidor and Sly 2016, Smith and Khawaja 2011
<b>Language proficiency</b>	Alharbi and Smith 2018, Zhang-Wu 2018, Smith and Khawaja 2011
<b>Sociocultural</b>	Mesidor and Sly 2016, Smith and Khawaja 2011
Social belonging	Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018
Social networks	Zhang-Wu 2018
Intercultural communication	Zhang-Wu 2018
Perceived Discrimination	Alharbi and Smith 2018, Smith and Khawaja 2011
<b>Psychological</b>	Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018, Mesidor and Sly 2016
Anxiety	
Depression	Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018, Mesidor and Sly 2016
Homesickness	Alharbi and Smith 2018, Mesidor and Sly 2016
Loneliness	Alharbi and Smith 2018
Acculturation /Acculturative stress	Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018, Alharbi and Smith 2018, Zhang-Wu 2018.
<b>Practical factors</b>	Smith and Khawaja 2011
Finance	
Accommodation	

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Research that has been carried out on each of the adjustment challenges for international Students in Table 8.4 is identified in Table 8.5 below based on Smith and Khawaja's (2011) study

Table 8.5 Adjustment Challenges for International Students

<b>Academic stress</b>	<p>Academic stress was intensified due to the need to adapt to a new educational environment and second language anxiety (Misra, Crist and Burant 2003)</p> <p>Academic stress led to psychological distress (Rasmi, Safdar and Lewis 2009)</p> <p>If academic performance was below expectations international students experienced acculturative stress (Mori 2000)</p> <p>If international students did not overcome acculturative stressors due to poor academic attainment, they would have decreased confidence in mastering the environment which had a negative impact on adaptation (Chen 1999)</p> <p>Pressure from family and the sponsoring university to achieve high levels of academic performance could aggravate acculturative stress (Chen 1999)</p> <p>If there was a mismatch between international students' expectations regarding the quality and efficiency of educational services provided by universities and the reality of what is offered, then there was less adaptation (Khawaja and Dempsey 2008)</p> <p>International students found it hard to adapt to the host country's teaching style. Students used to rote learning had issues when trying to adapt to critical thinking and interactive learning (Aubrey 1991, Liberman 1994, Cheng and Erben 2012)</p> <p>Asian students were used to a formal authoritative lecture, rote memorisation and working alone (Young 2011)</p> <p>Chinese cultural values led students to remain modest and quiet in class (Jiang 2014)</p> <p>Chinese students felt the main sources of anxiety and stress were academic study workload and ambiguity over assessment tasks or teaching styles (Redfern 2016)</p>
<b>Language proficiency</b>	<p>Language proficiency impacted writing assignments, asking questions in class, understanding lectures and oral and written exams (Chen 1999)</p> <p>Lower levels of English proficiency led to lower academic achievement (Poyrazli et al 2004)</p> <p>Language barriers impeded social interaction – making friends, and interacting with locals (Mori 2000)</p> <p>English proficiency was a predictor of psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Zhang and Goodson 2011)</p> <p>For those communicating in a second language writing assignments, in class discussions or making presentations were difficult (Kim 2011)</p>
<b>Practical factors</b> Finance Accommodation	<p>Financial problems were experienced by the majority of international students (Roberts et al 1999)</p> <p>Work restrictions in the host country and tuition fees contributed to financial issues (Chen 1999)</p>

<p><b>Sociocultural Factors</b>  <b>Social support</b>  <b>Social belonging</b>  <b>Intercultural communication</b>  <b>Social networks</b></p>	<p>Personality variables such as trait-anxiety, attachment style and extroversion impacted on international students' ability to make friends and adapt (Brisset et al 2010)</p> <p>International students experienced difficulties socialising with Australian locals (Townsend and Poh 2008)</p> <p>Language barriers, cultural norms and the host country nature of friendships were problematic when establishing friendships and could lead to loneliness (Smith and Khawaja 2011)</p> <p>Two thirds of Australian international students experienced loneliness and/or isolation in the host country (Sawir et al 2008)</p> <p>55% of Chinese international students in New Zealand were unhappy with opportunities to make friendships with locals and 71% wanted more local friends (Zhang and Brunton 2007)</p> <p>Asian international students experienced difficulties interacting with locals and making friends in the Western culture that emphasised individualism, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency rather than interdependence and relatedness (Yeh and Inose 2003)</p> <p>International students who left collectivist cultures consisting of close knit families felt considerable loss (Lee, Koeske and Sales 2004)</p> <p>Domestic students were uninterested in initiating friendships with international students making it more difficult to form friendships (Ward et al 2001)</p> <p>Taiwanese international students' personality traits, knowledge of the U.S., attitude about making friends with Americans and Taiwanese, proficiency in English, and social environmental context predicted the likelihood of the students forming friends with Americans (Ying, 2002).</p>
<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>International students from Asia, Africa, India, Latin America and the Middle East reported perceived discrimination compared to domestic or European students (Smith and Khawaja 2011)</p> <p>International Students reported discrimination including feelings of inferiority, direct verbal insults, discrimination when seeking employment, and physical attacks such as objects thrown at them (Lee and Rice 2007).</p> <p>Experiences of discrimination could impact negatively on international students' adaptation and have been linked with poor psychological well-being and depression (Wei et al 2007) homesickness (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007) and students are discouraged to make friends with locals (Mori 2000)</p>
<p><b>Psychological Factors</b>  Anxiety</p>	<p>Asian students might cope with acculturative stress by suppressing their emotions which might lead to anxiety (Wei et al 2008)</p> <p>Chinese students exhibited higher levels of anxiety and stress than Australian students (Redfern 2016)</p>
<p>Depression</p>	<p>International students' unmet expectations of the university's educational services lead to increased depression levels (Kennedy 1999)</p> <p>Experiences of discrimination were linked with poor psychological well-being and depression (Atri, Sharma and Cottrell 2006)</p> <p>Female students were more depressed than male students (Rosenthal, Russell and Thomson 2008)</p>
<p>Homesickness</p>	<p>Many Chinese students experienced loneliness and homesickness during their first term in the UK (Barron, Baum and Conway 2007)</p> <p>Homesickness was a significant factor relating to adjustment (de Araujo 2011)</p> <p>Male Indian international students experienced higher levels of homesickness than female Indian international students (Tochkov, Levine and Sanaka, 2010)</p> <p>For male Chinese students, homesickness led to academic procrastination (Lowinger, He, Lin, and Chang 2014)</p>

Loneliness	Two thirds of Australian international students experienced loneliness and/or isolation in the host country. Three types of loneliness were identified: personal loneliness due to the loss of contact with families, social loneliness, due to the loss of networks, and cultural loneliness, triggered by the absence of their preferred cultural and/or linguistic environment (Sawir et al 2008) Lack of an established social support system led to loneliness (Wei et al 2007)
Acculturation /Acculturative stress	Satisfaction with the social support network, social connectedness, geographic origin and English fluency could lead to less acculturative stress (Chavajay and Skowronek, 2008) Indian students had lower acculturative stress than Chinese students when adjusting to living in the US due to greater familiarity with the culture and language (Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero and Anderson 2012) Greater language proficiency led to less acculturative stress Poyrazli et al 2004 Expectations of the university environment and students' self-perceptions impacted on adjustment to a culture (Khawaja and Dempsey 2008) Strong social support and social ties had a favourable impact on acculturative stress (Smith and Khawaja 2011) Participating in leisure activities such as social events and sports resulted in less acculturative stress (Gómez, Urzúa, and Glass 2014) Students who had higher self-esteem, positive problem solving, and less maladaptive perfectionism, had better acculturative adjustment (Wang <i>et al</i> 2012) Dysfunctional coping with acculturative stress (denial, substance use, self-blame, venting, and behavioural disengagement) led to psychological distress which was displayed as worry and rumination over mistakes, and perfectionist tendencies (Khawaja and Dempsey (2008) Asian students used emotional suppression as a coping style when faced with acculturative stressors which increased vulnerability to depression and anxiety (Wei et al 2008)

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on Smith and Khawaja 2011



The predictors of international students' psychological and sociocultural adjustment outcomes are now considered. In Table 8.6 the author has summarised these predictors.

Table 8.6 Predictors of International students' psychosocial adjustment

<b>Predictors</b>
Age
Gender
Belonging/social support
Acculturation strategy
English language proficiency
Racial/perceived discrimination
Stress
Region/country of origin
Educational background
Self-efficacy
Personality traits
Perfectionism
Intercultural competence
Length of residence in host country
Level of university (4-year vs 2-year)
Academic intervention
Belonging
Social interaction/ support
Attitudes toward seeking help
Depression
Coping strategies
Anxiety
Homesickness

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The coping strategies of international students when faced with adjustment challenges are now considered. Table 8.7 outlines typical coping strategies used by these students.

Table 8.7 International students' Coping Strategies

<b>Coping Strategy</b>	<b>Commentary on strategy</b>
Reminders of home culture	Student's objects e.g. family photograph, music. University provide food and art on campus from student's country (Gebhard 2012)
Maintain a sense of humour	To overcome the risk of cross cultural interactions and recover from any mistakes made (Gebhard 2012)
Identifying an empathetic member of the host culture	To increase level of social support To ask for clarification or help eg on an assignment (Gebhard 2012)
Develop working relationships or friendships with University faculty and staff	To verify the accuracy of the information received (Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018)
Attend pre university experience course	To orientate and feel a sense of belonging (Keup and Petshauer 2011)
Share a room in accommodation	Roomates have a significant impact on belonging (Yao 2016)
Attend training on international student adjustment and acculturation	To gain an understanding of adjustment issues (Brunsting, Zachry and Takeuchi 2018)
Positive acculturative stress coping strategy	Accept the adjustment issue and positively reinterpret it (Ward, Leong, and Kennedy 1998)
Participate in extracurricular activities	Sports clubs and gyms, dance classes, bible study, yoga, martial arts, part time job etc (Hendrickson 2018)
Use counselling or health services	Take up is limited due to stigma, perception of lack of cultural knowledge amongst counsellors and student dropout rate is high (Ang and Liamputtong 2008)

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Universities often designed programmes and events to help international students cope with adjustment challenges. For example, at Western Michigan University in the USA, Asian international students were offered a support programme which aimed to increase their coping skills, provide culturally sensitive counselling, talk about acculturative stressors and normalise students' experiences. Students appreciated being able to share their experiences without being judged (Carr, Miki Koyama and Thiagarajan 2003).

### International Student Experiences, Satisfaction and Expectations

International student experiences and their satisfaction levels have become increasingly important to stakeholders in higher education institutions and to researchers around the world (Arambewela and Maringe 2012). This is due to

the marketisation of higher education (Foskett 2010) (see section 1.7), an increasingly competitive marketplace, the growth in students travelling overseas to study and universities needing to understand the diverse student population with different expectations to be met (Maringe and Carter 2007).

International student experiences have been given significant attention by researchers: for example Webb 2013, Sherry, Thomas and Chui 2010, Bird 2017, Lillyman and Bennett 2014, Coates and Dickinson 2012, Baroutian and Kensington-Miller 2016, Schartner 2015, Brown and Holloway 2008, Matheson and Sutcliffe 2017, Brown 2008, Evans, Nguyen, Richardson and Scott 2018, Barron, Baum and Conway 2009, Titrek, Erkiliç, Süre, Güvenç and Temür Pek 2016, Sam, Zain, Jamil, Souriyavongsa and Quyen 2013, Menzie and Baron 2014, Moores. and Popadiuk 2011, Menzies, Baron and Zutshi 2015, Prescott and Hellstén 2005, Monk 2012, Guilfoyle 2006, Kaur and Sidhu 2009, James 2013,. McMahon 2018, Kiley 2003, Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, Jing and Lifei 2017, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong 2006, Wang 2012, Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao and Chuang 2012, Crawford and Wang 2015, Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson 2010, Busher, Lewis and Comber 2016, Wu 2006, Straker 2016, Barron, Baum and Conway 2007, Montgomery 2010, Huang 2005, Huang 2012, Heggins. and Jackson 2003, Jones and Fleischer 2012, Lee 2010, Lee, Lee and Jang 2011, Su and Harrison 2016, Jancey and Burns 2013, Steele 2015, Albertyn, R.M., Kapp and Bitzer 2008, Evans, Nyuyen, Richardson and Scott 2018, Campbell and Li 2008, Menzies and Baron 2014, Smith Morey and Teece 2002, Perry 2012, Lillyman and Bennett 2014, Asmar 2005, Deem and Brehony, 2000, Sawir et al 2008, Trice and Yoo 2007, Coles and Swami 2012, Erichsen and Bolliger 2011, Gill 2007, Pereda, Airey and Bennett 2007, Warring 2010, Swami 2009.. However relatively few of these studies have looked at international student experiences in UK universities (Lillyman and Bennett 2014).

International student satisfaction was described as "the satisfaction of international students with their overall educational experience which reflects their prime goal of obtaining their educational qualification within the host country" (Arambewela and Hall, 2013, p. 973). It was often measured as an overall feeling or as satisfaction with elements of the transaction (Fornell 1996). Student satisfaction increased when the university provided a high-quality service (Russell 2005).

The satisfaction of international students was of growing importance to universities in a competitive environment so they could attract potential students, retain existing students and achieve a higher ranking in the league tables (Memon et al 2014, Ibrahim, Rahman and Yasin, 2014, Jalali, Islam and Ariffin 2011). Student satisfaction allowed the university to build loyalty and long-term relationships with their students and led to positive WOM recommendation (Temizer and Turkyilmaz 2012, Thurau, Langer and Hansen, 2001, Rowley 2003, Tapp, Hicks and Stone 2004).

Satisfaction amongst international postgraduate and undergraduate students has been researched by many scholars: Sam 2001, Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune 2011, Asare-Nuamah 2017, Beloucif, Mehafdi and Komey 2018, Arambewela and Hall 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair 2004, Lapina, Roga and Mürsepp 2016, Perez-Encinas and Ammigan 2016, Mak, Bodycott and Ramburuth 2015, Chong 2015, Padlee and Reimers 2015, Wang and Tseng. 2011, Seng 2013, Shahijan, Rezaei and Amin 2016, Alzamel 2014, Finn and Darmody 2017, Yasin and Bélanger 2015, Memon, Salleh, Rosli Baharom and Harun 2014, Yu and Wright 2016, Paswan and Ganesh 2009, Korobova and Starobin 2015, Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair and Ragavan 2016, Mavondo, Tsarenko and Gabbott 2004, Gao 2012, Muijs and Bokhove 2017, Yeh, and Inose 2003, Asgari and Borzooei 2014, Mustaffa, Bing, Rahman and Wahid 2016, Huili and Jing 2012, Monioukas, Stavrinoudis and Angelis 2007, Mak, Bodycott and Ramburuth 2015, Russell 2005. However, there was limited research undertaken on the satisfaction of international postgraduate students from different countries after they had made the decision to choose a university (Arambewela and Hall 2006).

According to Arambewela and Hall (2013) international postgraduate student satisfaction was based on the experiences that the student had while at university, which was classified as their internal environment, and their experiences in the external environment outside the university. The external environment consisted of "the social and physical dimensions outside of the university campus in which a student spends a significant amount of their academic life, engaged in multiple actions with host community" (Arambewela and Hall, 2013, p. 974). The host community comprised local and international students and local community groups (Arambewela and Hall, 2013).

Arambewela and Hall (2006) also argued that levels of international postgraduate student satisfaction were impacted by the postgraduates' country of origin and their personal values (Arambewela and Hall 2011). They found that international postgraduate students' personal values became predictors of student satisfaction. For Indian students, self-efficacy values were more important whereas Thai and Indonesian students placed greater importance on hedonistic values. With regards to the individual values, Thai students thought that 'fun and enjoyment in life' was the most important value and Indonesian students valued 'security'. Chinese students placed more importance on values of 'to have self-respect' and 'to have security.'

Table 8.8 summarises the contributors to student satisfaction and the scholars who have proposed these elements of student satisfaction.

Table 8.8 Contributors to Student satisfaction

<b>Contributors to Student Satisfaction</b>	<b>Author proposing contributing factor</b>
<b>Internal university environment</b>	
<b>Quality of educational services provided</b> See Table 8.9 for details	Arambewela and Hall 2006, 2007, 2012, 2013, Mai 2005, Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair, 2006, Kuo and Ye 2009, Athiyaman 1997
<b>Quality and quantity of research supervision and feedback</b>	Memon et al 2014, Kleijn <i>et al</i> 2013, Todd, Bannister and Clegg 2004, Pyhalto, Stubb and Lonka 2009, Alam, Alam and Rasul 2013
<b>Reputation and image of the institution</b> Image and prestige internationally Image and prestige in host country Image and prestige in home country (Arambewela and Hall 2007)	Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair, 2006, Zhao 2012, Mai 2005, Kuo and Ye 2009, Arambewela and Hall 2006, 2007
<b>Marketability of degree after study</b>	Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair 2006
<b>External university environment</b>	
Social relationships in friendship groups, and in accommodation facilities	Gracia-Aracil, Gabaldon, Mora and Villa 2009, Sam 2009
Relationships with local community	Carroll and Ryan 2007
Spend time with students of the same country	Ward and Masgoret 2004
Accommodation facilities	Amole 2009
Lifestyle	Memon et al 2014, Arambewela and Hall 2007
Safety	Arambewela and Hall 2007
Transport	Carroll and Ryan 2007
Availability of jobs	Carroll and Ryan 2007
Food	Carroll and Ryan 2007
Weather	Beloucif, Mehafdi and Komey 2018
<b>Personal Values</b>	
<b>Self-efficacy:</b> Being well respected To have self respect To have self-fulfilment To have a sense of accomplishment To have a warm relationship with others To have a sense of belonging To have security	Arambewela and Hall 2011
<b>Hedonism:</b> To have fun and enjoyment in life To have excitement	Arambewela and Hall 2011

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The quality of educational services provided to students was a key determinant of satisfaction as shown in Table 8.9 (Mai 2005). There are many different measures of satisfaction with the quality of educational services as summarised

in Table 8.9. These measures have been discussed by scholars in research which spans the period 1997 to 2013 and are included in the 2019 National Student Survey (NSS) for undergraduate students and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) of 2019. Arambewela and Hall's (2006, 2007, 2012, 2013) research focused specifically on international postgraduate students' satisfaction in Australian and UK universities and Mai looked at UK and US postgraduate students in business schools. Athiyaman 1997 studied the satisfaction of both undergraduate and postgraduate students in an Australian university.

Table 8.9 Measures of Satisfaction with the Quality of Educational Services

Measures of Educational Services' Quality	National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures	Author proposing measures
<b>Teaching on the course</b>			Arambewela and Hall 2007, Arambewela and Hall 2006
Lecturers' expertise in their subject area			Mai 2005
Lecturers' awareness of current events			Mai 2005
Lecturers' clarity of information conveyed	1. Staff are good at explaining things.	Aa. Staff are good at explaining things.	Mai 2005, Athiyaman 1997, NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Lecturers' interest/ enthusiasm in subject matter	2. Staff have made the subject interesting.	Ab. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching	Mai 2005, NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Level and difficulty of subject content	3. The course is intellectually stimulating.	Ac. The course is intellectually stimulating	Athiyaman 1997, NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Challenging course / enhance academic ability	4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work.	Bc. My course has challenged me to produce my best work	NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Enhance academic ability		Ad. The course has enhanced my academic ability	
Students' participation in class			Mai 2005
Close working relationships with all students			Arambewela and Hall 2007
<b>Quality of Course</b>			
Design and delivery of course			Mai 2005
Useful learning materials		Ae. The learning materials provided on my course are useful	PTES 2019
Class sizes			Athiyaman 1997 Arambewela and Hall 2006
Appropriateness of workload of the degree programme		d. The workload on my course has been manageable	Athiyaman 1997, Mai 2005, PTES 2019



<b>Learning opportunities from Course</b>	<b>National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures</b>	<b>Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures</b>	<b>Author proposing measures</b>
Appropriate academic courses with completion times suited to student needs			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth.	5. My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth.		NSS 2019
Opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics.	6. My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics.		NSS 2019
Opportunities to apply what I have learnt.	7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt.		NSS 2019
Learning quality			Li 2005
<b>Assessment and feedback</b>			
Grading based on academic merit			Mai 2005
Clear marking criteria	8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.	Ca. The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance	NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Fair marking and assessment	9. Marking and assessment has been fair.	Cb. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair	NSS 2019
Feedback on work	10. Feedback on my work has been timely.	Cc. Feedback on my work has been prompt	NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2013, Buckley 2012, PTES 2019
Receipt of helpful comments/ feedback on work.	11. I have received helpful comments on my work.	Cd. Feedback on my work (written or oral) has been useful	NSS 2019
<b>Academic Support</b>			
Availability of staff for student consultation	12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.		Athiyaman 1997, NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2007 and 2006
Lecturers' willingness to provide assistance in academic related areas	13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.	Ag. I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course	Mai 2005, NSS 2019, PTES 2019

<b>Learning opportunities from Course contd.</b>	<b>National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures</b>	<b>Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures</b>	<b>Author proposing measures</b>
Availability of advice on study choices	14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course		NSS 2019
Sufficient contact time with staff		Bf. There is sufficient contact time (face to face and/or virtual/online) between staff and students to support effective learning	PTES 2019
<b>Dissertation/ Major Project</b>			
Understand requirements		9a. I understand the required standards for the dissertation / major project	PTES 2019
Support for planning		9b. I am happy with the support I received for planning my dissertation / major project (topic selection, project outline, literature search, etc)	PTES 2019
Supervisor skills and knowledge		9c. My supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my dissertation / major project	PTES 2019
Feedback on progress		9d. My supervisor provides helpful feedback on my progress	PTES 2019
<b>Organisation and Management</b>			
Well organised course	15. The course is well organised and running smoothly.	Ec. The course is well organised and is running smoothly	NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Efficient/ flexible timetable	16. The timetable works efficiently for me.	Ea. The timetable fits well with my other commitments	NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2006, PTES 2019
Effective communication of changes	17. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.	Eb. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively	NSS 2019, PTES 2019

<b>Organisation and Management contd.</b>	<b>National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures</b>	<b>Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures</b>	<b>Author proposing measures</b>
Appropriate guidance and support at start		Ed. I was given appropriate guidance and support when I started my course	PTES 2019
		Ee. I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run	PTES 2019
<b>Engagement</b>			
Encouraged to ask questions		Ba. I am encouraged to ask questions or make contributions in taught sessions (face to face and/or online)	PTES 2019
<b>Administrative staff</b>			
Administrative staff knowledge and competency			Mai 2005
Level of efficiency of the administrative staff			Mai 2005
Administrative staffs' willingness to provide assistance			Mai 2005
<b>Learning/ Other Resources</b>			
Quality and accessibility of IT facilities	18. The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well.	Fb. I have been able to access general IT resources (including physical and online) when I needed to c	Athiyaman 1997, Mai 2005, NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2007, Arambewela and Hall 2006, PTES 2019
Library services - Quality of accessibility of reference materials	19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well.	Fa. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs (including physical and online)	Athiyaman 1997, Mai 2015, NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2006, PTES 2019

<b>Learning/ Other Resources contd.</b>	<b>National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures</b>	<b>Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures</b>	<b>Author proposing measures</b>
Availability of course specific resources	20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to.	Fc. I have been able to access subject specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software) necessary for my studies	NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Awareness of access to support services		Fd. I am aware of how to access the support services at my institution (e.g. health, finance, careers, accommodation)	PTES 2019
Campus environment conducive for learning			Ibrahim <i>et al</i> 2014
Recreational facilities			Athiyaman 1997
Availability of study areas for students			Mai 2005
Availability of modern facilities			Arambewela and Hall 2007
Lecture venues			Arambewela and Hall 2012
Counselling services			Arambewela and Hall 2007
Social activities			Arambewela and Hall 2007
International orientation programs			Arambewela and Hall 2007
<b>Skills Development through course</b>			
Confidence in independent learning		Ga. As a result of the course I am more confident about independent learning	PTES 2019
Confidence to be innovative/ creative		Gb. My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during my course	PTES 2019

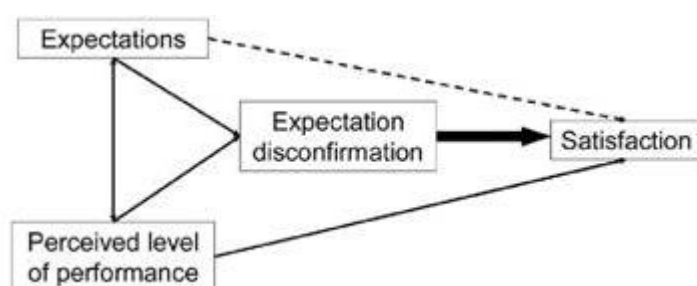
<b>Skills Development through course contd.</b>	<b>National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures</b>	<b>Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures</b>	<b>Author proposing measures</b>
Ability to communicate information to diverse audiences		Gd. My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my course	PTES 2019
Encouragement to think of career skills		Ge. I have been encouraged to think about what skills I need to develop for my career	PTES 2019
Feel better prepared for career		Gf. As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career	PTES 2019
Academic courses and training relevant to future career prospects			Arambewela and Hall 2006
<b>Learning community</b>			
Feeling part of community	21. I feel part of a community of staff and students.		NSS 2019
Opportunities to work with students as part of course	22. I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.	Bb. The course has created sufficient opportunities to discuss my work with other students (face to face and/or online)	NSS 2019, PTES 2019
<b>Student voice</b>			
Opportunities to provide feedback on my course.	23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course.	Be. I have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on my experience	NSS 2019, PTES 2019
Lecturers' response towards complaints/suggestions	24. Staff value students' views and opinions about the course.		Mai 2005, NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2006
Response to feedback	25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on.		NSS 2019, Arambewela and Hall 2006
Effective Student Union	26. The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests.		NSS 2019

<b>Economic Considerations</b>	<b>National Student Survey (NSS)(2019) Measures</b>	<b>Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey PTES 2019 Measures</b>	<b>Author proposing measures</b>
Casual jobs			Arambewela and Hall 2007
Cost of living			Arambewela and Hall 2007
Opportunities for migration			Arambewela and Hall 2007
<b>Accommodation</b>			
Reasonable cost of accommodation			Arambewela and Hall 2007
Good standard of accommodation			Arambewela and Hall 2007
<b>Other – SERVQUAL</b>			
Campus well located with easy access			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Efficient enrolment processing system			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Fees that offer good value for money			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Adequate information available to students via internet			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Adequate information available to students compared to other universities			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Efficient system to assist with student visas			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Competitive fees compared to other universities			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Appropriate academic courses with completion times suited student needs			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Adequate information and guidance through Australian embassies and other official agents			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Overseas agents and consultants who provide appropriate information and guidance			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Process to deal with complaints about inadequacy of services			Arambewela and Hall 2006
Recognition of prior learning			Arambewela and Hall 2012

The review of student satisfaction surveys from 1997 to 2013 in Tables 8.8 and 8.9 demonstrated how multi-faceted the concept of student satisfaction is, that it can be measured in many different ways and that it is dependent on the values of the student themselves. Many stakeholders were involved in the student experience: academics, administrative staff, students themselves and staff working in the library, careers, IT and other support services and satisfaction was impacted by the relationship developed with the university and its employees (Blythe 2013). Ramsden (2008) argued that the student experience was the responsibility of all these stakeholders. However, the vital role of university lecturers in the experiences and satisfaction of international students was also acknowledged, because these academics closely and continually interacted with their students (Tran 2008, Lacina 2002).

The relationship between international students' expectations and satisfaction are now explored. Oliver (1980) made the connection between expectations and satisfaction when he described satisfaction as meeting expectations. He demonstrated the link between expectations and satisfaction in his Expectancy-Disconfirmation model shown in Figure 8.1. This model has been widely used to measure customer satisfaction (Bolton et al, 1999, Parasuraman et al 1994).

Figure 8.1 Expectancy-Disconfirmation Model



Source Oliver 1997 p.120

Arambewela and Hall (2006) related Oliver's model to the expectations of international postgraduate students. Postgraduate students formed perceptions of the quality of the university's services in the pre purchase phase based on their prior expectations about the characteristics or benefits of the services (Arambewela and Maringe 2012). In the post purchase phase, after experiencing

the programme, their expectations became a comparative reference that led to a judgement on how satisfied they were. The gap or discrepancy between expectations and actual performance was known as 'expectation disconfirmation'. If the performance of the programme exceeded expectations then expectation disconfirmation was positive, whereas if performance was less than expected then it was negative. The higher the expectations of the international postgraduate the more likely that expectation disconfirmation would be negative as performance was worse than expected. The model shows that both postgraduate expectations and positive expectation disconfirmation led to postgraduates' satisfaction (Oliver 1980). International students' expectations were therefore a key determinant of their satisfaction (Beloucif, Mehafdi and Komey 2018).

Satisfaction levels were also determined by the postgraduate's expectations regarding the quality of competitive university services that they had not purchased. If postgraduate expectations regarding competitors' programmes were high then satisfaction with the current programme was lower (Herrmann, Huber and Braunstein 1999). This research indicates that universities should not only aim to maximise the satisfaction of their students and provide the optimal service for the money, but they should also avoid raising postgraduate expectations of the educational service above that which the university could deliver.

Studies have found that international students had lower perceptions of services provided by universities compared to domestic students so there was a mismatch between their expectations and their experiences (Sherry et al 2004, Khawaja and Dempsey 2008). When the expectations of international students were not met they adapted to the university experience more poorly (Khawaja and Dempsey 2008) and could suffer from depression (Kennedy 1999).

The medical research that has been carried out regarding the influence of information provision on experiences and satisfaction is now reviewed. Lawton (2005) found that patients who had access to medical specialists to provide them with the information they required had a more positive experience and increased satisfaction levels. Webster (1992) looked at the impact of providing pre session information to mental health patients and found that expectations of



the session were not altered if information had or had not been received. However, satisfaction levels were greater if the information was received. In McIntosh et al's (2003) study patients' expectations of low back pain information were not met and they were dissatisfied with the lack of information.

### Undergraduate Student Decision making models and Motivational Factors

There were three types of models which were related to undergraduate students' decision to enrol at a university; economic, status-attainment and combined models. Economic or econometric models were based on the idea that prospective students chose an institution based on its value to them by calculating the costs and benefits of attending and their individual preferences and tastes (Hossler et al 1999, Schwartz 1985). Decision making was seen as a rational process where students evaluated all the information available to them so as to minimise risk (Vrontis, Thrassou and Melanthiou 2007, Aydin 2013). The impact of tuition fees, financial support, cost of living, expected future earnings, peer aspirations and family background on the choice decision were studied (Cremonini, Westerheijden and Enders 2008).

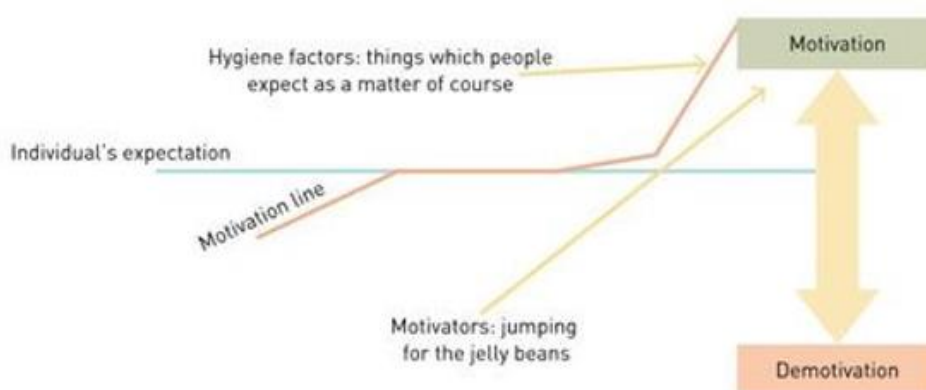
Status-attainment or sociological models related to students' aspirations to study at university and focused on the variables that impacted on the decision making process linked to the student's life. Students' behavioural variables, such as their academic performance and how leisure time was spent, were considered alongside background variables such as the social, educational and occupational status of parents to determine the educational aspirations of students (Sewell and Shah 1968).

Combined models combined both sociological aspects from the status attainment models and economic aspects and considered the factors that influenced the decision making process of students (Chapman 1984; Jackson 1982, Hanson and Litten 1982). The stages in these models are illustrated in Table 2.17.

Motivational factors are now considered. Herzberg (1966) distinguished between factors that were motivational (motivators) and the factors that were expected as a matter of course (hygiene factors). Figure 8.2 shows that hygiene factors

were those aspects of a product that consumers expected as basic features of any similar product and needed to be present to avoid the 'disease' of demotivation. Hygiene factors were dependent on the individual and their expectations (Blythe 2013).

Figure 8.2 Dual Factor Theory



Blythe 2013 p.40 Fig 2.6

Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott's (2014) model of postgraduates' decision making process included hygiene factors alongside motivators and so reflected the report of the Scottish Executive (2006) which drew on Herzberg (1966) and Maslow (1964)'s work. The Executive stated that hygiene factors and motivators needed to be present for adult learning to occur. Hygiene factors included affordability of the courses, access to time and space for learning, available childcare, confidence in learning and a positive attitude to learning. Motivators to learn comprised a benefit to the individual and their family, personal interest, the demands of an employer, maintenance of a learning identity and a positive experience of learning. Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott (2014) acknowledged that the hygiene factors for international students might be distinct and different from those of domestic students.

Appendix 3 Original Aim and ObjectivesTable 8.10 Original Aim and Objectives

<b>Aim</b>
To critically analyse information sources and types of information used by potential students when considering studying a UK postgraduate business qualification
<b>Objectives</b>
1. To examine the information searching behaviour of postgraduate students when researching a university course
2. To identify the information sources used by potential students when researching postgraduate study up to enrolment
3. To examine the types of information that postgraduate students search for up to enrolment
4. To analyse the impact of country of origin and motivation to study on the information sources used and the types of information sought
5. To draw conclusions on the sources of information used and the types of information required by potential postgraduate students when selecting a university

Source Author's Analysis 2017

## Appendix 4 Questionnaire: Postgraduate Students

HEP = Higher Education Provider

**Q1. Which institution and country are you studying a postgraduate qualification in? Please write in**

-----

**Q2. How are you studying your postgraduate qualification? Please tick one box**

Full time	
Part time	
Online/ Distance	

**Q3. What Postgraduate qualification are you studying? Please write in**

-----

**Q4. Please state the previous educational institution you attended before studying a postgraduate qualification and the country. Please write in**

-----

**Q5. How important were the following factors in motivating you to study for a postgraduate qualification? Please tick one box**

	Extremely un-important	Very un-important	Very un-important	Neither important or un-important	Important	Very Important	Extremely important
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
As a means of improving my career prospects							
To study further in a specific field of interest							
I wanted to gain/ update my skills to become more employable							
I wanted to change career							
My first degree was not specific enough for any particular job							
My ongoing career required further qualifications							
I would like to work in the education sector							
To acquire knowledge for my current job							
Personal satisfaction							
To enable progression to doctoral research							
It is a requirement of my current job							
To improve my English and obtain further qualifications							
Other <i>please specify</i>							

**Q6. How many higher education providers did you visit before selecting a specific Higher Education provider (HEP) for your postgraduate study?**

*Please write in number*

-----

**Q7. How many Higher education providers did you request information from prior to the enrolment decision in a postgraduate qualification?**

*Please write in number*

-----

**Q8. When did you complete the course that led to your highest qualification so far?**

(Month/Year) -----/-----

**Q9. Please indicate how important were the following sources of information when researching where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study? Please tick one box for each source of information**

	Not a source I considered	Extremely unimportant	Very unimportant	unimportant	Neither important or unimportant	important	Very important	Extremely important
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Teacher/tutor/lecturer at previous education								
An employer/ sponsor								
Current or previous students that studied at this HEP/ course								
Staff of the Higher Education Provider								
A friend(s)								
Family								
Education agent/ consultant								
Website of the Higher Education Provider								
Email from the Higher Education Provider								
Education UK website (www.educationuk.org)								
Course comparison website								
League tables or rankings								
Student chat rooms/ online forum/ website/ blog								
Online chat arranged by university								
Social networking site (Orkut, Bebo, Facebook etc)								
Campus open day/evening on site or visit								
Virtual Campus open day/evening								
Education postgraduate exhibition/ fair in UK								
Education postgraduate exhibition/ fair outside UK								
Printed directory								
A printed document/guide from the higher education provider								
Home country government advisory service								
British Council								
Another organisation representing the UK (please specify)								
Newspaper or magazine article								
Newspaper or magazine advertisement								
Online advertisement								
TV or radio advert								
Billboard								
Flyer/ Mail drop								
Other <i>please specify</i>								

**Q10. Please select the ONE source of information that was the most important when researching where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study? Please tick one**

Teacher/tutor/lecturer at previous	Campus open day/evening on	Course comparison website	
An employer/ sponsor	Virtual Campus open	League tables or rankings	
Current or previous students that	Education postgraduate	Student chat rooms/ online forum/	
Staff of the Higher Education	Education postgraduate	Online chat arranged by university	
A friend(s)	Printed directory	Social networking site (Orkut,	
Family	A printed document/guide from	Newspaper or magazine	
Education agent/ consultant	Home country government	Online advertisement	
Website of the Higher Education	British Council	TV or radio advert	
Email of the Higher Education	Another organisation	Billboard	
Education UK website	Newspaper or magazine article	Flyer/ Mail drop	

**Q11. Please indicate how important were the following types of information when deciding where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study? Please tick one box for each type of information**

	Not a source I considered	Extremely unimportant	Very unimportant	unimportant	Neither important or unimportant	Important	Very important	Extremely important
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
University's age								
University's reputation								
Department's reputation								
Content of specific courses								
Accreditation of the course								
Course as a learning experience								
Degree classification structure								
Entry requirements								
Cost of course								
Contact with the lecturers								
Class sizes								
% of graduates gaining employment within 1year								
Opportunities to find part time jobs								
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards								
Opportunities to undertake a placement								
Opportunities to study abroad								
Average earning of the graduates								
Development of business contacts when studying								
Companies recruiting the department's graduates								
Male/ female ratio within the university								
Accommodation provided by the university								
Existence of private flats nearby								
Computer facilities								
Library facilities								
Sports facilities								
University unions								
University campus								
Cost of living in the area								
Night life in the city								
Friendliness of people living in the area								
Size of the area								
Weather in the area								
Safety/security in campus								
Safety/security in the area								
Local sights and activities								
Shopping in the area								
Contact with counselling services / student support								
Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)								
Ranking in university league tables								
Other <i>please specify</i>								

**Q12. Please select the ONE type of information that was the most important when deciding where to study your postgraduate qualification and what you should study? Please tick one box**

University's age	Accommodation provided by the university	
University's reputation	Existence of private flats nearby	
Department's reputation	Computer facilities	
Content of specific courses	Library facilities	
Accreditation of the course	Sports facilities	
Course as a learning experience	University unions	
Degree classification structure	University campus	
Entry requirements	Cost of living in the area	
Cost of course	Night life in the city	
Contact with the lecturers	Friendliness of people living in the area	
Class sizes	Size of the area	
% of graduates gaining employment within 1year	Activities in the area	
Opportunities to find part time jobs	Weather in the area	
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards	Safety/security in campus	
Opportunities to undertake a placement	Safety/security in the area	
Opportunities to study abroad	Shopping in the area	
Average earning of the graduates	Contact with counselling services / student support	
Development of business contacts when studying	Contact with doctors throughout the university	
Companies recruiting the department's graduates	Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)	

**Q13. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements. Please tick one**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I was satisfied with the quality of information I received from the HEP before I started					
The HEP choice decision was important to me					
I had enough information about HEPs before making the choice decision					

**Q14. What gender are you? Tick one box**

Male	
Female	

**Q15. What is your age? Please write in -----**

**Q16. What is your country of origin? Please write in -----**

**Q17. What is your hometown? Please write in -----**

**Q18. What is your continent of origin? Please tick one box**

Africa	
America	
Asia	
Middle east	
Oceania	
Europe (excluding UK)	
UK	

## Appendix 5 Additional Quantitative Data from Scoping Study

Additional data is provided below on the country of origin of respondents (Table 8.11), their age (Table 8.12), country of study of current postgraduate qualification (Table 8.13), the university attended for current postgraduate qualification (Table 8.14) the institution previously studied in (Table 8.15), the most important source of information (Table 8.16), the relative importance of sources of information by continent of origin (Table 8.17) and the most important type of information (Table 8.18).

Table 8.11 Country of Origin of respondents

Country of Origin	Number of Students	% of Student	Country of Origin	Number of Students	% of Student
Scotland	267	47.8	Saudi Arabia	2	0.4
England, Wales	47	8.4	Belgium	2	0.4
Nigeria	21	3.8	Portugal	2	0.4
France	19	3.4	Croatia	2	0.4
Germany	18	3.2	Oman	2	0.4
USA	16	2.9	Lebanon	2	0.4
Ghana	15	2.7	Tunisia	2	0.4
Canada	12	2.2	Sudan	1	0.2
India	12	2.2	Kazakhstan	1	0.2
Ireland	12	2.2	Egypt	1	0.2
Finland	11	2	Cameroon	1	0.2
China	10	1.8	Romania	1	0.2
Hungary	10	1.8	Austria	1	0.2
Poland	9	1.6	Greece	1	0.2
Bulgaria	9	1.6	Switzerland	1	0.2
Spain	7	1.3	Estonia	1	0.2
Italy	6	1.1	Mexico	1	0.2
Bulgaria	6	1.1	Vietnam	1	0.2
Pakistan	5	0.9	Zimbabwe	1	0.2
Denmark	4	0.7	Uganda	1	0.2
Holland	4	0.7	Sweden	1	0.2
Malaysia	3	0.5	Algeria	1	0.2
Slovakia	3	0.5			
Lithuania	3	0.5	<b>Total</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>100</b>

Source Author's Analysis 2020



Table 8.12 Age of respondents

Age	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
20	2	0.4
21	12	2.2
22	75	13.5
23	92	16.6
24	94	17.0
25	78	14.1
26	44	7.9
27	34	6.1
28	22	4.0
29	14	2.5
30	19	3.4
31	12	2.2
32	4	0.7
33	7	1.3
34	4	0.7
35	6	1.1
36	6	1.1
37	2	0.4
39	1	0.2
40	3	0.5
42	1	0.2
43	3	0.5
44	2	0.4
45	4	0.7
46	1	0.2
47	2	0.4
48	1	0.2
50	1	0.2
51	4	0.7
52	1	0.2
53	2	0.4
55	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>100</b>

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 8.13 Country of study of Current Postgraduate Qualification

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage of Students</b>
Scotland	475	85.3
England, Wales, Ireland	30	5.4
Canada	12	2.2
USA	6	1.1
Hungary	6	1.1
Holland	4	0.7
Germany	4	0.7
Malaysia	3	0.5
Denmark	3	0.5
France	3	0.5
Bulgaria	3	0.5
Europe	2	0.4
Spain	2	0.4
Poland	1	0.2
Belgium	1	0.2
Australia	1	0.2
Italy	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 8.14 University attend for Current Postgraduate Qualification

University	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	University	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
RGU & Aberdeen	344	61.5	Cardiff	1	0.2
Edinburgh	34	6.1	Chicago	1	0.2
Napier	20	3.6	College Europe	1	0.2
Glasgow	17	3	Colorado	1	0.2
Heriot Watt	13	2.3	De Montfort	1	0.2
Strathclyde	10	1.8	Dublin	1	0.2
Budapest	6	1.1	Dublin CU	1	0.2
St Andrews	6	1.1	Exeter	1	0.2
Stirling	6	1.1	France	1	0.2
Dundee	5	0.9	Grenoble	1	0.2
Durham	5	0.9	Holloway	1	0.2
Glasgow Caledonian	5	0.9	Leiden NL	1	0.2
Ryerson	4	0.7	LSE	1	0.2
Abertay	3	0.5	Lyon	1	0.2
Leeds	3	0.5	Malaysia	1	0.2
Queens	3	0.5	MBWay	1	0.2
Strathclyde	3	0.5	Miami	1	0.2
Alabama	2	0.4	Neofit Rilski	1	0.2
Anhalt	2	0.4	Newcastle	1	0.2
Barcelona	2	0.4	Northumbria	1	0.2
Bradford	2	0.4	Po	1	0.2
Bulgaria	2	0.4	Queen	1	0.2
Cambridge	2	0.4	Queen Mary	1	0.2
Copenhagen	2	0.4	St Catherines	1	0.2
Mainz	2	0.4	Sunderland	1	0.2
Roskilde	2	0.4	Swansea	1	0.2
Rotterdam	2	0.4	Trento	1	0.2
Southampton	2	0.4	UCL	1	0.2
Taylors	2	0.4	UWS	1	0.2
Toronto	2	0.4	Virginia	1	0.2
Wilfrid Laurier	2	0.4	Warsaw	1	0.2
Manchester	2	0.4	Warwick	1	0.2
Amsterdam	1	0.2	Waterloo	1	0.2
Austria	1	0.2	Westminster	1	0.2
British Columbia	1	0.2	York	1	0.2
Bath	1	0.2	<b>Total</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Bedford	1	0.2			
Bristol	1	0.2			
Canberra	1	0.2			

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 8.15 Institution previously studied in

Institution	# Student	% of Student	Institution	# Student	% of Student	Institution	# Student	% of Student
RGU	169	30.2	Elsah	2	0.4	Brunel	1	0.2
Aberdeen	60	10.8	Faullker	2	0.4	Cape Coast	1	0.2
Glasgow	28	5	Imperial	2	0.4	Cardiff	1	0.2
Edinburgh	27	4.8	India	2	0.4	Central	1	0.2
Napier	18	3.2	Italy	2	0.4	Cologne	1	0.2
Strathclyde	16	2.9	Lagos	2	0.4	Colorado	1	0.2
Herriot Watt	15	2.7	Leiden	2	0.4	Copenhagen BA	1	0.2
Dundee	9	1.6	Liverpool	2	0.4	Croatia	1	0.2
China	6	1.1	London Met	2	0.4	DCU	1	0.2
Ghana	6	1.1	Mainz	2	0.4	Dresden	1	0.2
Stirling	6	1.1	Malaysia	2	0.4	Dschang	1	0.2
Budapest	5	0.9	Nigeria	2	0.4	Edinburgh	1	0.2
Glasgow Cale	5	0.9	Ontario	2	0.4	Exeter	1	0.2
Newcastle	5	0.9	Orkney	2	0.4	Falmouth	1	0.2
Copenhagen	4	0.7	Paris	2	0.4	Geology	1	0.2
Queen Margarets	4	0.7	Sligo	2	0.4	Geology FR	1	0.2
St Andrews	4	0.7	SRM	2	0.4	Greece	1	0.2
Toronto	4	0.7	Vienna	2	0.4	Guelph	1	0.2
UHI	4	0.7	Abdulaziz SA	1	0.2	Hanze	1	0.2
Bratislava	3	0.5	Acure	1	0.2	Helsinki	1	0.2
Cork	3	0.5	Alaska	1	0.2	Ho Chi Minh	1	0.2
Leeds	3	0.5	Algeria	1	0.2	Holloway	1	0.2
OU	3	0.5	Amsterdam	1	0.2	Insead	1	0.2
Pakistan	3	0.5	Applied Science	1	0.2	ISCTE	1	0.2
Southampton	3	0.5	Bahria	1	0.2	IUC	1	0.2
Taylors	3	0.5	BBA EDHEC	1	0.2	Jordanstown	1	0.2
Toulouse	3	0.5	Bedford	1	0.2	Khartoum	1	0.2
Bulgaria	2	0.4	Beijing	1	0.2	Krakov	1	0.2
Cape coast	2	0.4	Bochim	1	0.2	Laurea	1	0.2
Chicago	2	0.4	Bristol	1	0.2	Leicester	1	0.2
Dublin	2	0.4	British Columbia	1	0.2	Leipzig	1	0.2

Table 8.15 Institution previously studied in contd.

Institution	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Institution	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
LIUC	1	0.2	Strasbourg	1	0.2
Lodz	1	0.2	Swansea	1	0.2
London Met	1	0.2	Tallinn	1	0.2
Loughborough	1	0.2	Teesside	1	0.2
Louvain	1	0.2	UCL	1	0.2
Lueneburg	1	0.2	Uganda	1	0.2
Madrid	1	0.2	Ulster	1	0.2
Manchester	1	0.2	UWC	1	0.2
Mannheim	1	0.2	UWS	1	0.2
Montpelier	1	0.2	Vaasa	1	0.2
Nantes	1	0.2	Vanderbilt	1	0.2
Navarra	1	0.2	Verona	1	0.2
Neu Ulm	1	0.2	Vilnius	1	0.2
Nicosia	1	0.2	Virginia	1	0.2
Notre Dame	1	0.2	W Laurier	1	0.2
NUU	1	0.2	Warsaw	1	0.2
Obuda	1	0.2	York	1	0.2
Plymouth	1	0.2	Zimbabwe	1	0.2
Port Harcourt	1	0.2	<b>Total</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Portsmouth	1	0.2			
Preston	1	0.2			
Principia	1	0.2			
Queens	1	0.2			
Russia	1	0.2			
Ryerson	1	0.2			
Southampton Solent	1	0.2			
SRU	1	0.2			
Stanford	1	0.2			
Stirling	1	0.2			
Stockholm	1	0.2			

Source Author's Analysis 2020

Table 8.16 Overall most important Source of Information

To ascertain the most important sources of information to postgraduates when deciding on a postgraduate course and university to enrol in, respondents were given a list of sources of information and asked to select the one source of information that was the most important to them when researching where to study their postgraduate qualification and what they should study.

Information source	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Rank
Website of the Higher Education Provider	118	21.3	1
Teacher/tutor/lecturer at previous education institution	75	13.5	2
League tables or rankings	52	9.4	3
Campus open day/evening on site or visit	45	8.1	4
Current or previous students that studies at this HEP/course	42	7.6	5
An employer/sponsor	39	7	6
Staff of the Higher Education Provider	38	6.8	7
Family	31	5.6	8
A friend(s)	23	4.1	9
Education agent/consultant	18	3.2	10
Course comparison website	18	3.2	10
A printed document/guide from the higher education provider	11	2	12
Student chat rooms/online forum/website/blog	7	1.3	13
Social networking site (Orkut, Bebo, Facebook etc)	7	1.3	13
Education postgraduate exhibition/fair outside UK	7	1.3	13
Email of the Higher Education Provider	5	0.9	16
Education UK website (www.educationuk.org)	4	0.7	17
Home country government advisory service	4	0.7	17
Education postgraduate exhibition/fair in UK	3	0.5	19
Online chat arranged by university	2	0.4	20
Virtual Campus open day/evening	2	0.4	20
British council	2	0.4	20
Printed directory	1	0.2	23
Newspaper or magazine article	1	0.2	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source Author's Analysis 2020

The most important sources of information for all respondents are highlighted in grey in Table 8.16: HEP website (21.3%), lecturer at previous institution

(13.5%), rankings (9.4%), campus open day or visit (8.1%) and current or previous students (7.6%). 8 of the top 10 sources were WOM sources. Agents ranked 10<sup>th</sup> and social networking sites such as Facebook were ranked 13<sup>th</sup>.

Respondents were given a list of sources of information and asked to indicate how important the sources were when researching where to study a postgraduate qualification and what they should study. A Likert scale was used from 'not a source I considered' (n0) to 'extremely important' (n7) to ascertain the relative importance of sources of information for international postgraduates. Mean analysis was undertaken by continent of origin and the higher the score the more important the source as shown in the shading in Table 8.17.

Table 8.17 Relative Importance of Sources of Information by Continent of Origin

Mean	UK	Europe	America	Asia	M East	Africa	Overall
Teacher/tutor/lecturer at your previous education institution	4.13	3.53	4.73	4.40	6.60	3.53	4.82
Employer/sponsor	3.12	2.73	3.52	4.29	2.20	3.37	3.35
Current or previous students that studied at this HEP/course	4.06	4.05	4.90	4.51	5.60	4.13	4.79
Staff of the Higher Education Provider	4.42	4.02	4.97	4.60	3.40	3.78	4.19
A friend(s)	3.98	3.88	3.20	4.49	5.00	3.50	4.05
Family	4.18	3.94	4.03	4.74	3.60	3.80	4.04
Education agent/consultant	2.46	2.45	3.40	3.60	3.00	3.11	3.28
Website of the Higher Education Provider	5.11	5.40	4.97	4.89	5.80	5.30	5.24
Emails from the Higher Education Provider	3.73	3.74	3.97	4.20	5.60	3.28	4.26
Education UK website (www.educationuk.org)	2.50	2.28	1.43	3.77	4.60	2.74	3.14
Course comparison websites	3.51	4.08	2.83	4.47	5.00	3.70	4
League tables or rankings	4.36	5.07	4.40	4.69	6.20	4.72	5
Student chat rooms/forums/websites/blogs	2.42	2.88	2.23	4.06	2.20	2.91	2.85
Online chats arranged by the university	1.86	2.03	1.77	3.12	1.00	2.61	2.13
Social networking sites (Orkut, Bebo,FB etc)	2.98	2.97	4.03	3.94	4.20	2.70	3.72
Campus open days/evenings	4.04	3.10	4.20	4.03	3.20	2.87	3.58
Virtual campus open days/evenings	2.23	2.18	2.73	3.63	4.40	2.61	3.34
Education PG exhibitions/fairs in the UK	2.75	1.68	1.80	2.74	2.40	2.39	2.33
Education postgraduate exhibitions/fairs outside the UK	1.35	1.89	1.52	2.91	2.00	3.09	2.38
Printed directory	2.56	2.47	1.72	3.53	3.20	2.91	2.84
Printed documents/guides from the higher education provider	3.42	2.63	3.48	3.88	4.00	2.91	3.57
Home country Government advisory service	1.34	1.28	2.70	2.89	2.60	2.80	2.75
British council	1.20	.81	.87	2.69	2.20	2.76	2.13
Other Organisations representing the UK	.90	.63	.55	2.91	.80	1.89	1.54
Newspapers or magazine articles	1.94	1.72	2.10	3.11	4.20	1.89	2.83
Newspapers or magazine advertisements	1.83	1.48	1.63	3.11	3.80	2.09	2.66
Online advertisement	2.54	2.31	3.67	3.21	3.80	2.65	3.33
TV or radio advert	1.79	1.09	1.80	2.57	3.20	1.85	2.35
Billboard	1.33	1.06	1.60	2.17	2.20	1.76	1.93
Flyers/mail drops	1.66	1.13	1.97	2.54	1.40	2.02	1.98



The most important sources for all international postgraduates, as shown in the final column, were the website (mean of 5.24), rankings (5), lecturers in a previous institution (4.82), current or previous students (4.79), email (4.26), staff of the HEP (4.19), family (4.04) and course comparison websites (4).

For American postgraduates the most important sources were the website (mean of 4.97) and staff of the HEP (4.73) followed by WOM from students (4.9). Asian students also rated the website (4.89) as the most important source but ranked their family (4.74), rankings (4.69) and staff of the HEP (4.6) in second to fourth place.

Respondents were given a list of types of information and asked to select the one type of information that was the most important to them when deciding where to study their postgraduate qualification and what to study, as shown in Table 8.18.

The most important types of information are highlighted in grey in Table 8.18 in order of importance are: university's reputation, content of specific courses, department's reputation, accreditation of the course, percentage of graduates gaining employment within one year and cost of the course.

Table 8.18 Most important type of information

Type of Information	# Students	% Students
University's Reputation	115	20.7
Content of specific courses	92	16.5
Department's reputation	56	10.1
Accreditation of the course	53	9.5
% of graduates gaining employment within 1 year	53	9.5
Cost of course	40	7.2
Course as a learning experience	23	4.1
Companies recruiting the department's graduates	14	2.5
Average earning of the graduates	13	2.3
Entry Requirements	11	2
Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)	11	2
Contact with the lecturers	8	1.4
University campus	8	1.4
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards	7	1.3
Opportunities to undertake a placement	7	1.3
Degree classification structure	6	1.1
Safety/security in the area	6	1.1
Cost of living in the area	5	0.9
Development of business contacts when studying	4	0.7
Class sizes	3	0.5
Opportunities to study abroad	3	0.5
Night life in the city	3	0.5
Opportunities to find part time jobs	2	0.4
Accommodation provided by the university	2	0.4
Computer facilities	2	0.4
Friendliness of people living in the area	2	0.4
University's Age	1	0.2
Library facilities	1	0.2
University unions	1	0.2
Local sights and activities	1	0.2
Contact with counselling services/student support	1	0.2
Contact with doctors throughout the university	1	0.2
Ranking in University League Tables	1	0.2

Source Author's Analysis 2020

## Appendix 6 Missing Information from the Quantitative Scoping Study

Table 8.19 shows the information that the researcher felt was absent from the quantitative research undertaken. The compilation of this table led to the decision to conduct qualitative research to gain this missing information.

Table 8.19 Limitations of the Quantitative Research Undertaken

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Missing Information</b>
Sources of information used by postgraduate students	Large number of important sources of information and relative importance of different sources not clear
	Alternative sources not specified under 'other'
	Missing sources not researched
	Sources used at different stages of the Decision Making Process not clear – need recognition, information search stage, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, post purchase
	Sources of information that respondents were emotionally attached to and so had more significant was not clear
	Other sources of WOM communication and recommendation and their significance were not researched
	Factors (nationality, gender, age, undergraduate qualification, graduation date, family background) impacting on sources of information required not researched
Types of information used by postgraduate students	Large number of important types of information and relative importance of different types not clear
	Alternative types not specified under 'other'
	Missing types not researched
	Types used at different stages of the Decision Making Process not clear – need recognition, information search stage, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, post purchase
	Reputation a key factor – what is the perception of the meaning of reputation when considering a university
	Factors (nationality, gender, age, undergraduate qualification, graduation date, family background) impacting on types of information required not researched
Decision Making Process	Perception of the degree of difficulty of the process and the rationality of the approach not researched
	Step wise vs cyclical process not researched
	Factors (nationality, gender, age, undergraduate qualification, graduation date, family background) impacting on decision making process not researched

Topic	Missing Information
Postgraduates contribution to information pool	How current students and alumni informed the decisions of potential applicants not researched
Decision Making Unit	Members of DMU contributing to decision and information they required not researched
Questionnaire questions	Likert scales in questions 9 and 11 in Table 13 were interpreted differently - Some respondents classified sources that they did not use as 'unimportant' sources with a value of 3 when others classified unused sources as 'not a source I considered' with a value of 0.
	The large number of options meant that automatic response syndrome occurred with some respondents choosing a few options at the start which they rated with different values and then repeatedly ticked the unimportant or 'not considered' boxes box for the remainder of the options

Source Author's Analysis 2020

## Appendix 7 Interview Guide 1 for International Postgraduate Students: Decision making process

My name is Carolyn and I am conducting research for my PhD on the role of information in the decision making cycle of postgraduate students.

I am interested in your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers so just be honest

With your permission, I'd like to record this group to ensure I note all the information and your suggestions – which will all be reported anonymously and kept confidential

Before I start, can I run through this consent form to make sure you are happy with what's going to happen today.

### **Profile of respondents**

Gender:

What is your age?

What is your country of origin?

Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?

What course did you study?

How long was the course?

What date did you finish the course?

So what did you do after that?

What Masters are you currently studying?

What is the educational background of your family?

Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?

What are you planning to do when you leave university?

### Motivation

**Can you talk me through the reason why you made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification.**

**I would like you to talk to you about the decision making process that you went through which led to you studying a postgraduate qualification at the University.**

### Need Recognition

**Can you talk me through the point at which you first started thinking about studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)

When was this (date)?

What triggered you thinking about studying a postgraduate qualification? sources seen, influencers and their significance

Was there any significant information that triggered you thinking about studying a postgraduate qualification?

Start of Decision Making Process

**Can you talk me through the time that you made the decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)

When did you make the decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification?

Why did you make the decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification?  
*motivation*

Was anyone else involved in your initial decision – family, tutors etc?

How did these people influence how you thought and behaved?

What factors impacted on your decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification?

What were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?

**Can you talk me through what you did next once you had decided to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)

What decision did you need to make and what did you do to make that decision?

*Information search*

What information did you need to help you make that decision?

Where did you search for information?

How did you search for information?

How long did you search for information?

Which sources of information did you look at?

What were the relative importance of the sources? significant sources of information

Were there any people who you talked to and who influenced you?

What information did you find out from each source/ person?

How did these people influence how you thought and behaved?

Did you find all the information you needed – was information missing – did you manage to find that information?

What other factors influenced you as you searched for information? - hygiene factors, aspects in your life, - educational background of parents, educational background of siblings, family members experiences of studying abroad, finance, connections in foreign market, cultural norms, experience of travel etc

Did you pass on the information you found to others? how did you do this? what information did you pass on? how did it make you feel?

How did you feel while you were searching for information?

What were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?

*DMU*

Was anyone else involved with helping you make the decision?

How were they involved?

What information did they require – where did they find this information? significant sources

*Evaluation of Alternatives*

How did you rank and evaluate the alternative decision choices?

How long did it take you to make this decision?

What other factors influenced you as you evaluated the alternatives?

**Can you talk me through the next step that you took on the way to applying to study at a university. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

*Repeat the questions above until all decisions have been covered - whether to study abroad, which country to study in, which university to attend and which course to study. Explore fully the iterative nature of the decision making process and its stages (information search, evaluation, decision) until the point where they applied to a university. Explore which decisions were reconsidered and how this happened*

Prompt list for stages above

**When you made the decision to study abroad....**

*Evaluation of alternatives*

What factors were important to you in deciding to study abroad?

How did you rank and evaluate these factors?

*Decision*

Why did you decide to study abroad?

What factors influenced you as you decided to study abroad?

**When you made the decision to choose a country...**

*Information search*

Which countries did you research?

How long did you spend researching countries?

*Evaluation of alternatives*

What factors were important to you in choosing a country?

How did you rank and evaluate these factors?

How many countries did you evaluate? which ones were they?

What factors influenced you as you evaluated countries?

*Decision*

Why did you choose to study in the UK?

What factors influenced you as you decided to study in the UK?

**When you made the decision to choose a university.....***Information search*

Which universities (in which countries) did you decide to research ?

How many universities did you research? which were these universities?

How many universities did you contact to ask for further information? which were these universities?

How long did you spend researching universities?

Did your friends applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in that you did not have?

*Evaluation of alternatives*

What factors were important to you in choosing a university?

How did you rank and evaluate these factors?

How many universities did you evaluate? which ones were they?

What factors influenced you as you evaluated universities?

*Decision*

Why did you decide to study at the University?

What factors influenced you as you decided to study at the University?

**When you made the decision to choose a course ...***Information search*

Which courses at which universities (in which countries) did you decide to research?

How many universities did you contact to ask for further information on their courses? which universities were these?

Did your friends, applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in that you did not have?

How long did you spend researching courses?

*Evaluation*

What factors were important to you in choosing a course?

How did you rank and evaluate these factors?

How many courses did you evaluate? which ones were they?

What factors influenced you as you evaluated courses?

*Decision*



Why did you decide to study this course?

What factors influenced you as you decided on a course to study?

**Can you talk me through the university application process. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)

When did you apply to the university?

Did you apply for just the one university course?

Did you apply to other universities/ courses? which ones? when did you do this?

How satisfied were you with the application process at the university? elsewhere?

Did you have all the information from the university(s) you needed at this point to fill out the application? If not what additional information did you need? sources/ people?

How satisfied were you with the information received from the university?

Did your friends applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in that you did not have?

Was anyone else involved in the application process with you – how satisfied were they with the information received from the university – did they need additional information?

What factors influenced you as you applied to university(s)?

Could the university have done anything differently during the application process?

What were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?

**Can you talk me through the time when you made the final decision to study at the University. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)

*if student was accepted to more than one university/course explore how they made the final decision as to which university/ course they were going to choose*

When did you make the final decision to study at the university?

What factors influenced you as you made the final decision to study at the University E?

Was anyone else involved in the final decision?

What happened after you made the final decision to apply to the university?

When did you pay for the course? who is financing your course?

Did you have all the information from the university you needed when you paid for the course? did you search for information elsewhere – sources/ people?

When did you enrol on the course?

Was anyone else involved in the payment and enrolment – what information did they require – where did they find this information?

What influencers were there? How did the influencers influence how you thought and behaved?

What factors influenced you as you paid and enrolled at the university?

How satisfied were you with the information received from the university?

How satisfied were you with the payment process?

How satisfied were you with the enrolment process?

What were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?

Could the university have done anything differently?

Do you have all the information from the university you need at this stage?

When do you start at the university?

**Can you talk me through the information that you have provided to other students who are considering applying to universities in the UK. Please describe the experience of providing the information to them and how you felt at the time.**

Would you be comfortable providing testimonials for your university? If so what would you highlight?

What do you think prospective students need to know?

Would you be happy to provide information to others who have questions in the future?

As future alumni to what extent do you see yourself as a protector of the university's reputation in the world?

**Can you reflect back on the whole decision making process. Please describe that whole experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

*Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)*

Given your experiences of researching countries/universities/courses, what advice would you give other students about searching for information? what advice would you give them about the information they should obtain? sources they should use?

Given your experiences of evaluating countries/universities/courses, what advice would you give other students about evaluation?

Have you provided recommendations to others about the decision making process when choosing to study abroad, to study in a particular country, to study at a particular university, to study a particular course? How did this make you feel?

Are you satisfied with the decisions you made to study abroad? go to the UK? the university? study your course?

What have you learnt from your decision making experiences? How has this influenced your future decisions?

How would you make decisions differently in the future?

What decisions would you make differently?

What do you wish that you had known before you started on the decision making process?

**Prompt List****Sources of Information**

Teacher/tutor/lecturer at previous education	Campus open day/evening on site or visit
An employer/ sponsor	Virtual Campus open day/evening
Current or previous students that studied at this	Education PG exhibition/ fair in UK
Staff of the Higher Education Provider	Education PG exhibition/ fair outside UK
A friend(s)	Printed directory
Family	A printed document/guide from HEP
Education agent/ consultant	Home country government advisory service
Website of the Higher Education Provider	British Council
Email of the Higher Education Provider	Another organisation representing the UK
Education UK website (www.educationuk.org)	Newspaper or magazine article
Course comparison website	Newspaper or magazine advertisement
League tables or rankings	Online advertisement
Student chat rooms/ online forum/ website/ blog	TV or radio advert
Online chat arranged by university	Billboard
Social networking site (Orkut, Bebo, Facebook	Flyer/ Mail drop

**Types of Information**

University's age	Accommodation provided by the Uni
University's reputation	Existence of private flats nearby
Department's reputation	Computer facilities
Content of specific courses	Library facilities
Accreditation of the course	Sports facilities
Course as a learning experience	University unions
Degree classification structure	University campus
Entry requirements	Cost of living in the area
Cost of course	Night life in the city
Contact with the lecturers	Friendliness of people living in the area
Class sizes	Size of the area
% of graduates gaining employment within 1year	Activities in the area
Opportunities to find part time jobs	Weather in the area
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards	Safety/security in campus
Opportunities to undertake a placement	Safety/security in the area
Opportunities to study abroad	Shopping in the area
Average earning of the graduates	Contact with counselling services/support
Development of business contacts when studying	Contact with doctors throughout the university
Companies recruiting the department graduates	Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)

## Appendix 8 Interview Guide 2 for International Postgraduate Students: Post purchase evaluation stage semesters 1, 2 and 3

My name is Carolyn and I am conducting research for my PhD on the role of information in the decision making cycle of postgraduate students.

I am interested in your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers so just be honest.

With your permission, I'd like to record this group to ensure I note all the information and your suggestions – which will all be reported anonymously and kept confidential.

Before I start, can I run through this consent form to make sure you are happy with what's going to happen today.

### **Profile of respondents**

Gender:

What is your age?

What is your country of origin?

Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?

What course did you study?

How long was the course?

What date did you finish the course?

So what did you do after that?

What Masters are you currently studying?

What is the educational background of your family?

Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?

### **Motivation**

**Can you talk me through the reason why you made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

### **Pre arrival Information**

**Can you please talk me through the time before you came to this university and you looked for information that you needed. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

### **Arrival in the country and accommodation information**

**Can you please talk me through the point at which you first arrived in the country and the accommodation and looked for information that you needed. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

### **Arrival in the university information**

**Can you please talk me through the point at which you first arrived at the university on day one and looked for information that you needed. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

**During semesters information**

**Can you please describe your experiences to me about looking for information during your time so far or receiving information and how you felt at the time.**

**Can you please describe to me a situation where you were in desperate need for information.**

*Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)*

What information did you require? \* (see list below)

Where did you get this information from?

Did you feel that you had all the information that you needed? What was missing?

Did you have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Did you manage to answer these questions?

Were there other people who had been involved in the decision to come to this university who wanted information about any aspect of you being at the university? Did they find the information they needed? Did they have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Where did they find this information? How did they feel?

Do you feel that the information you received before coming here painted a true picture of what life would be like in the University city and at the university?

Do you feel that there was any information that you had received that you perceived to be incorrect?

What do you wish that you had known?

Was the information you needed easy to find? Could this be improved?

Overall how satisfied were you with the sources of information used by the university? How could the university improve the media channels that it uses?

What would you advise the university to do concerning the information they provide to students after they arrive? Where should they provide this information?

What advice would you give other students about the university/ courses? What missing information would you give them? How would you give them this information - sources/ people?

Could the university have done anything differently in terms of information provision?

**Pool of information – current students**

**Did you pass on the information you found to others to help during your time so far? How did you do this? What information did you pass on? How did this make you feel?**

**Did your friends on other courses have additional information that they found helpful and you did not have the information? Where was this information provided? Would you have liked that information?**

**Overall experience, expectations, satisfaction**

**Can you please describe your overall experience of being a student at this university during your time so far and how you have felt.**

Prompted questions

Where were you? What was life like? How did the experience go?

What have you learnt from your experiences?

What factors have most influenced your experiences?

Which people have most influenced you?

**Can you talk me through any of your student experience that was better than you expected.**

**Can you talk me through any of your student experience that has fallen short of expectations.**

Prompted questions

Was there anything unexpected that happened that took you by surprise?

Could the university improve the information it provides to prospective students/ existing students so that expectations are met?

How has your experience of studying at the university matched the expectations of those involved in the decision to undertake the course? How has it not matched their expectations? How do you think that they feel?

**Overall experience and satisfaction**

**Can you please describe how satisfied you have been as a student at this university during your time so far.**

Prompted questions

Are you satisfied with your decision to come to the UK? Your university? Study your course?

Do you have any regrets about what you would have done differently if you had had more information?

**Impact of experiences on decision making**

**Can you please describe how your experiences have influenced your future decisions in anyway.**

Prompted questions

How have your experiences influenced your decisions in the future?

How would you make decisions differently in the future?

What would you like to tell others who will make decisions?

What decisions would you make differently?

**Pool of information – future students**

**Can you talk me through the information that you have provided to other students who are considering applying to universities in the UK. Please describe the experience of providing the information to them and how you felt at the time.**

Prompted questions

Would you be comfortable providing testimonials for your university? If so what would you highlight that the think prospective students need to know?

Would you be happy to provide information to others who have questions in the future?

As future alumni to what extent do you see yourself as a protector of the university's reputation in the world?

**Prompt List Experiences**

- arriving in the country
- accommodation
- arriving at the university
- starting to study at the university
- attending lectures, tutorials, workshops
- amount of time needed for study
- assessments
- lecturers
- support staff
- facilities at the university (sport, library, study support, catering etc)
- life outside study
- living in the University city
- getting around the University city
- working in the University city
- extra curricular activities
- friendship groups
- having a social life

**Prompt List Information needs****Pre arrival**

University's age	Accommodation provided by the university
University's reputation	Existence of private flats nearby
Department's reputation	Computer facilities
Content of specific courses	Library facilities
Accreditation of the course	Sports facilities
Course as a learning experience	University unions
Degree classification structure	University campus
Entry requirements	Cost of living in the area
Cost of course	Night life in the city
Contact with the lecturers	Friendliness of people living in the area
Class sizes	Size of the area
% of graduates gaining employment within 1 year	Activities in the area
Opportunities to find part time jobs	Weather in the area
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards	Safety/security in campus
Opportunities to undertake a placement	Safety/security in the area
Opportunities to study abroad	Shopping in the area
Average earning of the graduates	Contact with counselling services / student
Development of business contacts when studying	Contact with doctors throughout the university
Companies recruiting the department's	Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)

**Arrival in the country and the accommodation**

- to arrive in the country, visa regulations etc
- to arrive at your accommodation, about the accommodation
- to live in the University city – shop for food, clothes, household goods, take public transport etc
- to have a social life – safe areas to walk in, sightseeing, nightlife
- to find the university and get to the university (walk/ public transport)
- to work in the University city

**Arrival at the university on day 1**

- to get around the university, find the library, the food outlets, the gym, student help point etc
- timetable and where the rooms were
- facilities at the university (sport, library, study support, catering etc)

**Post arrival**

- course, individual modules, study schedule (lectures, tutorials)
- to get to know your classmates
- assessment, hand in date, marking criteria
- learning styles, what was expected in class
- academic regulations
- report writing
- plagiarism
- how to write a report
- how to search for information through the library
- referencing
- IT systems – Moodle, RefWorks, NVivo, SPSS



### Appendix 9 Interview Guide 3 for International Respondents: Post purchase evaluation stage end of course

My name is Carolyn and I am conducting research for my PhD on the role of information in the decision making cycle of postgraduate students.

I am interested in your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers so just be honest.

With your permission, I'd like to record this group to ensure I note all the information and your suggestions – which will all be reported anonymously and kept confidential.

Before I start, can I run through this consent form to make sure you are happy with what's going to happen today.

#### **Profile of respondents**

Gender:

What is your age?

What is your country of origin?

Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?

What course did you study?

How long was the course?

What date did you finish the course?

So what did you do after that?

What Masters are you currently studying?

What is the educational background of your family?

Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?

#### **Motivation**

**Can you talk me through the reason why you made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.**

#### **Information seeking**

**Can you please describe your experiences to me about looking for information during your course and how you felt at the time.**

**Can you please describe your experiences to me about receiving information during your course and how you felt at the time.**

**Can you please describe to me a situation where you were in desperate need for information.**

Prompted questions (if material not covered under reporting of experience above)

What information did you require? \* (see list below)

Where did you get this information from?

Did you feel that you had all the information that you needed? What was missing?

Did you have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Did you manage to answer these questions?

Did you feel uncertain or uneasy about anything? Did this uncertainty or unease prompt you to look for information about the topic?

Were there other people who had been involved in the decision to come to this university who wanted information about any aspect of you being at the university? Did they find the information they needed? Did they have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Where did they find this information? How did they feel?

Do you feel that the information you received before coming here painted a true picture of what life would be like in the University city and at the university?

Do you feel that there was any information that you had received that you perceived to be incorrect?

What do you wish that you had known?

Was the information you needed easy to find? Could this be improved?

Overall how satisfied were you with the sources of information used by the university? How could the university improve the media channels that it uses?

What would you advise the university to do concerning the information they provide to students after they arrive? Where should they provide this information?

What advice would you give other students about the university/ courses? What missing information would you give them? How would you give them this information - sources/ people?

Could the university have done anything differently in terms of information provision?

### **Pool of information – current students**

**Did you pass on the information you found to others to help them? How did you do this? What information did you pass on? Why did you pass on the information? How did this make you feel?**

**Did your friends on other courses have additional information that they found helpful and you did not have the information? Where was this information provided? Would you have liked that information?**

### **Overall experience, expectations, satisfaction**

**Can you please describe your overall experience of being a student at this university and how you have felt.**

#### Prompted questions

Where were you? What was life like? How did the experience go?

What have you learnt from your experiences?

What factors have most influenced your experiences?

Which people have most influenced you?

**Can you talk me through any of your student experience that was better than you expected.**

**Can you talk me through any of your student experience that has fallen short of expectations.**Prompted questions

Did the actual benefits of studying at the university match your expectations?

Was there anything unexpected that happened that took you by surprise?

Could the university improve the information it provides to prospective students/ existing students so that expectations are met?

How has your experience of studying at the university matched the expectations of those involved in the decision to undertake the course? How has it not matched their expectations? How do you think that they feel?

**Overall experience and satisfaction****Can you please describe how satisfied you have been as a student at this university.**Prompted questions

Are you satisfied with your decision to come to the UK? the university? Study your course?

Do you have any regrets about what you would have done differently if you had had more information?

**Impact of experiences on decision making****Can you please describe how your experiences have influenced your future decisions in anyway.**Prompted questions

How have your experiences influenced your decisions in the future?

How would you make decisions differently in the future?

What would you like to tell others who will make decisions?

What decisions would you make differently?

**Pool of information – future students****Can you talk me through the information that you have provided to other students who are considering applying to universities in the UK. Please describe the experience of providing the information to them and how you felt at the time.**Prompted questions

Would you be comfortable providing testimonials for your university? If so what would you highlight that the think prospective students need to know?

Would you be happy to provide information to others who have questions in the future?

As future alumni to what extent do you see yourself as a protector of the university's reputation in the world?

**Prompt List Experiences**

- arriving in the county
- accommodation
- arriving at the university
- starting to study at the university
- attending lectures, tutorials, workshops
- amount of time needed for study
- assessments
- lecturers
- support staff
- facilities at the university (sport, library, study support, catering etc)
- life outside study
- living in the University city
- getting around the University city
- working in the University city
- extra curricular activities
- friendship groups
- having a social life

**Prompt List Information needs****Pre arrival**

University's age	Accommodation provided by the Uni
University's reputation	Existence of private flats nearby
Department's reputation	Computer facilities
Content of specific courses	Library facilities
Accreditation of the course	Sports facilities
Course as a learning experience	University unions
Degree classification structure	University campus
Entry requirements	Cost of living in the area
Cost of course	Night life in the city
Contact with the lecturers	Friendliness of people living in the area
Class sizes	Size of the area
% of graduates gaining employment within 1year	Activities in the area
Opportunities to find part time jobs	Weather in the area
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards	Safety/security in campus
Opportunities to undertake a placement	Safety/security in the area
Opportunities to study abroad	Shopping in the area
Average earning of the graduates	Contact with counselling services/support
Development of business contacts when studying	Contact with doctors at university
Companies recruiting the department graduates	Financial aid (bursaries, scholarships)

**Arrival in the country and the accommodation**

- to arrive in the country, visa regulations etc
- to arrive at your accommodation, about the accommodation
- to live in the University city – shop for food, clothes, household goods, take public transport etc
- to have a social life – safe areas to walk in, sightseeing, nightlife
- to find the university and get to the university (walk/ public transport)
- to work in the University city

**Arrival at the university on day 1**

- to get around the university, find the library, the food outlets, the gym, student help point etc
- timetable and where the rooms were
- facilities at the university (sport, library, study support, catering etc)

**Post arrival**

- course, individual modules, study schedule (lectures, tutorials)
- to get to know your classmates
- assessment, hand in date, marking criteria
- learning styles, what was expected in class
- academic regulations
- report writing
- plagiarism
- how to write a report
- how to search for information through the library
- referencing
- IT systems – Moodle, RefWorks, NVivo, SPSS

## Appendix 10 Objectives linked to Interview Guide Questions

Table 8.20 Objectives linked to Interview Guide One Questions

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 1 Questions
Objective 1: Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	Need recognition	<b>Can you talk me through the point at which you first started thinking about studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>
	Motivation	<b>Can you talk me through the reason why you made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>
	Evaluation of alternatives	<p><b>Can you talk me through the time that you made the decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b></p> <p><b>Can you talk me through what you did next once you had decided to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b></p> <p>how did you rank and evaluate the alternative decision choices?            how long did it take you to make this decision?            what other factors influenced you as you evaluated the alternatives?            what factors were important to you in deciding to study abroad?            how did you rank and evaluate these factors?            why did you decide to study abroad?            what factors influenced you as you decided to study abroad            what factors were important to you in choosing a country?            how did you rank and evaluate these factors?            how many countries did you evaluate? which ones were they?            what factors influenced you as you evaluated countries            why did you choose to study in the UK?            what factors influenced you as you decided to study in the UK?            what factors were important to you in choosing a university?            how did you rank and evaluate these factors?            how many universities did you evaluate? which ones were they?            what factors influenced you as you evaluated universities?            why did you decide to study at the University?            what factors influenced you as you decided to study at the University?</p>

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 1 Questions
Objective 1: Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	Evaluation of alternatives contd	what factors were important to you in choosing a course? how did you rank and evaluate these factors? how many courses did you evaluate? which ones were they? what factors influenced you as you evaluated courses? why did you decide to study x course? what factors influenced you as you decided on a course to study Given your experiences of evaluating countries/universities/courses, what advice would you give other students about evaluation?
	Application	<b>Can you talk me through the university application process. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time</b> when did you apply to the University? did you apply for just the one university course? did you apply to other universities/ courses? which ones? when did you do this? how satisfied were you with the application process at the University? elsewhere?
	Purchase	<b>Can you talk me through the time when you made the final decision to study at the University. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time</b> when did you make the final decision to study at the University? what happened after you made the final decision to apply to the University? when did you pay for the course? who is financing your course? when did you enrol on the course? how satisfied were you with the payment process? how satisfied were you with the enrolment process? could the university have done anything differently? when do you start at the university?
	Iterative and cyclical	<i>Explore fully the iterative nature of the decision making process and its stages (information search, evaluation, decision) until the point where they applied to a university. Explore which decisions were reconsidered and how this happened</i> what have you learnt from your decision making experiences? How has this influenced your future decisions? How would you make decisions differently in the future? What decisions would you make differently?

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 1 Questions
Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	Information search pre purchase	<p>what information did you need to help you make that decision?            where did you search for information?            how did you search for information?            how long did you search for information?            which sources of information did you look at?            what were the relative importance of the sources? significant sources of information            were there any people who you talked to and who influenced you?            what information did you find out from each source/ person?            how did these people influence how you thought and behaved?            how did you feel while you were searching for information?            did you find all the information you needed – was information missing – did you manage to find that information?            which countries did you research?            how long did you spend researching countries?            which courses in which universities (in which countries) did you decide to research?            did your friends applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in had information that you did not have?            how long did you spend researching courses?            which universities (in which countries) did you decide to research ?            how many universities did you research? which were these universities?            how many universities did you contact to ask for further information? which were these universities?            how long did you spend researching universities?            did your friends applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in that you did not have?            which courses in which universities (in which countries) did you decide to research ?            how many universities did you contact to ask for further information on their courses? which were these universities?            did your friends applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in that you did not have?            how long did you spend researching courses?            Application: did you have all the information from the university(s) you needed at this point to fill out the application? If not what additional information did you need? sources/ people?            how satisfied were you with the information received from the university?</p>



Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 1 Questions
Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.		<p>did your friends applying at the same time have information from the universities that they were interested in that you did not have?</p> <p>could the university have done anything differently during the application process?</p> <p>did you have all the information from the university you needed when you paid for the course? did you search for information elsewhere – sources/ people?</p> <p>Payment: do you have all the information from the university you need at this stage?</p>
	DMU	<p>Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?</p> <p>was anyone else involved in your initial decision – family, tutors etc?</p> <p>how did these people influence how you thought and behaved?</p> <p>was anyone else involved with helping you make the decision?</p> <p>how were they involved?</p> <p>what information did they require – where did they find this information? significant sources?</p> <p>was anyone else involved in the final decision?</p> <p>was anyone else involved in the application process with you – how satisfied were they with the information received from the university –did they need additional information?</p> <p>was anyone else involved in the final decision?</p> <p>was anyone else involved in the payment and enrolment – what information did they require – where did they find this information?</p> <p>what influencers were there? How did the influencers influence how you thought and behaved.</p> <p>how satisfied were you with the information received from the university?</p> <p>Given your experiences of researching countries/universities/courses, what advice would you give other students about searching for information? what advice would you give them about the information they should obtain? sources they should use?</p>

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 1 Questions
Objective 3: Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction		<p>Time that you made the decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification: what were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?            did you find all the information you needed – was information missing – did you manage to find that information?            how satisfied were you with the information received from the university?            how satisfied were you with the payment process?            how satisfied were you with the enrolment process?            did you have all the information from the university you needed when you enrolled on the course? did you search for information elsewhere – sources/ people?            Application: what were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?            Payment: what were the things that you were uncertain or anxious about?            are you satisfied with the decisions you made to study abroad? go to the UK? the University? study your course?</p>
Objective 4: Assess the factors that influence the information search process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates		<p>Gender:            What is your age?            What is your country of origin?            Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?            What date did you finish the course?            What is the educational background of your family?            what factors impacted on your decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification?            what other factors influenced you as you searched for information? - hygiene factors, aspects in your life, - educational background of parents, educational background of siblings, family members experiences of studying abroad, finance, connections in foreign market, cultural norms, experience of travel etc            what factors influenced you as you evaluated courses?            what factors influenced you as you decided on a course to study?            when did you make the final decision to study at the University?            what factors influenced you as you applied to university(s)?            what factors influenced you as you made the final decision to study at the University?            what factors influenced you as you paid and enrolled at the University?</p>

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 1 Questions
<p>Objective 5: Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decision and studying at university</p>		<p>did you pass on the information you found to others? how did you do this? what information did you pass on? how did it make you feel?</p> <p><b>Can you talk me through the information that you have provided to other students who are considering applying to universities in the UK. Please describe the experience of providing the information to them and how you felt at the time.</b></p> <p>Have you provided recommendations to others about the decision making process when choosing to study abroad, to study in a particular country, to study at a particular university, to study a particular course? How did this make you feel?</p> <p>Would you be comfortable providing testimonials for your university? If so what would you highlight?</p> <p>What do you think prospective students need to know</p> <p>Would you be happy to provide information to others who have questions in the future?</p> <p>As future alumni to what extent do you see yourself as a protector of the university's reputation in the world?</p>

Table 8.21 Objectives linked to Interview Guide Two Questions

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 2 Questions	Interview Guide 2 Questions
Objective 1: Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	Need Recognition Motivation	<b>Can you talk me through the reason why you made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>	
Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	Pre arrival	<b>Can you please talk me through the time before you came to this university and you looked for information that you needed. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>	<p>What information did you require? * (see list below)</p> <p>Where did you get this information from?</p> <p>Do you feel that the information you received before coming here painted a true picture of what life would be like in the University city and at the university?</p> <p>Do you feel that there was any information that you had received that you perceived to be incorrect?</p> <p>What do you wish that you had known?</p> <p>Was the information you needed easy to find? Could this be improved?</p> <p>Overall how satisfied were you with the sources of information used by the university? How could the university improve the media channels that it uses?</p> <p>What would you advise the university to do concerning the information they provide to students after they arrive? Where should they provide this information?</p> <p>What advice would you give other students about the university/ courses? What missing information would you give them? How would you give them this information - sources/ people?</p> <p>Could the university have done anything differently in terms of information provision?</p>
	Arrival in the country and the accommodation	<b>Can you please talk me through the point at which you first arrived in the country and the accommodation and looked for information that you needed. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>	
	Arrival at university	<b>Can you please talk me through the point at which you first arrived at the university on day one and looked for information that you needed. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>	
	During semesters	<b>Can you please describe your experiences to me about looking for information during your time so far or receiving information and how you felt at the time.</b>	

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 2 Questions
Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	Iterative and cyclical	<p><b>Can you please describe how your experiences have influenced your future decisions in anyway</b></p> <p>Prompted questions</p> <p>How have your experiences influenced your decisions in the future?</p> <p>How would you make decisions differently in the future?</p> <p>What would you like to tell others who will make decisions?</p> <p>What decisions would you make differently?</p>
	DMU	<p>Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?</p> <p>Were there other people who had been involved in the decision to come to this university who wanted information about any aspect of you being at the university? Did they find the information they needed? Did they have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Where did they find this information? How did they feel?</p>
Objective 3: Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	Missing Information	<p><b>Can you please describe to me a situation where you were in desperate need for information.</b></p> <p>Did you feel that you had all the information that you needed? What was missing?</p> <p>Did you have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Did you manage to answer these questions?</p>
	Student experience and satisfaction	<p><b>Can you please describe your overall experience of being a student at this university during your time so far and how you have felt.</b></p> <p>Where were you? What was life like? How did the experience go?</p> <p>What have you learnt from your experiences?</p> <p>What factors have most influenced your experiences?</p> <p>Which people have most influenced you?</p> <p><b>Can you talk me through any of your student experience that was better than you expected.</b></p> <p><b>Can you talk me through any of your student experience that has fallen short of expectations.</b></p> <p>Was there anything unexpected that happened that took you by surprise?</p>

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 2 Questions
Objective 3: Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	Student experience and satisfaction contd.	<p>Could the university improve the information it provides to prospective students/ existing students so that expectations are met?            How has your experience of studying at the university matched the expectations of those involved in the decision to undertake the course? How has it not matched their expectations? How do you think that they feel?</p> <p><b>Overall experience and satisfaction</b>  <b>Can you please describe how satisfied you have been as a student at this university during your time so far</b>            Are you satisfied with your decision to come to the UK? Your university? Study your course?            Do you have any regrets about what you would have done differently if you had had more information?</p>
Objective 4 Assess the factors that influence the information search process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates	Factors impacting search and decisions	<p>Gender:            What is your age?            What is your country of origin?            Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?            What date did you finish the course?            What is the educational background of your family?</p>
Objective 5: Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decision and studying at university	Pool of information – current students	<p><b>Did you pass on the information you found to others to help during your time so far? How did you do this? What information did you pass on? How did this make you feel?</b>  <b>Did your friends on other courses have additional information that they found helpful and you did not have the information? Where was this information provided? Would you have liked that information?</b></p>
	Pool of information – future students	<p><b>Can you talk me through the information that you have provided to other students who are considering applying to universities in the UK. Please describe the experience of providing the information to them and how you felt at the time.</b>            Would you be comfortable providing testimonials for your university? If so what would you highlight that the think prospective students need to know?            Would you be happy to provide information to others who have questions in the future?            As future alumni to what extent do you see yourself as a protector of the university's reputation in the world?</p>

Table 8.22 Objectives linked to Interview Guide Three Questions

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 3 Questions
Objective 1: Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	Need recognition Motivation	<b>Can you talk me through the reason why you made the decision to study a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.</b>
Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	Course information	<p><b>Can you please describe your experiences to me about looking for information during your course and how you felt at the time.</b></p> <p><b>Can you please describe your experiences to me about receiving information during your course and how you felt at the time.</b></p> <p><b>Can you please describe to me a situation where you were in desperate need for information.</b></p> <p>What information did you require? * (see list below)</p> <p>Where did you get this information from?</p> <p>Do you feel that the information you received before coming here painted a true picture of what life would be like in the University city and at the university?</p> <p>Was the information you needed easy to find? Could this be improved?</p> <p>Overall how satisfied were you with the sources of information used by the university? How could the university improve the media channels that it uses?</p> <p>What would you advise the university to do concerning the information they provide to students after they arrive? Where should they provide this information?</p> <p>What advice would you give other students about the university/ courses? Could the university have done anything differently in terms of information provision?</p>
	Iterative and cyclical	<p><b>Can you please describe how your experiences have influenced your future decisions in anyway</b></p> <p>How have your experiences influenced your decisions in the future?</p> <p>How would you make decisions differently in the future?</p> <p>What would you like to tell others who will make decisions?</p> <p>What decisions would you make differently?</p>

Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 3 Questions
Objective 2: Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	DMU	<p>Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?</p> <p>Were there other people who had been involved in the decision to come to this university who wanted information about any aspect of you being at the university? Did they find the information they needed? Did they have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Where did they find this information? How did they feel?</p>
Objective 3: Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	Missing Information	<p>Did you feel that you had all the information that you needed? What was missing?</p> <p>Did you have any unanswered questions? What were these questions? Did you manage to answer these questions?</p> <p>Did you feel uncertain or uneasy about anything? Did this uncertainty or unease prompt you to look for information about the topic?</p> <p>Do you feel that there was any information that you had received that you perceived to be incorrect?</p> <p>What do you wish that you had known?</p> <p>Advice to other students: What missing information would you give them? How would you give them this information - sources/ people?</p>
	Student experience, expectations and satisfaction	<p><b>Can you please describe your overall experience of being a student at this university and how you have felt.</b></p> <p>Where were you? What was life like? How did the experience go?</p> <p>What have you learnt from your experiences?</p> <p>What factors have most influenced your experiences?</p> <p>Which people have most influenced you?</p> <p><b>Can you talk me through any of your student experience that was better than you expected</b></p> <p><b>Can you talk me through any of your student experience that has fallen short of expectations</b></p> <p>Did the actual benefits of studying at the university match your expectations?</p> <p>Was there anything unexpected that happened that took you by surprise?</p> <p>Could the university improve the information it provides to prospective students/ existing students so that expectations are met?</p>



Objectives	Topic	Interview Guide 3 Questions
Objective 3: Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	Student experience, expectations and satisfaction contd.	<p>How has your experience of studying at the university matched the expectations of those involved in the decision to undertake the course? How has it not matched their expectations? How do you think that they feel?</p> <p><b>Can you please describe how satisfied you have been as a student at this university</b>            Are you satisfied with your decision to come to the UK? the University? Study your course?            Do you have any regrets about what you would have done differently if you had had more information?</p>
Objective 4 Assess the factors that influence the information search process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates	Factors impacting search and decisions	<p>Gender:            What is your age?            What is your country of origin?            Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?            What date did you finish the course?            What is the educational background of your family?</p>
Objective 5: Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decision and studying at university	Pool of information – current students	<p><b>Did you pass on the information you found to others to help them? How did you do this? What information did you pass on? Why did you pass on the information? How did this make you feel?</b>  <b>Did your friends on other courses have additional information that they found helpful and you did not have the information? Where was this information provided? Would you have liked that information?</b></p>
	Pool of information – future students	<p><b>Can you talk me through the information that you have provided to other students who are considering applying to universities in the UK. Please describe the experience of providing the information to them and how you felt at the time.</b>            Would you be comfortable providing testimonials for your university? If so what would you highlight that the think prospective students need to know?            Would you be happy to provide information to others who have questions in the future?            As future alumni to what extent do you see yourself as a protector of the university's reputation in the world?</p>

## Appendix 11 Consent Form

### **Consent Form**

I am studying for a PhD at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.

Title of research: The role of information in postgraduate students' decision making cycle

Data storage and processing will comply with data protection legislation. Material gathered for this research in the form of interview transcripts and audio recordings will be treated as confidential and securely stored. The information gathered in this interview will be reported anonymously.

By signing this consent form I agree to the following concerning the collection and use of the research data:

- I have read and understood the information sheet
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study
- I have had my questions answered satisfactorily
- I understand that I am granting permission to become a participant in this research study
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time until the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019 without having to give an explanation
- I consent to the interview being recorded

The study findings will be reported in the researcher's PhD, peer reviewed journal articles and conference presentations

If I am not sure about anything then I can ask the researcher, Carolyn McNicholas, and she will explain it to me.

Name (Printed).....

Signature.....Date.....

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

Researcher contact details: Carolyn McNicholas, Room 5x224, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

PhD Supervisor details: Dr Rita Marcella, The School of Creative and Cultural Business, Robert Gordon University. Garthdee, Aberdeen. Tel: +44 (0)1224 263904. Email r.c.marcella@rgu.ac.uk

The research has been approved by [REDACTED] Faculty Ethics Committee. Email: [researchethics@\[REDACTED\].ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@[REDACTED].ac.uk)

## Appendix 12 Participant Information Sheet

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Study title**

The role of information in the postgraduate student decision making process

#### **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us 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. Thank you for reading this.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

To explore the role of information within the individual decision making cycle of postgraduate students when selecting a business qualification and studying at [the University]. The data will be collected from August 2018 to July 2019.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are studying a business qualification at [the University] Business School. Up to 45 postgraduates will be interviewed over the period of the study

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason until the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2019. If you withdraw your data and documents will be removed from the study and securely destroyed. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect you in any way during your time at [the University] or afterwards. There will be no adverse consequences for you if you decide that you do not want to take part or if you withdraw at any time. Your withdrawal will not prejudice my ability to conduct the research.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part and what do I have to do?**

If you decide to take part in the study I would like to interview you for 30 to 40 minutes in the university at a time that suits you. During the interview I will be asking you questions about how you decided to study at [the University], the information sources and types you used when making that decision and the role of information in your experiences and satisfaction levels whilst studying at [the University]. I am interested in your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the research

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The information you provide when you arrive at university and during the early stages of your study could lead to changes that could benefit you during the rest of your time at [the University]. The information you provide at all stages will help other students who study at [the University] after you and help the university to decide on their marketing communications strategy.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

If you have any queries or complaints about the interview please contact the following individuals who will deal with your query or complaint:

My PhD supervisor Rita Marcella [r.c.marcella@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:r.c.marcella@rgu.ac.uk) or the [REDACTED] Faculty Ethics Committee. Email: [researchethics@\[REDACTED\].ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@[REDACTED].ac.uk)

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information will be kept confidential.

The study will comply with the Data Protection Acts, GDPR and the university's data security procedures according to [REDACTED] Data Protection Policy [http://www2.\[REDACTED\].ac.uk/services/Marketing/about-us/pdf/Policies/Data-Protection-Policy.pdf](http://www2.[REDACTED].ac.uk/services/Marketing/about-us/pdf/Policies/Data-Protection-Policy.pdf) and [REDACTED] Privacy Policy: [https://www1.\[REDACTED\].ac.uk/about/websiteinformation/privacy.aspx](https://www1.[REDACTED].ac.uk/about/websiteinformation/privacy.aspx)

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research study will be published as part of my PhD dissertation and in journal articles and conference presentations. You will not be identified in any of the publications.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

I am a member of [REDACTED] staff who is completing their PhD.

### **Contact for Further Information**

Carolyn McNicholas [c.mcnicholas@\[REDACTED\].ac.uk](mailto:c.mcnicholas@[REDACTED].ac.uk)

The participant will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Date: August 2018

## Appendix 13 The University Approval Letter

████████████████████  
████████████████████  
████████████████████  
████████████████████

Tel: 0117 328 86890

██████ REC REF No: FBI.18.07.032

17<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Carolyn McNicholas

Room 5x224

████████████████████.

Dear Carolyn

### **Application title: Role of Information in Postgraduates' Decision Making Cycle**

I am writing to confirm that the Faculty Research Ethics Committee are satisfied that you have addressed all the conditions relating to our previous letter sent on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018 and the study has been given ethical approval to proceed.

Please note that any information sheets and consent forms should have the ██████ logo.

Further guidance is available on the web: <https://intranet.█████.ac.uk/tasks-guides/Guide/writing-and-creating-documents-in-the-█████-brand>

The following standard conditions also apply to all research given ethical approval by a ██████ Research Ethics Committee:

1. You must notify the relevant ██████ Research Ethics Committee in advance if you wish to make significant amendments to the original application: these include any changes to the study protocol which have an ethical dimension. Please note that any changes approved by an external research ethics committee must also be communicated to the relevant ██████ committee.  
<http://www1.█████.ac.uk/research/researchethics/applyingforapproval.aspx>
2. You must notify the University Research Ethics Committee if you terminate your research before completion;
3. You must notify the University Research Ethics Committee if there are any serious events or developments in the research that have an ethical dimension.

The Faculty and University Research Ethics Committees (FRECs and UREC) are here to advise researchers on the ethical conduct of research projects and to approve projects that meet UWE's ethical standards. Please note that we are unable to give advice in relation to legal issues, including health and safety, privacy or data protection (including GDPR) compliance. Whilst we will use our best endeavours to identify and notify you of any obvious legal issues that arise in an application, the lead researcher remains responsible for ensuring that the project complies with UWE's policies, and with relevant legislation. If you need help with legal issues please contact [safety@■■■■.ac.uk](mailto:safety@■■■■.ac.uk) (for Health and Safety advice), [James2.Button@■■■■.ac.uk](mailto:James2.Button@■■■■.ac.uk) (for data protection, GDPR and privacy advice).

Please note: The UREC is required to monitor and audit the ethical conduct of research involving human participants, data and tissue conducted by academic staff, students and researchers. Your project may be selected for audit from the research projects submitted to and approved by the UREC and its committees.

We wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely

*Stephen Parker*

**Stephen Parker B.Sc. (Joint Hons) D.I.S. M.A. (Law)**  
Chair, Faculty Research Ethics Committee

### Appendix 14 Additional Information on the Profile of Participants

Table 8.23 shows the profile of participants: their country of origin, gender, age, the name of their undergraduate degree, whether their undergraduate degree was a joint degree between a UK university and a partner institution, the year they completed their undergraduate degree, the university and its location in terms of the last university qualification they obtained at undergraduate or postgraduate level and the postgraduate degree they were studying. It also notes whether the participants had studied or travelled abroad as these were factors that were found to influence the decision making process.

Table 8.24 provides further information on the profile of participants and highlights whether the participants were the first generation to study at university or if their parents or siblings went to university, the number of people in the DMU and if the participant was the sole member of the DMU, if the participant was the child of entrepreneurial parents and wanted to set up their own business when they graduated and their source of income. These factors were found to influence motivation to study a postgraduate qualification and the degree of rigour with which participants progressed through the information searching and decision making processes.

Table 8.23 Profile of Participants: Demographic Data, Place of Study and Travel

P#	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Undergraduate Degree	Year completed studies	Place of study of undergraduate, Postgraduate degree	Place of study degree	Postgraduate course	The University degree	Study Abroad	Travel abroad
1	Thailand	Male	24	Marketing	2016	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing Communications	Y	N	N
2	Malaysia	Female	23	Business Management with Marketing	2017	The University UK (Yr 2 - 3) Malaysia University (Yr 1)	Selangor The University	MSc Marketing	Y	The University	Y
3	Vietnam	Male	22	Business Management with Marketing	2017	The University UK (Yr 3 - 4) Vietnamese University 1 (Yr 1-2)	Ho Chi Minh City The University	MSc Marketing	Y	The University	Y
4	Cambodia	Female	22	Strategic Management and Organisation	2016	Japan University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Japan	MSc Marketing	N	Japan	Y
5	Thailand	Male	27	Marketing	2014	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing	Y	N	Y
6	Vietnam	Female	23	Business Management	2017	Vietnamese University 1 (Yr1-4)	Ho Chi Minh City	MSc Events Management	Y	N	N
7	Thailand	Female	26	Business English	2014	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing	N	N	N
8	Thailand	Female	28	Thai Dance	2012	Thai University 3 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing	N	N	N
9	India	Male	22	MBA	2016	C University (Yr 1-3)	Cardiff	MSc Marketing	N	UK	Y
10	Vietnam	Female	22	Marketing Communications	2018	The University UK (Yr 3-4) Vietnamese University 1 (Yr 1-2)	Ho Chi Minh City The University	MSc Marketing Communications	Y	The University	Y
11	Malaysia	Male	22	Business Management with Marketing	2018	The University UK (Yr 4) Malaysia University (Yr 1-3)	Selangor The University	MSc Marketing Communications	Y	The University	Y
12	Thailand	Female	26	Business Chinese	2014	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Innovation and Applied Entrepreneurship	N	N	Y
13	Indonesia	Female	21	Creative Writing and Publishing	2018	BS University (Yr1-3)	Bath	MSc Marketing Communications	N	UK	Y



Table 8.23 Profile of Participants: Demographic Data, Place of Study and Travel contd.

P#	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Undergraduate Degree	Year completed studies	Place of study of undergraduate, Postgraduate degree	Place of study degree	Postgraduate course	The University degree	Study Abroad	Travel abroad
14	Mauritius	Female	22	Communications	2017	Mauritius University (Yr 1-3)	Mauritius	MSc Marketing Communications	N	N	Y
15	Kenya	Female	24	Arts, Journalism and Media Studies	2015	Kenya University (Yr 1-3)	Nairobi	MSc Marketing Communications	N	N	Y
16	Syria	Male	22	Marketing	2018	Jordan University (Yr 1-4)	Madaba	MSc Marketing Communications	N	N	Y
17	USA	Female	28	Fine Arts	2015	USA University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Stevens Point	MBA	N	N	Y
18	Russia	Male	23	Economics	2018	BT University (Yr 1-3)	Bath	MSc Business Management	N	UK	Y
19	Bangladesh	Male	26	English	2016	Bangladesh University (Yr 1-4)	Bangladesh	MSc Marketing	N	N	N
20	Bangladesh	Male	25	Human Resources Management	2017	Bangladesh University (Yr 1-4)	Bangladesh	MSc Marketing	N	N	N
21	Ghana	Male	29	Business Administration	2015	Ghana University (Yr 1-5)	Ghana	MSc Marketing	N	N	Y
22	USA	Male	23	Marketing	2018	USA University 2 (Yr 1-4)	Pennsylvania	MSc Marketing	N	N	N
23	China	Female	39	Business Administration	2016	China University (Yr 1-2.5)	Shanghai	MBA	N	N	Y
24	Thailand	Male	26	MSc Entrepreneurship	2018	Thai University 2 (Yr 1)	Bangkok	MSc International Management	N	N	N
25	Vietnam	Male	23	Marketing	2018	The University UK (Yr 3-4) Vietnamese University 1 (Yr 1-2)	Ho Chi Minh City The University	MSc Marketing	Y	The University	N
26	China	Female	27	Civil Engineering	2017	C University (Yr 1-3)	Cardiff	MSc Business Management	N	UK	Y
27	Thailand	Male	26	Computer Science	2012	Thai University 3 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc International Management	N	N	Y

Table 8.23 Profile of Participants: Demographic Data, Place of Study and Travel contd.

P#	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Undergraduate Degree	Year completed studies	Place of study of undergraduate, Postgraduate degree	Place of study degree	Postgraduate course	The University degree	Study Abroad	Travel abroad
28	Thailand	Female	25	Tourism and Hotel Management	2015	Thai University 4 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing	N	N	Y
29	Vietnam	Male	24	Business Management with Marketing	2018	The University UK (Yr 4) Vietnamese University 1 (Yr1-3)	Ho Chi Minh City The University	MSc Business Management	Y	The University	N
30	Vietnam	Female	22	Banking and Finance	2018	Vietnamese University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Hanoi	MSc International Management	N	N	N
31	Vietnam	Female	23	Banking and Finance	2018	Vietnamese University 2, Vietnam (yr1-4)	Hanoi,	MSc International Management	N	N	N
32	Thailand	Female	28	Business English	2015	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing	N	N	Y
33	Thailand	Male	26	Engineering Management	2018	Thai University 5 (Yr 1-4)	Thammasat	MSc Marketing	N	N	Y
34	Thailand	Male	24	BBA Marketing	2018	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc Marketing	Y	N	Y
35	Vietnam	Female	23	Marketing	2018	The University UK (Yr 3) Vietnamese University 2, (Yr 1-2)	Hanoi The University	MSc Marketing Communications	Y	The University	N
36	Bangladesh	Female	29	Environmental Policy and Management	2012	Australia University (Yr 1-3)	Australia	MSc International Management	N	Australia	Y
37	Brazil	Male	33	MSc Human Resource Management	2010	Brazil University	Rio de Janiero	MSc International Management	N	N	Y
38	Thailand	Female	24	Business English	2016	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc International Management	N	N	Y
39	Thailand	Female	25	Business English	2018	Thai University 1 (Yr 1-4)	Bangkok	MSc International Management	N	N	N

Table 8.24 Profile of Participants: Parental education, DMU, Entrepreneurship, Income source

Participant number	Interview number	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Parent at University	Sibling go/to go to Uni	DMU member number	DMU Participant only	Child of entrepreneur	Want to start own business	Source Income
1	3	Thailand	Male	24	N	Y	3	N			Parents
2	3	Malaysia	Female	23	N	Y	3	N			Parents
3	3	Vietnam	Male	22	N	Y	3	N			Parents
4	3	Cambodia	Female	22	Y	Y	3	N	Y	Y	Parents
5	3	Thailand	Male	27	Y	Y	3	N	Y	N	Parents
6	3	Vietnam	Female	23	N	N/A			N		Parents
7	3	Thailand	Female	26	Y	Y			Y		
8	3	Thailand	Female	28	Y	Y		N		N	Employer
9	1 2	India	Male	22	Y	N/A	3	N	Y	Y	Father
10	1 2	Vietnam	Female	22	Y	Y	3	N		Y	Parents
11	1 & 2	Malaysia	Male	22	Y	N/A	3	N	N	N	Parents
12	2	Thailand	Female	26	Y	Y				Y	
13	1 & 2	Indonesia	Female	21	Y	Y	3	N	N	N	Parents
14	1 & 2	Mauritius	Female	22	N	N/A	3	N	N	N	Parents
15	1 & 2	Kenya	Female	24	N	Y	3	N	N	N	Participant, Parents
16	1 2	Syria	Male	22	Y	Y	3	N	N	N	Parents

Table 8.24 Profile of Participants: Parental education, DMU, Entrepreneurship, Income source

Participant number	Interview number	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Parent at University	Sibling go/to go to Uni	DMU member number	DMU Participant only	Child of entrepreneur	Want to start own business	Source Income
17	1 & 2	USA	Female	28	Y	Y	1	Y	N	N	Participant
18	1 & 2	Russia	Male	23	Y	Y	1	Y		N	Parents
19	1 & 2	Bangladesh	Male	26	Y	Y	4	N			Father
20	1 & 2	Bangladesh	Male	25	N	N/A	3	N			Father Company
21	1 & 2	Ghana	Male	29	N	Y	3			Y	
22	1 & 2	USA	Male	23	N	Y	1	Y	N	N	Participant, University
23	1 & 2	China	Female	39			1	Y		Y	Participant
24	1 & 2	Thailand	Male	26	Y	Y	4	N	Y	Y	Parents
25	1 & 2	Vietnam	Male	23	N	Y	3	N		N	Parents
26	1 & 2	China	Female	27	N	N/A	1	Y		Y	
27	1 & 2	Thailand	Male	26	Y	Y	3	N	N	N	Parents
28	1 & 2	Thailand	Female	25	Y	Y	1	Y			Parents
29	1 & 2	Vietnam	Male	24	N	Y	5	N	Y	Y	Parents
30	1 & 2	Vietnam	Female	22	Y	Y	4	N	Y	N	Parents

Table 8.24 Profile of Participants: Parental education, DMU, Entrepreneurship, Income source

Participant number	Interview number	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Parent at University	Sibling go/to go to Uni	DMU member number	DMU Participant only	Child of entrepreneur	Want to start own business	Source Income
31	1 & 2	Vietnam	Female	23	Y	N/A	3	N	N	Y	Parents
32	1 & 2	Thailand	Female	28	Y	Y	2	N	Y	Y	Parents
33	1 & 2	Thailand	Male	26	Y	Y	1	Y	Y	N	Mother
34	1 & 2	Thailand	Male	24	N	Y	2		Y	Y	Father
35	1 & 2	Vietnam	Female	23	Y	Y	3	N	N	N	Parents
36	1 & 2	Bangladesh	Female	29	N	N/A	1	Y	N	N	Participant
37	1	Brazil	Male	33	N	Y	4	N	N	N	Partner, Company
38	1	Thailand	Female	24	Y	Y	4	N	N	N	Father
39	1	Thailand	Female	25	Y	N/A	4	N	Y	N	Parents

Table 8.25 shows the country of origin of the participants in this study and compares this to the number of international students from that country that studied overseas in 2017.

Table 8.25 Outwardly Mobile International Students by Domicile

Country of Origin	Number of outwardly mobile students	Number of students in the qualitative study
China	869 387	2
India	305 970	1
Vietnam	82 160	8
USA	72 830	2
Malaysia	64 187	3
Russia	56 837	1
Bangladesh	55 787	3
Brazil	52 515	1
Indonesia	45 206	1
Syria	44 791	1
Thailand	29 884	12
Ghana	14 622	1
Kenya	14 012	1
Mauritius	7 165	1
Cambodia	5 469	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 720 822</b>	<b>39</b>

Source Author's Analysis 2020 based on UNESCO 2018

## Appendix 15 Sample Transcript of Interview

### **Respondent 38**

INTERVIEWER: What is your age?

PARTICIPANT: 24

INTERVIEWER: What is your country of origin?

PARTICIPANT: Thailand.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you study your Undergraduate degree?

PARTICIPANT: [Thai University 1]

INTERVIEWER: And how long did you study at [Thai University] 1 for?

PARTICIPANT: Four years.

INTERVIEWER: What course did you study?

PARTICIPANT: I study Business English. They are in Faculty of Arts.

INTERVIEWER: And do you come out with a [Thai University 1] degree

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long was the course?

PARTICIPANT: 4 years.

INTERVIEWER: What date did you finish the course?

PARTICIPANT: I'm not sure about the date, but I'm graduate on 2016.

INTERVIEWER: So what did you do after that?

PARTICIPANT: After that I went to America and joined the work and travel programme. And then I moved back to my country and I got a job.

INTERVIEWER: And what was the job in?

PARTICIPANT: I joined an advertising agency and take my position as the coordinator, with their internal team and their client.

INTERVIEWER: What Masters are you currently studying?

PARTICIPANT: MSc International Management.

INTERVIEWER: What is the educational background of your family? Did your mother or father go to university?

PARTICIPANT: My father go to university. He got that master degree as well. But at the country. My mother just graduate like the high school.

INTERVIEWER: And do you have any brothers or sisters?

PARTICIPANT: I have one older sister. And she studied at the same university as my and she did her undergraduate degree.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other people who were involved in the decision to come to this university?

PARTICIPANT: The first like different instruments serve me is my friends. And take a lot of part of that to motivate me to come here.

INTERVIEWER: And were your mother and father involved?

PARTICIPANT: Actually my father don't want me to study here. But also my mother and my sisters, she always support me to go here.

INTERVIEWER: I would like you to talk to you about the decision making process that you went through which led to you studying a postgraduate qualification at [The University]. Can you talk me through the point at which you first started thinking about studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.

PARTICIPANT: At that moment I feel like confused. Should I go abroad or should study at my hometown. Because of my father didn't want me to spend the much money to going abroad. So you can study at my hometown and in the same way you can working and study at the same time like my father did. He just like the conservative people so he don't want me to go here. And I know that I have to use a lot of money to support for going here. And Yeah, I know that my mother can support for me. So at that moment I just think that if there's benefit for me in my future career or not. If it yes, I think I have to took the chance.

INTERVIEWER: So at what point did you actually start thinking about doing a postgraduate qualification?

PARTICIPANT: I searching on the job classifications that the position that I want to apply in my hometown. Most of them, they are required for the Masters degree.

INTERVIEWER: So which position do you want to apply for?

PARTICIPANT: It's kind of the management trainee.

INTERVIEWER: In a large company?

PARTICIPANT: Yup. In the P&G, Huawei and Samsung. As a management trainee, it's like, you are always transferred to another department for two years and then you just choose later what department you would to belong.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start looking at job adverts? You graduated in 2016 so was it when you came back to Thailand?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah when I came back from America.

INTERVIEWER: So that would've been in 2017?

PARTICIPANT: That will be 2017, yes 2017.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk me through the time that you made the decision to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification? Please describe that experience to me



and how you felt at the time.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, like I said to you before, I'm so confused. I'm not sure what I decided is right or wrong. And because my sister not going to the Masters degree yet and she already get their family. So yep she just told me that it's your chance to go and grab it and maybe your future will be better than her. So that I think, okay, so right now I have the IELTS score, I have the working experience so that's why I, why not, I had to ignore this chance.

INTERVIEWER: So when did you get your IELTS?

PARTICIPANT: Actually the IELTS, I got this because of the EBEC because of my university that does the use the study and the English test in my university. Like I had to use their score.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so you did Business English, so part of that then they give you the IELTS?

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the factors that impacted on your decision to study a postgraduate qualification, what were the factors that impacted on it?

PARTICIPANT: The first factor I think is going to be my friends. They always influence me. They also motivate me. Like he always said to me that, if you've got that, if you've got the degree, the Masters degree I mean, you will be better than another girl that does only the bachelor degree. And that in my hometown it's just a few people who have this qualification so I will be the main talent.

INTERVIEWER: And how is a UK degree perceived in Thailand?

PARTICIPANT: UK is the most of everything in their education degree. If you graduate from the UK, whatever university, I think they might be considered as the first country.

INTERVIEWER: And why did you decide on a business management degree?

PARTICIPANT: Because at the bachelor degree I study about the half of business and half of English. So it's kind of ...Oh there's one point after I decide for the first Company that I get a job, I apply for Huawei Company. And that when I go to interview, he just talk to me that you've got this course bachelor degree but not in specific in business. So I think that is the point that I want to study about the business. So like I have to learn you my state to be the business, not just a course.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk me through what you did next once you had decided to investigate studying a postgraduate qualification. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.

PARTICIPANT: After I investigate, right?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: After I investigate, I'm searching the information on the Google, on [The University] website and actually I'm in contact with the agency in Thailand to guide me what university that I have to apply and what is the qualification needed in specific on each university.

INTERVIEWER: So where was your agent based?

PARTICIPANT: She is based in the Bangkok in Thailand

INTERVIEWER: Not in [Thai University 1]?

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: So it is an independent agent in Bangkok?

PARTICIPANT: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So you went to the agent. Did they give you a number of universities to apply to?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. She gave me like, the university that you can use the IELTS score from the EBEC. So I have a list and one of them is the [SO University]. But the course that I want to study is on the January period. But at the January period, they have a limit course to open on that term. So, and they're in the, I mean, this course is quite impressive. It sounds more interesting than the other.

INTERVIEWER: So can you remember which universities the agent gave you?

PARTICIPANT: [SO University] and [The University] and another two I can't remember the name.

INTERVIEWER: So did you start to search for information on Google before you went to the agent or did you go to the agent first?

PARTICIPANT: No I searched Google first and then I go to the agency?

INTERVIEWER: So what did you put into Google?

PARTICIPANT: At that time I just asked reveal about the course and what kind of the cost that most students apply for the master degree.

INTERVIEWER: And were you looking at that time at Business Management?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So can you remember what you keyed into Google?

PARTICIPANT: I keyed into Google just the management. That's it. And one thing that I'm looking for is about the marketing course. I am just familiar with marketing more than the management. So I took these two keywords. And then so the finally the result of course, I mean the marketing as I found it a lot, but for the management there is a limit of the information that I think is useful.

INTERVIEWER: So what information did you find on management?

PARTICIPANT: Um, I found some that is about the management, but it's kind of the MBA, the MBA course. It's not the international one that I applied for here. So most of that is going to be why they are working experience for like two years. But I'm not qualify for that one. So I just looking one of that is [The University] that no need for working experience.

INTERVIEWER: So which websites did you go on to? Can you remember when you were looking for information?

PARTICIPANT: In my hometown they use one website. We call it Pantip. That one is kind of the web where you can share all of your thoughts . So it looks like the Facebook that you post your title and then everyone will comment. Yeah, but that one is not includable website. But we use that one to guideline to be the like they leave review for us.

INTERVIEWER: So what did you key into Pantip?

PARTICIPANT: I just keyed the management and press [The University]. Oh, not press [The University] I just press the Pantip. So it will like someone who did the course before they got to tell that experience on that website.

INTERVIEWER: So is it like an online review?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, like that one.

INTERVIEWER: So do you, did you go into ranking websites at all?

PARTICIPANT: At that time I'm not interesting about the ranking yet. I just thought that the agency give me a ranking after I select [The University].

INTERVIEWER: So you went on to onto websites, you went onto Pantip, you looked on Google about business and management and you looked at reviews. Did you actually go onto any university websites at that point?

PARTICIPANT: After I'm applying and I choose the module that I want to study. After that I just go to [The University] website and look what course that I have to going to learn.

INTERVIEWER: So you then went to the agent and the agent gave you four universities to look at. What information did you look at for those four universities?

PARTICIPANT: I am looking for the course, what kind of study that I'm going to learn and yeah, for [The University] is the most interesting one.

INTERVIEWER: The actual course itself?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So did you look at any other information in terms of...

PARTICIPANT: No I only looked at the course that I want to study. So you went into the four university websites and you looked at the different courses and what was involved with them.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk me through the next step that you took on the way to applying to study at a university. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.

PARTICIPANT: After that I just go to [The University] one. I'm writing the SOP and then send my like, um, send my information, my document, and then I get offer.

INTERVIEWER: So you have the four universities and you were looking through Google at online reviews, what then made you decide to go for [The University] rather than the other universities?

PARTICIPANT: Because one thing that [The University] starting about the marketing. They have the marketing module for the one. The one is optional. This is your module. And another one is about the services. The one that I studied there last semester.

INTERVIEWER: What was it called?

PARTICIPANT: The services marketing. And I like this kind of module so I just go for [The University] that's it [ speeds up and laughs].

INTERVIEWER: So when you were looking at the actual courses on the four websites for the universities, [The University] course looked the best for you.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you analyse the information? Did you write it down? Did you put it in a spreadsheet?

PARTICIPANT: When I learn something I like to jot notes. I have a small note with me all the time and that is, I just jot this, this, this I like this course. And another the course at [SO University], there were limitations for me. The first condition that I have to, I had to come here at the January course. And that is the few choice to me to choose. And [The University] got two for that. Uh Huh. I just put the mark when I leave. Whatever I want. I just put the score from [The University]. Ok [The University] got two mark and another got nothing.

INTERVIEWER: So you're actually weighted each course?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So did the [SO University]'s course start in January?

PARTICIPANT: Oh, it's on the September. So I don't want to wait six month for free. And then, yeah. So I just pick up here first.

INTERVIEWER: So did the agent make any recommendation to you when she handed over the four universities?

PARTICIPANT: She told me to got the recommendation from teacher

INTERVIEWER: And did you do that?

PARTICIPANT: Yep, I got for two letter.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So she didn't say [The University] is better or [SO University] is better?

PARTICIPANT: No

INTERVIEWER: She just said here are the four universities?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: So you went online, you looked at the courses. Did you talk to anyone at that point?

PARTICIPANT: Yep. I talk a lot with my friends [smiles] and I saw some of my friends who share in the Facebook in the personal information that he studied at [The

University] before. So I just talk and chat to him. And he told me that [The University], the rank is not high much, but you can, like everyone familiar with the name of [The University], so not surprise that if you get it from here and then you got back you will get a job easily.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So [The University] reputation in Thailand is a good reputation.

PARTICIPANT: Yep

INTERVIEWER: So you spoke to the one friend on Facebook and which course had he done at [The University]

PARTICIPANT: That is about the international business. Business management. But my course I don't know that the name is quite different, but I think the module will be the same. He studied international business management. But I study about the international management. Yup. The business is missing, so not sure what is the right way. I don't know anything

INTERVIEWER: So what else did he tell you about [The University]?

PARTICIPANT: Um, yeah, he tell me that the city is nice, so you're not going to be lonely. Yeah. And most are Thai people and EBEC student is here so that's why it's the, another consideration, another factor that I decided.

INTERVIEWER: So any other factors that influenced you? What about the cost?

PARTICIPANT: Actually one of my friends he studied at the [SO University] and he nearly to graduate soon and he told me that [The University] is like the city is quite good and [The University] is kind of the university that have the facility that everything is in one place. Not go to like another campus, like the [SO University] bit. I think that is, yeah, most of my friends is always friends with me, always motivate me.

INTERVIEWER: So obviously you had your friend on Facebook, you had your friend who had been to [SO University] and were there other friends as well were there that you talked to?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So where did you find them?

PARTICIPANT: Most of the others know when he is like on the Facebook profile

INTERVIEWER: So they had already been to [Thai University 1] and then they had come to [The University] to study?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And so you contacted them through Facebook again and had a conversation with them?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you meet anyone face to face to talk to them?

PARTICIPANT: Not face to face.

INTERVIEWER: And did you talk to any of your professors at [Thai University 1]?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah I talk to my professor but he always support me to go to abroad.

INTERVIEWER: And so did you have to convince your father that you wanted to study?

PARTICIPANT: Oh that is so hard for me [laughs] to convince him. He wants me to study and working at the same time, so I just do that point. I told him that okay, when I stay here I can work a part time job at a Thai restaurant also I can study. So that's what he wants study and working at the same time and he says, if you want to go you just go and that's it.

INTERVIEWER: So he is financing you to come here and study?

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And have you got a job in a Thai restaurant?

PARTICIPANT: Yep, I got that.

INTERVIEWER: So you've gathered information from your friends and, and the websites

PARTICIPANT: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: Did you look anywhere else? Did you look at the [University city] at all as part of your decision?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I found someone on YouTube. He talk about how nice in the city. Like he is at the agency in Thailand as well and he already visited around the [University city] and the city. What we have in this, like I found that as much interesting than the other.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So that was a YouTube video posted by a person in the agency in Bangkok about [The University] and the [University city].

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Any other sources of information that you looked at?

PARTICIPANT: No, that's only that [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: So then you put all the notes in your book and you weighted the different universities?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So you had four universities and then you're weighting them?

PARTICIPANT: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: And then you obviously came to a decision at the end that you wanted to go for [The University]?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk me through the university application process. Please describe that experience to me and how you felt at the time.

PARTICIPANT: I went back to the agency and asked them to help with application.

INTERVIEWER: So what did they do for you?

PARTICIPANT: She recommend me to... actually my grade at the EBEC is quite good and she just suggest me that, okay, you're just writing SOP and then she will check once again and then just apply it. Nothing much that she helped me.

INTERVIEWER: So what's SOP? Personal statement is it?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So you have to say why you want to come?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So you wrote that?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I just wrote that one and I just checked with my grade, with my transcript and that's it

INTERVIEWER: Did she actually make the physical application for you or did you have to do by yourself?

PARTICIPANT: I did it by myself.

INTERVIEWER: So did you just apply to the one university?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So what happened after that in terms of your application?

PARTICIPANT: Mmm. I just wait for the offer like two or three day and then I got offer.

INTERVIEWER: That was quick.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. That was quick. That was what make me surprised as well.

INTERVIEWER: So was that a positive thing for you that you got the offer back really quickly?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. So the process is so quick. After I got the offer, okay, I go through to the visa. I make appointment and finally I got the visa and that's it.

INTERVIEWER: So when did you make the application can you remember?

PARTICIPANT: Um, actually I take my decision to go here after the two months, the two months before the course start. I think that I got the offer is around November, almost the end of November I got the offer. And the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, I go to the apply for the appointment visa.

INTERVIEWER: So in terms of the time that you first started looking at information, you mentioned back in 2017 you're thinking about looking for a postgraduate.....

PARTICIPANT: At the 2017 I just looking for the job.

INTERVIEWER: For the job yes and that triggered the process. So after that, did you then start actively looking for information or did you wait for a while?

PARTICIPANT: Oh, I wait for a while.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So how long would the process have taken you?

PARTICIPANT: The first time I got a job I just, okay, I just fine with the job that I get. So I'm not interesting to study abroad after I decide for the first company.

INTERVIEWER: And then so when did you start thinking about applying for university?

PARTICIPANT: Um, I think it should be probably around 2018, at the 2018. The one that I go for interview and he just ignore me. Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. That was the job you went for and you didn't get that. So then you started looking at universities?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So how long a period would you say that you actually researched universities?

PARTICIPANT: I think it's probably around two months, I guess. Yeah. Two or three months.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you feel when you first started looking for information on universities?

PARTICIPANT: I feel so confused. And I feel have someone choose to guide me what I have to looking for or what criteria that I have to match with myself.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you overcome that feeling of confusion?

PARTICIPANT: It will be my friends one that he study here. And another one is the kind of the alumni at the [Thai University 1]. He helped me to guide what is I want to looking for.

INTERVIEWER: So you got help through the process and so you became more confident?

PARTICIPANT: Uh huh. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So when you made your decision, how did you feel at that point?

PARTICIPANT: How I feel when I'm making my decision?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Actually when I got the offer I still, um, should I go or should I just ignore it. And at that time, yeah so... I have one, my fellow, he is my colleague at the firm that I'm working for. He told me that, okay, you have to took this chance because if you don't you're going to wait for that and maybe you don't want to study again, so you're going to miss the chance. He talked to me like that though I just, yeah, I think I have to get the chance first. I don't know. What about if I wait until next year or the year after? I think I will feel lazy to study.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you feel when you actually made the application?



PARTICIPANT: How I feel. Mm. I'm not sure, but I feel like I'm not confident. I am afraid that I'm not gonna finish the graduation in the timeframe, within the timeframe. And just looking, what should I prepare before study here.

INTERVIEWER: So you went back and looked for information did you when you were uncertain about whether to accept the offer.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go back into websites and look for information?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go?

PARTICIPANT: Of course Google again. Every time. I just go into Google and also [The University] website provide some like they have their course at the library that you can study with them like to make me not nervous, about the critical writing, about the ... Yes. So I feel okay. I feel warm in my heart and then okay I think it's going to be okay after that.

INTERVIEWER: So you got the offer. How long was it before you actually accepted the offer then?

PARTICIPANT: Um, after I got offer the agency told me that if I took that offer, I just pay the deposit. I think it take me one or two days.

INTERVIEWER: But you were still uncertain even after you paid the deposit?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel now?

PARTICIPANT: Right now?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: I almost did it. It's just the dissertation is left and right now I'm still on the semester two and that is make me 'okay I can do it probably'.

INTERVIEWER: So even though you've come here, you've still been uncertain, have you during the process?

PARTICIPANT: Yes [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: So the way that you went about the decision in terms of making your notes and your weighting, etcetera, how do you feel about that, that decision making process that you went through?

PARTICIPANT: Um, how am I feeling?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you were quite systematic. You went through quite an in depth plan.

PARTICIPANT: Yes the plan, the organise.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about the way that you went about that?

PARTICIPANT: I think that is benefit for me when I just to make a decision. I think I am the one who study, so I have to make sure that okay, I'm fine with this. I'm happy with this. So that is make me feel like, okay, this is my confident, like my confidential that I make a decision.

INTERVIEWER: And in the future, if you had to make a major decision again, would you go about it the same way that you did this time?

PARTICIPANT: Yes I am informed for the future.

INTERVIEWER: So in terms of the sources of information that you gathered, what would you say were the most important sources of information?

PARTICIPANT: I think it is about the word of mouth, I guess. When someone leave [The University], when someone told the experience that they faced before. That is made me feel okay It's just be the credible information for me. And the one thing as the on the [The University] website on each university website, I found a lot of informations in the [The University] but some of them is I can't find some.

INTERVIEWER: For other universities?

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And could you just remind me in terms of the reasons why you chose to come to [The University]. Could you just summarise those for me?

PARTICIPANT: Uh Huh. The reason that I chose here because of, um, the first thing that I got IELTSs that match with the [The University]. That is my first qualifications. And then I have a lot of friends who study here who come visit here at the same time of me. So that is make me okay. Make me feel better than I'm study other cos I have friends here and because of [The University] reputation in Thailand is quite good. Yeah. I think that's true.

INTERVIEWER: And what about the cost of the course, the fee?

PARTICIPANT: Oh yeah. The course as well.

INTERVIEWER: But why was that a factor compared to other universities?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, because the one that I told you that they have only the limitation when their course open on the January. And [The University] one is the most interesting modules.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And the actual fee is at the [SO University] more expensive or...

PARTICIPANT: mm, I don't think so. I'm not sure about the price, the tuition fee.

INTERVIEWER: So that wasn't something that you looked at?

PARTICIPANT: I'm not looking for the tuition fee at all [laughs]. I search for what I want to study and what that university is.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of your satisfaction levels since you've arrived at [The University] how satisfied have you been?

PARTICIPANT: Um, I got like the welcoming party and like the tour, like how you gonna live in here or how you're gonna study here? Uh Huh. Yeah, I got many manuals.

INTERVIEWER: So are you happy with the decision that you made to come to [The University]?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I'm happy.

INTERVIEWER: So if I was to say to you how happy are you from zero to 10, what would you say?

PARTICIPANT: I think I'm about eight or nine.

INTERVIEWER: And is there anything that would take it from it from eight to 10?

PARTICIPANT: What I take from eight to 10?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: The first thing is that the university is quite far from the city centre. That is one thing that I have to get two bus before I came here. Yeah. But that is not the, like it's not the factor that that makes me feel bad with the university and yeah, I think, yeah, I think that's.. I think one thing I have to wait until I am a graduate here. I will know that I'm going to satisfy here. But right now, there's around eight or nine.

INTERVIEWER: So where are you living?

PARTICIPANT: Near the Temple Meads.

INTERVIEWER: And are you living in a house with Thai people?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah I'm living with Thai roommate.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you find the house?

PARTICIPANT: I find house because I pay for the agency to looking at house.

INTERVIEWER: And did you pay the agency to find a house with Thai people?

PARTICIPANT: Yes actually that agency, the services are in London. And one of my friends, he knows the one who works at the agency. He just contact him and then yeah, I've got the contact and he looking for the [University city] for me.

INTERVIEWER: For [University city] for a house or an empty house?

PARTICIPANT: The empty house.

INTERVIEWER: And then how did you fill it?

PARTICIPANT: She looking for the available house first at the January month and then he's just give me a choice. Okay. If I pick up this house, he going to go and view the house for me first. And then okay. If I took that contract and pay for the deposit and that's it.

INTERVIEWER: So you have other Thai people in the house?

PARTICIPANT: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: How did they get there?

PARTICIPANT: Oh, no, me and my roommate is come together.

INTERVIEWER: This is your roommate from Thailand?

PARTICIPANT: From Thailand. From [Thai University 1] as well.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you so much. I really do appreciate your time

## Appendix 16 List of NVIVO Codes

<b>Name</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
<b>TITPU Type information To Purchase University</b>		
TITPU Course Module	20	32
TITPU Campus Facilities	17	24
TITPU Fee	18	25
TITPU Friend	5	6
TITPU Reputation	15	17
TITPU Rank	15	25
Rank source of info	2	2
TITPU Requirement	7	9
TITPU Study [the University]	7	10
TITPU Other	14	19
TITPU Staff	5	6
TITPU Ethnic	6	7
TITPU Employ	9	15
Reason to return to [the University]	3	3
TITPU January	2	5
TITPU Accommodation	4	5
TITPU Atmosphere Lifestyle	7	10
TITPU Ease of adaptation, study	7	9
TITPU Creativity Practical	4	7
TITPU Relationship partner	4	4
TITPU English	1	1
<b>TITPCO Type information To Purchase Country</b>		
TITPCO Fee	1	1
TITPCO Duration	12	13
TITPCO Study [the University]	1	1
TITPCO UK reputation	10	11
TITPCO Distance	2	2
TITPCO Visit	2	2
TITPCO Friends	1	1
TITPCO English	2	2
TITPCO Other	4	4
TITPCO Alt Country	0	0
TITPCO Alt USA	7	8
TITPCO Alt Other	2	2
TITPCO Alt New Zealand	1	1
TITPCO Alt Canada	2	2
TITPCO Alt Australia	8	13
TITPCO Weather	1	2
<b>TITPCI Type information To Purchase City</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
TITPCI Creative	1	2
TITPCI Features	5	6
TITPCI Safety	5	8
TITPCI Location	7	8
TITPCI Weather	8	8
TITPCI Lifestyle	7	8
TITPCI Cost living	3	3
TITPCI Industry	1	1
TITPCI Family nearby	1	1
TITPCI Tourist	1	1
TITPCI Ethnic	1	1
<b>TIPPU Type information Post purchase University</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
TIPPU Good mark	4	7
TIPPU Academic, teaching style	21	45
TIPPU Course modules	9	16
TIPPU Careers	7	10

<b>Name</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
TIPPU Accommodation	7	8
TIPPU Local	6	10
TIPPU Admin	4	4
TIPPU Rooms	4	4
TIPPU Non-academic Skills	3	5
TIPPU English	3	4
TIPPU Induction	8	9
TIPPU Need uncertain missing	20	30
TIPPU IT	3	3
TIPPU Finance	2	2
TIPPU Culture	1	1
TIPPA Type information post application	2	3
TIPPA Other	9	12
TIPPA Accommodation	8	8
Satisfaction		
SATIS Positive	5	5
SATIS pos Travel	3	3
SATIS Pos Study	2	2
SATIS pos Students	1	1
SATIS pos Staff	6	6
SATIS pos Module	2	2
SATIS pos Library	4	5
SATIS Pos Learn environment	3	3
SATIS pos Friend	3	4
SATIS pos Facilities	3	3
SATIS pos English	8	8
SATIS pos Cultural interaction	5	6
SATIS pos City	1	1
SATIS pos Accommodation	5	6
SATIS pos Other	7	7
SATIS Negative	0	0
SATIS neg Other	16	22
SATIS neg Module	8	12
SATIS neg Marks gained	10	11
SATIS neg Food	11	11
SATIS neg Facilities	1	1
SATIS neg English	7	10
SATIS neg Cultural interaction	8	13
SATIS neg Accommodation	7	8
SATIS score	33	36
POOL of information		
POOL TP WOM IS	5	7
POOL PP WOM IS	24	34
POOL PP Support	28	49
Perception UK education and [the University]	13	15
Need Recognition	18	19
MOTIV Motivation		
MOTIV to study postgraduate	27	39
MOTIV to study subject	31	42
MOTIV to study	1	1
Kuhlthau		
Initiation	1	1
Selection	14	24
Exploration	2	3
Formulation	3	3
Collection	2	3
Presentation	2	2

<b>Name</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
ISTP systematic rigour	9	14
ISTP Main source	2	2
ISTP Information source To Purchase WOM		
ISTP Edu agent	16	28
ISTP [the University] agent	3	4
ISTP Educational fair	3	4
ISTP Friend	16	24
ISTP Friend [the University]	19	29
ISTP Family	5	5
ISTP Staff [the University]	8	12
ISTP Staff Home	10	12
ISTP Employer	2	2
ISTP University Agent	3	5
ISTP Football agent	1	2
ISTP Staff in partner university	2	3
ISTP Information source To Purchase Social	14	15
ISTP Information source To Purchase Online	2	2
ISTP Email	0	0
ISTP Google	19	27
ISTP Website university	8	9
ISTP Website other	4	5
ISTP Website [the University]	19	28
ISTP Rank	13	16
ISTP Online other	1	1
ISTP Online review	9	10
ISPPU Information sources post purchase at university	0	0
ISPPU Friend	13	14
ISPPU Lecturer	15	27
ISPPU [the University] Staff	14	18
ISPPU Information point	13	15
ISPPU [the University] media	11	15
ISPPU Induction	5	5
ISPPU Online	3	3
ISSPU Other	4	5
ISPPA Information sources post application	13	16
Friendship group	28	44
FACTOR To Purchase impact	1	1
FACTOR Working experience	4	4
FACTOR Source of finance	4	4
FACTOR Sibling education	1	1
FACTOR Prior experience of [the University]	2	4
FACTOR Personality	3	6
FACTOR Parent education	2	4
FACTOR Friends	2	2
FACTOR Family support	2	2
FACTOR Family members study, travel abroad	1	1
FACTOR Experience of travel	6	8
FACTOR Experience of study abroad	1	1
FACTOR Cultural norms	1	1
FACTOR Post Purchase impact		
FACTOR Prior travel	3	3
FACTOR Prior experience of [the University]	1	1
Entrepreneur	4	7

<b>Name</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
<b>DMU Decision Making Unit</b>		
DMU Participant only	10	11
DMU Parent Sibling	22	31
DMU Other Family	4	4
DMU Information needs	4	4
DMU Friend	3	3
<b>DMP Decision Making Process</b>		
DMP Systematic	7	12
DMP Short cut	6	8
DMP Satisfaction with decision	5	5
DMP Rational	3	4
DMP Overall	8	14
DMP Length of time	4	4
DMP Impact future	14	18
DMP Feeling	7	7
DMP Enormity	4	7
DMP Emotional	3	11
DMP Choice set	10	11
DMP Anxious	1	1
DMP Adequate info TP	1	1
<b>Competitors</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>
MBA	6	12
Marketing and communications	10	18
Management	5	7
<b>Application</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Adjustment</b>		
ADJUS Other	2	2
ADJUS Time keep	2	2
ADJUS Learn	4	4
ADJUS Homesick	4	4
ADJUS Feel arrive	24	28
ADJUS Culture Shock	15	23



### Appendix 17 Qualitative Results Tables

The following tables illustrate mentions of the key themes in the qualitative interviews.

Table 8.26 Decision Making Unit Profile

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	Tot		
DMU																																								
Participant only (P)															1	1				1	1				1		1								1					8
Father (D)	1	1	1		1		1	1	1		1	1		1			1	1	1			1	1		1		1	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		25	
Mother (M)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1				1				1	1		1		1	1	1	1				1		1	1	1	25	
Brother/ Sister (BS)																																					1		2	
Grandfather/ mother (G)																		1										1											2	
Other family member (O)				1									1				1					1						1								1			2	
Influencer																																								
Friend(s) (F)	1							1	1				1	1			1		1			1				1	1		1		1	1	1	1			1	1	16	
Employer (E)	1												1																										2	
Agent (A) education, football							1					1	1					1		1	1	1		1		1		1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		17	
[the Uni] rep (W)			1																																				1	
Staff at previous institution (S)	1													1									1	1											1			1	6	
Number in DMU (no influencer)	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3		3	3	3	3	1	1	4	3	3	1	1	4	3	1	3	1	6	4	3	2	1	2	3	1	4	4	4	2.7		
DMU # include P	6	3	4	3	3	2	4	4	4		3	4	6	5	1	1	4	4	4	2	3	6	4	2	4	3	5	6	4	5	2	4	5	1	5	6	6	4.2		
Role in DMU (R Parent) (M Family) PA (Partner)																																								
Initiator	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	P	P	P	P	F	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	F	P	P	P	P	A	P	P		
Buyer	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R	R	R	R	P	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	R	R	P	PA	R	R		
Influencer	S		W				A	F	F		A	F	F	S		F	A	F	A	A	S	S	A	F	A	F	M	A	A	A	F	F	A		A	O	A			
Decider	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Gatekeeper	S						A					A										A	A	S			S	A									A			
University attend (1 yes 0 no)																																								
Parents at university		0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0		1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	21	
Father		0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0		1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	20	
Mother		0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0		1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	20	
Siblings at uni		1	1	1	1	N	N	1	N	1	1	N	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1		1	1	N	1	1	1	1	N	1	1	0	1	N	1	1	0	25		

Table 8.26 Decision Making Unit Profile contd

	Participant																																							Tot
	1	2	3	4	5	6	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39			
Entrepreneur																																								
Child of entrepreneur				1	1		1		0		0	0							0		1				0			1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10
Want to start own business				1			1	1	0	1	0	0		0				0	1	0	1	1	0	1				1		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Help in family business				1	1				0											0		1	0					1					1	1	0		0	0	0	6
Source of Income G = organisation	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R	R	P R	R	P	R		R G		P U	P	R	R		R	R	R	R	R	R	R	M	D	R	P	G O	D	R		

Key	Code
Parent	R
Participant only	P
Father	D
Mother	M
Brother/ Sister	BS
Grandfather/ mother	G
Other family member	O
Friend(s)	F
Employer	E
Agent (A) education, football	A
[the Uni] rep (W)	W
Staff at previous institution	S
Family	M
[the University]	U
Organisation	G
Partner	PA
Yes	1
No	2
Not applicable	N

Table 8.27 Motivation to study a Postgraduate Qualification

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	TOT
As a means of improving my career prospects	1	1	1			1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1		1	1	1		1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	29
To study further in a specific field of interest															1																									1
I wanted to gain/ update my skills to become more employable	1					1	1																														1	1		5
I wanted to change career																	1									1	1													3
My first degree was not specific enough for any particular job																																								0
My ongoing career required further qualifications																																								0
I would like to work in the education sector																																								0
To acquire knowledge for my current job																																								0
Personal satisfaction / make my family proud																1																								1
To enable progression to doctoral research																																								0
To enable progression to an academic career														1																										1
It is a requirement of my current job																																								0
To improve my English	1																						1	1																3
To obtain further qualifications																																								0
To gain a theoretical perspective																																								0
To get a promotion																																								0
My employer encouraged me to																																							0	
To enhance earnings							1	1			1																		1	1										5
To make a greater personal impact on society																																								0
To progress within a company							1												1	1														1					4	
To apply for a certain job																		1														1					1	1	4	
To apply for a job in the UK		1	1							1																								1				4		
To set up own business				1					1	1		1									1		1	1		1		1	1	1		1	1						12	
To help run family business	1			1	1																			1				1					1	1					7	

Table 8.28 Sources of Information Pre purchase

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	TOT
<b>WOM</b>																																						<b>90</b>
Education agent/ consultant								1		1		1	1					1			1	1		1			1		1		1	1	1		1	1	1	16
Football recruiter																					1																	1
University agent	1						1																			1				1								4
[the Uni] Agent									1																			1										2
[the Uni] Representative			1									1																										2
Postgraduate fair outside UK								1				1																	1									3
A friend(s)											1																											1
A friend(s) in home country	1	1		1	1									1			1				1								1					1	1	1	11	
Friends foreign country study elsewhere														1			1		1			1					1	1					1			1	1	9
Current or previous students that studied at [the Uni]		1		1		1	1		1	1				1			1	1	1			1	1				1	1	1	1	1	1				1	1	21
Family	1									1			1				1	1										1										6
Staff of [the Uni] home								1		1	1		1							1																		5
Staff of [the Uni] host									1																													1
Staff at previous education institution														1																								1
Partner lecturer			1																				1	1					1						1		1	6
An employer/ sponsor													1																									1
<b>Online sources</b>																																						<b>100</b>
Website of [Uni]				1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1				1	1	1	27
University websites								1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					1	1		1	1									1	1	1	1	18
Other website										1																										1		2
Rankings websites					1			1				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				1	1					1	1	1	1	1	1	19	
Google search								1	1	1								1						1	1	1	1				1				1	1	1	13
Other search																						1																1
Tourist websites															1																							1

Table 8.28 Sources of Information Pre purchase contd.

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	TOT		
<b>Online sources contd</b>																																								
City websites															1						1	1				1												4		
News feeds															1																								1	
[the Uni] Videos													1																1										2	
[the Uni] Email									1		1																												2	
Alumni/online reviews								1		1			1	1	1	1					1				1		1	1								1	1	1	12	
<b>Social media</b>																																								
LinkedIn groups															1																								1	
LinkedIn review/images																																							0	
Facebook groups								1							1						1														1				4	
Facebook adverts																											1													1
Facebook reviews/images												1																												1
Instagram reviews/images												1									1																1			3
YouTube												1																										1		2
Twitter													1																										1	
Student chat rooms/ online forum/ website/ blog																																								0
<b>Other</b>																																								
A printed document/guide from the higher education provider												1																												1
Brochures																																								
Prospectus																																								2
Visit to university								1			1																													2
Educational Fair											1	1																												2
<b>DMP (Fa family, G Google, Fr friend, Fa family, F father, St staff, O online, R rank)</b>																																								
Number of sources	3	2	2	3	3	1	2	10	7	9	6	10	10	8	10	4	6	5	5	6	8	8	3	6	8	3	7	6	5	3	3	2	7	4	8	10	9			
Main source								O	Fr		O	O	R	O	O	O	Fa	Fa	Fr	St	Fr	Fr	St	G	Fr	O		Fr	Fr				O			Fr	Fr			
Time took (month)										3	2	1			24								2															2		
Systematic								1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1							1	1		1								1	1	1		13	
DMU require IS																						1				1										1	1	1	6	

Table 8.29 Sources of Information Post purchase

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	TOT			
Sources post application																																									
[the Uni] staff						1							1		1		1			1		1															1		7		
[the Uni] Website									1																	1	1											1		4	
[the Uni] Portal																1				1																				2	
Email					1								1	1		1	1			1		1		1		1								1			1		11		
Agent															1	1													1							1			4		
Partner University																								1				1												2	
Information point					1																																	1		2	
Sources university																																									
Friends (pool)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1				1	1				1		1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1			24		
Lecturer		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1					1				1		1						1	1	1	1			1		1	1		18	
[the Uni] Staff			1	1		1			1				1				1			1	1								1									1		10	
Information point				1				1	1			1					1											1			1				1			1		10	
Careers/ leaflet																1															1					1	1		4		
Visa Hub					1							1															1											1		4	
Finance Dept					1																																		1		
Library		1	1		1							1																										1	1	7	
Ambassadors																				1										1										1	
[the Uni] Website		1		1	1							1																1	1	1	1									8	
Social Media																																								0	
Google								1																																2	
Printed Handbooks			1																																					1	
BB/email				1													1			1										1							1			5	
International student office																																								1	
Student Union				1																																				1	
Induction week														1	1	1													1								1			5	
Preessional					1																																	1		2	
Pool of Information																																									
Information received from friends		1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1				1	1				1		1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1					23	
Information provided to friends		1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1				1	1					1					1		1		1										17
Student source of WOM recommendation		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1				1			1		1		1	1			1		1	1			1			23	
Reasons to choose [the Uni] communicated		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				1	1					1			1		1		1	1		1		1							19	





Table 8.31 Types of Information and Choice Factors Pre Purchase: City

	Participant																																							Tot
	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39			
City			1	1						1		1										1																		
Safety/security in campus / area City							1					1			1							1																		
Crime rate/safety																																								
Amount of Rent / cost living	1														1																									
Size of the area Size of city/ population/ crowded			1												1	1																								
Local sights and activities Near tourist attractions/seaside															1																									
Artists Banksy, Aardman, creative															1																									
Near to family/friends															1																									
Networking opportunities															1																									
Weather in the area Beautiful							1								1					1						1														
Good living, lifestyle, environment			1	1						1	1														1															
Peaceful, quiet													1				1										1	1												
Clean, tidy, nice																			1			1																		
Best place to live UK																																								
Location												1							1	1	1				1		1													
Industrial/ business town																											1													
Young people not boring /lively											1																													
Near to nature																1																								
Cambodians live here			1																																					
Total	1	0	3	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	2	2	3	0	0	1	3	2	1	0	1	3	1	1	0	2	0	0	0			

Table 8.32 Types of Information and Choice Factors Pre Purchase: University/ Course

	Participant																																							Tot
	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39			
University/Course																																								
Content of specific courses Modules/programme content	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1					1	1		1	1		1		1	1	1		1		1	1		
Class sizes																				1																				
Staff student ratio							1																																	
Cost of course Cost/Value for money/ tuition fees	1	1						1	1			1	1	1										1	1		1	1	1	1	1			1	1	1		1		
Financial aid (scholarships, discount)		1								1																									1					
Accessibility																				1																				
Atmosphere																						1																1		
Application process/ease									1			1																									1			
Entry requirements												1		1													1			1		1		1		1		1	1	
Appealing/ attractive												1																												
[the Uni] students / friend come																												1			1	1	1				1	1		
Lack of change / ease/ comfortable		1	1						1																															
[Uni]highest student satisfaction rate																																								
University's reputation [the Uni] Good reputation													1	1			1	1	1			1													1		1			
Department's reputation																																								
[the Uni] reputation business								1	1												1		1		1															
Location											1					1	1																			1				
Ranking in university league tables							1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1							1			1	1							1	1	1	1	1		
Cost of living in the area												1																									1			
January intake																												1									1	1		

Table 8.32 Types of Information and Choice Factors Pre Purchase: University/ Course contd.

University/Course	Participant																														Tot										
	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32		33	34	35	36	37	38	39			
Requirement for previous background in business studies for management courses in many universities																																							0		
Study in partner institution	1			1	1	1			1																			1	1				1			1	1		10		
Study at [the Uni]		1							1																		1								1				4		
Support family																		1																					1		
Response to emails																																							0		
Accommodation								1		1															1													1		3	
Modern high technology building/ campus facilities							1			1														1		1	1	1		1						1				8	
Contact with the lecturers Lecturer support																											1	1												2	
Academic demands																																							0		
Teaching Style									1																			1		1										3	
Composition of student population/ ethnic			1																																				1		
Career advice/fair																	1																				1			2	
Employability after course/ career prospect		1			1								1											1				1												5	
Opportunities to find part time jobs												1																												1	
Opportunities to undertake a internship/placement																												1													1
Preessional course																																								1	
Opportunity to apply theory in practice									1														1																		2
Opportunity to be creative/ innovative																														1											1
Learning environment / materials																												1									1				2

Table 8.32 Types of Information and Choice Factors Pre Purchase: University/ Course contd.

University/Course	Participant																																							Tot	
	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39				
Relationship IU Vietnam																																			1					1	
Relationship other partner		1									1																1												1		5
Lifestyle, good living													1														1													2	
Ethnic mix																						1					1													2	
Football team																						1																		1	
Business speakers, DBA																																								1	1
Political																																								1	1
Recognised by Government												1																													1
Accredited										1																															1
No Masters in Events in Vietnam						1																																			1
Established course vs B University		1																																							1
	4	7	3	2	4	2	5	3	10	4	2	9	5	5	3	3	2	5	3	6	3	3	4	4	6	6	4	10	3	8	3	6	9	7	3	6	10				
Evaluation	1	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39				
Depth (L = low, M = medium, H = high)	L	M					M	L	M	L	L	H	M	M	H	M	L	L	M	M	L	V	M	M	M	L	L	L	M	V	V	L	H	L	L	L					
Number University evaluate UK	5						2	2	3		3	8	4	5	9	3	3	1	2	3	4	4	2	6	5	8	1	2	3	5	1	1	2	5	3	2	3				
Number University apply to UK	1						2	1	1		1	1	4	5	3	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	2				
Time (month)									3		2	1	3		2		1	2		8		2	2	2	2	2		1		1											
Choice set depend on agent/football recruiter							1					1								1	1					1			1	1								1			8
Choice set depend on partner	1																					1			1																3

Table 8.33 Types of Information Post Purchase

	Participant																																				Tot	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36			
Type of Info pre arrival																																						
Teaching Style/assessments				1	1																																2	
English																																					0	
Accommodation	1			1	1	1		1			1		1	1	1	1						1		1											1	14		
Local					1									1	1																						3	
Timetable															1																						1	
Admissions												1																									1	
Transport					1	1																															2	
Visa					1	1																															1	3
Health check																																					1	1
Type of Info University																																						0
Academic																																						0
Getting a good mark															1					1					1	1			1	1	1						7	
Library searching	1														1																						3	
Academic writing (report, critical thinking, referencing)				1											1				1	1	1						1	1			1		1				9	
Friends						1															1		1	1				1	1	1	1		1				9	
Module grades									1			1																										2
Specific Modules		1	1	1				1		1					1									1														8
Module submit assignment								1																														1
Careers/ Employment		1	1												1											1											1	6
SPSS								1																														1
Writing a coursework / doing exam				1		1				1					1																					1		5
Local																																					1	1
Accommodation	1			1			1	1							1	1																				1		7
Food shops	1				1										1																					1	1	5
Bus	1				1			1							1																					1	1	6
Travel to other towns	1														1																					1		3
Restaurants	1														1																					1		3
Tourist attractions	1														1																							2
Administrative																																						
Visa						1					1	1													1												1	5
Schengen visa	1																																					1
Student card						1																																
Finance (Payment, bank letter)						1						1				1																						4

Table 8.33 Types of Information Post Purchase contd.

	Participant																																				Tot
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36		
Navigation																																					
Location of rooms							1								1		1				1																4
BB/ Email																												1									1
Timetable																1							1				1										3
Skills																																					
Time management																																					0
English language	1																																				1
Digital Marketing	1																																				1
IT																				1																	1
Soft skills						1																															1
Culture				1																																	1
Ease of access to information		1			1																																2



Table 8.35 Factors impacting on Information Search Post Purchase

	Participant																																				Tot					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36						
Cultural norms (culture)																																			1				1			
Prior experience of [the Uni]	1	1	1			1				1	1															1				1	1	1							10			
Experience of travel									1					1														1	1								1			5		
Family support in country															1					1																				2		
Prior knowledge of country									1																		1										1				3	
Experience of study abroad				1	1								1					1									1										1				6	
Reliance on friends							1	1																														1			3	
Age													1														1											1			3	
Knowledge of IT																																									1	
Personality																																										
Level of confidence																												1										1	1			4
Positive mental attitude												1																													1	







## Appendix 18 Saturation tables

Table 8.38 Saturation Table Interview Three

Theme	Interview Participant							
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Profile								
Entrepreneur child							X	
Parents at university							X	
DMU university decision	x	x	X	x	x	x		
Motivation to study postgrad	x	x	x	x	x	X	X	x
Information seeking and impact on experience								
Ease of access to information	x	x				x		
Sources of information	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
most useful source of information		x				x	x	x
Need info on	x	x	x	x		x	X	x
Desperate need of info		x	x	x	x	x	X	x
Impact of lack of information on student	x	x	x	x		x	X	x
Missing info	x	x	x			x	X	x
Importance of have correct info when required	x			x		x		
Helpful staff		x	x			x		x
Impact of accomm on experience				x			X	x
Importance of careers info / dept		x	X					
Induction week							x	x
Overall experience								
Positive experiences	X	X			x	x	X	x
Above expectations	x	x				x	X	x
Below expectations	x	X				x	X	x
Hard experience		x	x					
Culture shock re teaching style		x	x	x	x	x		
Culture shock timing		x	x				x	x
Culture shock/ feeling when arrived		x	x	X	x	x	X	x
Interacting with foreign students	x	x	x	x		x	X	x
Handbook confuse – need interact face to face		x	X					
Difficulty with marketing analytics		x	x	x				
Difficulty with Digital Marketing							X	x
Confidence to access info – grows		x	x			x		
Perception postgrad qualification home country			x			x		

Table 8.38 Saturation Table Interview Three contd.

Theme	Interview Participant							
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Embed employability skills in course			x					
Impact of info on experience /satisfaction	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x
Pool of Information								
Information received from friends	x	x	X		X	x	X	x
Information provided to friends	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x
Student as source of WOM recommendation	x	x	x	x			X	x
Reasons choose uni communicated		x				x	X	x
Satisfaction								
Satisfaction level	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x
Impact of experiences on decision making	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x

Table 8.39 Saturation Table Interview One

Theme	Interview Participant																														
	R9	R10	R11	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	R21	R22	R23	R24	R25	R26	R27	R28	R29	R30	R31	R32	R33	R34	R35	R36	R37	R38	R39	
Profile																															
Entrepreneur	x														x					x	x			x	x					x	
Parents University attendance	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
DMU	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Motivation to study	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Need recognition	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x							x					x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Timing		x							x	x	x	x	x	x									x					x			
Feelings	x		x																												
Information search																															
Sources of Information																															
WOM																															
Education agent/ consultant Agent	x	x			x	x					x		x	x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Education postgraduate exhibition/ fair outside UK					x																										
A friend(s)				x																									x	x	x
Friends home country			x				x			x		x			x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x						x	
Current or previous students that studied at UNI/ course UNI student/ alumni		x					x			x		x								x	x		x		x	x			x	x	
Friends foreign country study elsewhere							x			x												x		x		x			x		
Family						x				x	x											x									
Staff of UNI		x		x									x	x									x								
Teacher/tutor/lecturer at previous education institution	x						x																								
UNI Representative						x																									
Partner lecturer															x	x		x					x				x			x	
An employer/ sponsor						x																									
Online sources																															
UNI website	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	
University websites	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	



Recommendations to others (choice factor)	x	x	x		x	x	x			x			x	x	X		x	x			x	x	x			x	x		x	x	
Evaluation of alternatives																															
Choice Factors																															
Country								x																							
Lower fees Cost						x		x				x																			
1 year course (time)							x	x			x	x				x															x
English speaking																															x
Culture																															x
Dual nationality																															
Studied at UNI /in home country																															
Quality of education/tuition in host/ reputation UK reputation for education	x				x	x					x		x	x	x																x
Distance from home country																															
Visit to UK	x																														
Heritage (civilisation)																															
Visa allow exit																															
Many of nationality study here/ friends																															
Opportunities to stay in the country afterwards																															
Job opportunities																															
Not Australia																															
Not America																															
Not NZ																															
Not Canada																															
Knowledge of host country																															
Number of countries consider	1	1	1	2				2					1																		1
Perception of UK postgrad qualification in home country	x	x	x					x																							
Evaluation Choice Factors City																															
Safety/security in campus / area Crime rate/safety	x																														
Amount of Rent																															







DMP evaluation stage																																				
Depth																											X									
Number evaluate	25	2	3	3	8	5	5	9	3	1		2		3			5								5	1	50		2	3						
Time																												X								
Feelings																											X		X	X						
Purchase / Application process																																				
Speed of response	x		x		x	x	x	x						x			x	x							x	x		x		x						
Number apply to	2 5	1	1	1	1		5	3					1	1			2	2							3	1		1		2		1	2			
Impact on decision		x					x	x																		x										
Satisfaction																															X					
Ease of application through agent	x				x																						x	x			x	x				
Ease of application		x					x																			x										
Depth of DMP	X																																			
Short cut		x		x						x	x	x		x	X	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									
Rational	x							x	x				x				x														x	x	x	x		
Emotional	x																																x			
Systematic			x		x		x																								x	x	x			
Length of time			3		1			2 y		2y																										
Reflection/Learning from DMP				x	x		x	x																							x		x	x	x	
Competitor	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		X	x	x														x	x	x	x	x	
Google			x				x		x																										x	x

Table 8.40 Saturation Table Interview Two

Theme	Interview Participant																										
	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	R21	R22	R23	R24	R25	R26	R27	R28	R29	R30	R31	R32	R33	R34	R35	R36
Profile																											
Entrepreneur															X					X	X			X	X		
Parents University attendance	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
DMU	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Motivation to study	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sources of Information post application																											
UNI staff				X		X		X					X														
UNI Website				X														X									
UNI Portal						X				X																	
Email				X	X	X	X			X			X				X										
Agent					X	X																					
Sources of Information university			X								X					X		X	X		X				X		
Friends (pool)	X		X		X	X	X			X	X		X								X		X		X		X
Lecturer	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X								X						X
UNI Staff			X			X	X																				
Information point			X				X		X																		
Careers						X																					X
Visa			X																								
Finance																											
Library			X																							X	X
UNI Website			X						X								X										
Web search engines							X																				
Social Media										X																	
Printed Handbooks							X																				
BB/email							X			X															X		
Events																											
Induction week				X		X													X			X			X		X
Preessional																						X					
Interacting with foreign students – source of info			X	X				X							X	X		X				X	X		X		X
Information seeking and impact on experience /satis	X										X																X





## Appendix 19 Additional Qualitative Findings

In this section participants' motivation to study individual courses is investigated. This will be useful to university marketers trying to position their courses to appeal to different postgraduate segments.

Participants were motivated to study particular courses to fulfil different needs. Those who had chosen to study marketing or marketing communications had done so because they intended to gain a job in that field, return to existing employment or get involved in running businesses. Participants 1, 2, 10, 22, 25 and 28 wanted to find marketing roles in their home countries often in global companies:

*P1 'After I did a job for a year in sales and marketing I wanted to improve my skills to progress my career. I want to gain a job in marketing for a big international company like Tesco.'*

Participant 14 wanted to study the Corporate Communications module so she could work in Public Relations (PR) when she returned to Mauritius. Similarly, Participants 15 and 35 were studying marketing communications in order to go back into a career in PR or marketing in Vietnam and Kenya.

Participant 32 was planning to set up her own business and needed to learn about marketing to do this:

*P32 'I don't know how to do the marketing. That's why I choose this course because I want to do my own business.'*

Other participants who had already worked before postgraduate study knew that they needed to study marketing to develop the competencies they needed to succeed in the workplace:

*P20 'I realised that without Marketing you cannot really do a business well [...] we have to do a lot of collaboration with other companies. So that will help me to develop this kind of knowledge.'*

*P19 'First of all when I started my job my study background was English [...] And in this merchandising work whatever I do I have to work as a bridge between buyers and suppliers everywhere. So, whatever happens I*

*do need some core information about marketing [...] So that's the motivation. I feel the urge of getting academic knowledge on it. So that is why I'm here.'*

The International Management course was chosen as it would lead to roles in business development (P27), project management (P23) or help them run their family business (P29). Participants would gain the theoretical knowledge that they could apply in practice in the workplace:

*P27 ...'to gain some more knowledge and theory. So that after I graduate I can apply some theory to doing my job.'*

*P29 'So I want to learn something else about SWOT analysis and about marketing and digital marketing, which is really popular in Vietnam right now.'*

*P36 'And, since my undergrad was a bit specific because it was more concentrated on environment and sustainable development. So, this time I wanted to go for a broader area. So, this was one of the reasons to go for international management.'*

Participant 23 was motivated to study an MBA to gain the skills to be a manager:

*P23 'I decided to study a MBA as I wanted to improve my management skills.'*

Some participants were motivated to study in the same field as their undergraduate degree as they were more confident in those subjects:

*P14 'I will be confident in this field. It's not going to be like rocket science for me [laughs]. So I know it's like in the main field and I am quite at ease with it. That's why I said yes I will probably be able to do it.'*

Other participants decided to gain additional skills and knowledge by studying new subjects such as those in the Business Management course:

*P18 'Yes I did economics as my undergraduate so why do the same thing at Masters.'*

### Appendix 20 Overview of Qualitative Study Findings

Table 8.41 below shows that the objectives and research questions have been fulfilled by linking them to the findings from the study and the academic contribution made.



Table 8.41 Objectives and Research Questions, Findings of the Study and Academic Contribution

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 1 Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	RQ 1: What were the sequence of decisions taken before enrolling at university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sequence of decisions identified in this study for 'new' prospective postgraduates were similar to those proposed by Manns and Swift (2016). Prospective postgraduates who were unaware of universities that they could study in and had no prior experience or connection to a university, approached the sequence of decisions to be made in a rational manner and decided firstly on the country, then the course and university and finally the city to study in.</li> <li>• Alternative sequences of decisions were identified in this study which have not been discussed in the literature. If prospective postgraduates had a shortlist of universities given them by the agent or partner staff, they would not investigate countries to study in but would make decisions regarding the course and university to attend followed by the city to study in.</li> <li>• Potential postgraduates that had previously studied at a UK university or undertaken the UK university's undergraduate degree at a partner university would decide that they wanted to continue to study at the university and then decide which course to study.</li> </ul>
	RQ2: To what extent were the decision making and information searching processes iterative and cyclical?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study builds on the work of Kuhlthau and suggests that the information search process was iterative as prospective postgraduates revisited prior stages in Kuhlthau's model and reviewed the sources and types of information they had accessed previously. This occurred throughout the decision making cycle.</li> <li>• This study agrees with previous research that has found that the decision making process is iterative rather than linear and sequential. Prospective postgraduates moved backwards and forwards through the stages of the decision making process. They went back to check on previous decisions they had made concerning the country, city, university and course to attend and revisited previous stages in the process.</li> <li>• The rationale for a cyclical decision making model has not been addressed in the literature so this study fills a gap in the research.</li> <li>• The decision making and information searching processes were cyclical in nature. The rationale for this was that postgraduates learnt from the decision making and information searching processes that they had gone through. What they had learnt then informed their search strategies and decision making processes for a future high involvement purchase in a continuous circular manner. This topic is further addressed in research questions 13 and 14.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 1 Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	RQ3: To what extent was the approach to the decision making cycle and information searching process rigorous and rational?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study adds to the body of research concerning the rigour and the rationality of the decision making process and information searching process of different groups of international postgraduates. For the majority of postgraduates there was a lack of rationality and information used during the information searching and decision making processes, so the author's hypothesis is confirmed.</li> <li>• The author proposes a Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology based on the rigour of the information searching and decision making processes and the rationality employed when making a decision. The different types identified are: New systematic, New semi systematic, New systematic shortcut, New semi systematic shortcut, Local systematic, Local semi systematic, Local limited, Experienced systematic, Experienced semi systematic, Experienced limited, Connected systematic, Connected semi systematic, Connected systematic shortcut and Connected limited.</li> <li>• This typology is of practical benefit to universities when segmenting prospective postgraduates and tailoring communications messages and media so these segments of postgraduates are provided with the breadth of sources and types of information required at the time they are needed.</li> </ul>
	RQ13: What have the postgraduates learnt about the decision making process that will inform future decisions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study adds to the body of knowledge concerning how learning about the decision making process informs future decisions.</li> <li>• Postgraduates learnt from the decision making processes that they had gone through and claimed that this would inform their future decision making processes.</li> <li>• Those postgraduates who were satisfied with the decision they had made based on a rigorous and rational decision making process would repeat the same process again.</li> <li>• Postgraduates who were dissatisfied with the decision they had made felt that their experiences of decision making would inform their future behaviour. In the future they would approach the decision making process in a rational way and take time to make the final decision.</li> <li>• Postgraduates had learnt from the decision making process they had undertaken to evaluate less alternatives and information sources, to take account of unexpected factors and to think more critically when making decisions in the future.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 1 Explore the stages of the international postgraduates' decision making cycle from need recognition to post purchase evaluation	RQ14: How did the postgraduates' experiences of information searching affect future information searching behaviour?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study fills a gap in the research as the impact of postgraduates' experiences of information searching on future information searching behaviour has not been researched</li> <li>• Postgraduates' experiences of information searching affected future information searching behaviour.</li> <li>• Postgraduates performing a rigorous search for information and satisfied with their decision would approach the information searching process for a high involvement product in the same way in the future.</li> <li>• Postgraduates who had not performed a systematic search for information, had skipped stages in Kuhlthau's model, taken shortcuts and were dissatisfied with the decision they had made had learnt from their experiences and would perform a more rigorous search for information in the future.</li> </ul>
Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	<p>RQ4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p> <p>RQ5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International postgraduates have distinct information needs when deciding which country, city, university and course to attend, applying to a university and then purchasing a course. This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the information requirements of international postgraduates in the pre purchase stages of the decision making cycle.</li> <li>• Previous research has not looked at information sources used in the application and purchase and post purchase stages, so this study fills a gap in the research.</li> </ul> <p><u>Need Recognition Stage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study fills a gap in the research as it considers the sources of information that were used to trigger a need for postgraduate study in the need recognition stage. Previous research has not examined these triggers.</li> <li>• Sources of information that triggered need recognition were job adverts or WOM sources such as parents, siblings, family members, friends, lecturers, agents and employers who became part of the decision making unit.</li> <li>• Universities should consider the sources of information they could use to trigger a need and target members of the DMU in their communications.</li> <li>• This study extends the research on the timing of need recognition and the time period between recognising a need and enrolment and has implications for university marketers.</li> <li>• The timing of need recognition varied between postgraduates and depended on their age, work experience, prior travel to the UK, prior study in a UK university, family experiences of travel and study abroad and whether the parents had attended university themselves.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
<p>Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.</p>	<p>RQ4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p> <p>RQ5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p>	<p><u>Need Recognition Stage contd.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of postgraduates recognised they had a need to study a postgraduate degree after they had completed their undergraduate or previous degrees. This could be from the date of graduation to up to seven years afterwards.</li> <li>• For other postgraduates their need was triggered whilst studying at university and many of them recognised the need to investigate postgraduate study while in their final year at university. 15 postgraduates studied a postgraduate degree immediately after their undergraduate studies and these students are a core target audience for universities.</li> <li>• The time period between need recognition and enrolment at university was between two months and six years. The majority of participants recognised that they had a need to study a postgraduate qualification from 12 months to 3 months prior to enrolment and this was often during their undergraduate studies.</li> <li>• The research found that the longer the time period between initial recognition of need and enrolment, the more thorough and rational was the approach to the decision making process.</li> <li>• This study extends the research on motivation to study a postgraduate degree as it identifies a segment of prospective postgraduates who applied for a postgraduate degree to gain the skills they required to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses or help to run their family businesses.</li> <li>• A segment of postgraduates from non-English speaking countries who wanted to improve their English language skills and cultural awareness to help them improve their performance in the workplace and in their own businesses was also identified.</li> <li>• This research agrees with previous studies and the author's quantitative research that postgraduates were motivated to study a postgraduate qualification to improve their career prospects, to gain or update skills to become more employable. Postgraduates also wanted to be successful in job interviews and gain employment, enhance their job opportunities and earnings, advance their careers, apply for certain jobs in their home countries or the UK or change their career path. For those who had already been offered jobs by previous employers the postgraduate degree would give them the competencies to progress within their companies and earn a higher salary.</li> <li>• The postgraduate qualification was perceived by postgraduates as a means of competing in the job market and differentiating themselves from students who had studied an undergraduate degree or postgraduates who had not been abroad to study.</li> <li>• This study disagrees with previous literature that claimed that postgraduates were motivated by personal reasons to undertake a postgraduate qualification such as to study further in a specific field of interest, to study for personal satisfaction, to gain a theoretical perspective or to make a personal impact on society.</li> <li>• These findings have implications for universities' segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies and impact on the types of information universities should provide to prospective postgraduates to attract them to study at their institution</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
<p>Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.</p>	<p>RQ4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p> <p>RQ5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p>	<p><u>Evaluation of Alternatives and Purchase Stages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study extends the body of knowledge on sources of information used by prospective postgraduates as it explores when the sources were used during the decision making process and the types of information each source provided.</li> <li>• This study agrees with the literature that WOM sources were influential sources for prospective postgraduates as they evaluated alternative universities and decided which course to purchase as they were perceived to be more credible, impartial and less biased and therefore more trustworthy.</li> <li>• Contrary to Manns and Swift's (2016) study and the quantitative research which found that lecturers at the previous institution were the most important source of information, this study found that friends who were current or previous students at universities were relied on most as a source of information. The concept of a friend was broad as identified by Towers and Towers (2018) and encompassed students who were not known to the postgraduates. Using friends to provide recommendations on where to study often led to a curtailment of information searching and a shortcut to the final decision without postgraduates fully evaluating universities they could study at.</li> <li>• Family members including parents, siblings and partners were the second most important WOM source.</li> <li>• Agents who were independent educational agents, university agents, academic staff taking on the role of agents in partner institutions and a football agent were influential sources. Agents applied to universities on behalf of the participants, filled in accommodation requests and advised on visa interviews and paperwork making the decision making process easier and less stressful. Agents built relationships with participants over time as they got to know their needs and became a trusted source of information. Participants perceived that agents provided a valuable service and recommended them to their friends.</li> <li>• Lecturers at the previous institution helped to form the choice set of a participant by recommending universities to investigate which in many instances were those that their university was affiliated to. They provided advice as to which universities would be suitable according to the academic level of the participant. They could reassure participants that they would be able to cope with academic study at postgraduate level. Participants regarded them as a credible and trustworthy source of information that they could rely on and so the decision as to which university to attend was often based on the lecturer's advice.</li> <li>• Contrary to Moogan's (2020) study and the quantitative research, employers were not referred to as a key source of information because few participants had worked prior to postgraduate study and those that had worked often wanted to change career.</li> <li>• There was little contact between prospective postgraduates and staff in the host institutions during the evaluation of alternatives stage until they wanted to apply, when they sought advice in order to fill out the forms and submit the paperwork.</li> </ul>

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<p>Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.</p>	<p>RQ4: What sources of information were accessed at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p> <p>RQ5: What types of information were required at each stage of the decision making cycle pre purchase by postgraduate students and other influential members of the decision making unit?</p>	<p><u>Decision Making Unit</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study adds to the body of research as it investigates membership of the decision making unit for a prospective postgraduate student, the roles adopted by DMU members and their information requirements.</li> <li>• The average number of members in the DMU was four. The most influential members of the DMU were found to be parents, friends, agents and staff at partner institutions when deciding which postgraduate qualification to choose.</li> <li>• 30 out of 39 of prospective postgraduates were influenced by their parents as they progressed through the decision making cycle. The degree of parental influence has previously been understated in the literature. Parents performed the roles of initiator, buyer, influencer and decider regardless of whether they came from collectivist or individualistic cultures which extends the current research.</li> <li>• Parents wanted recommendations from other parents and family members on which universities to choose for postgraduate study and were interested in information concerning university rankings, employment opportunities, levels of safety at the university and the student lifestyle in order to ensure that their children would be safe and happy.</li> <li>• The more roles parents adopted in the DMU and the more influential they were in making the final decision the less systematic and rational were prospective postgraduates' information search and decision making processes.</li> <li>• Friends who were current students or alumni played the roles of initiator and influencer in the DMU and were significant sources of information when making the decisions as to which country, city, university and course to choose. Friends provided information on the real experience of studying at the university, the atmosphere, teaching quality, assessments, learning environment, quality and friendliness of staff, engagement with lecturers, employability, safety, university reputation, facilities, ease of adaptation to the UK culture, likelihood of friendship groups and what life was like on the campus, in the city and whilst travelling to other places.</li> <li>• The significant role of educational agents and partner university staff as gatekeepers in the DMU has not been previously researched. For 11 of the 39 prospective postgraduates, agents and staff provided lists of universities to investigate and these lists often formed the complete choice set of universities that were considered. Agents and partner staff were also initiators and influencers and provided information on the university's unique selling proposition, facilities, courses, modernity, employability rating, student satisfaction, fees, payment procedure, application process, accommodation, requirements for IELTS test, advice on the recognition of the qualification by home country authorities, health checks, weather, preparation for the visa interview and working while studying. Post application they reassured students and provided practical advice. Agents also applied to universities on behalf of postgraduates.</li> </ul>

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<p>Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.</p>	<p>RQ4 and RQ5</p>	<p><u>Decision Making Unit contd.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prospective postgraduates who were the sole members of the DMU and made the decision to study at the university alone perceived higher risk in the decision and undertook rigorous information searching and decision making processes. The level of cognitive dissonance was potentially higher amongst those who were financing the purchase of the postgraduate degree and had expectations which had been formed from impersonal sources of communications. There is an opportunity for universities to segment prospective participants into those that are supported by DMU members in making their decisions and those that are the only member of the DMU and have to make their decisions by themselves.</li> </ul>
	<p>RQ6: What sources of information were accessed in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?</p> <p>RQ7: What types of information were required in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This study is unique in that the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle starts when the postgraduate student has purchased a degree and lasts until graduation.</li> <li>This study fills a gap in the literature concerning the sources and types of information required by postgraduates between purchase and arrival as this has been previously unexplored.</li> </ul> <p><u>Pre arrival</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgraduates acknowledged that the period between purchase and arrival at the university was a difficult time for them. They were anxious about the transition to postgraduate study, whether they would cope with the demands of academic work, enjoy student life, make the desired friends and contacts and fulfil their goals and wanted reassurance that they had made the right decision.</li> <li>Pre arrival WOM information sources included: agents, partner university staff, host university staff and online sources; university website, the university portal and emails to university departments such as accommodation, visa and finance and to the international office concerning all aspects of living in the UK.</li> <li>Postgraduates wanted universities to actively communicate with them at this time through a personal call by WhatsApp, a dedicated Facebook group, a Twitter account, interactive communication through Reddit and Quora and emails highlighting tailored events for postgraduates once they arrived.</li> <li>Information was required by postgraduates on the following: visa application and interview, accommodation, tuition fees, deposit, course details, transport, health and wellbeing, timetable, restaurants, local tourist activities, employment, finance, health checks, the weather, tips before coming to the university, what to bring and safety.</li> <li>Postgraduates, especially those from collectivist cultures, wanted the opportunity to start building their friendship groups before they arrived at the university. Social media accounts and pre departure events to be hosted by partner universities would enable them to start to meet fellow postgraduate students.</li> </ul>

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Objective 2 Examine the information requirements of international postgraduates at all stages of the decision making cycle and the information requirements of other influential members of the decision making unit during pre-enrolment.	<p>RQ6: What sources of information were accessed in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?</p> <p>RQ7: What types of information were required in the post purchase evaluation stage of the decision making cycle by postgraduate students?</p>	<p><u>At University</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study fills a gap in the research as the focus in the literature has been on the information needs of international students at university rather than specifically international postgraduate students.</li> <li>• The WOM sources used by postgraduates at university included the following: university hubs, academic staff, non-academic staff, current students, societies, friendship groups, study groups, student ambassadors and online sources including; university website, Blackboard, Google searches, email and library representatives.</li> <li>• Postgraduates with poorer English language skills wanted direct face to face interaction with a lecturer to answer their academic queries. They wanted to be able to drop in to see a lecturer at any time to have their queries answered and preferred video communication regarding the assignment rather than text heavy emails which they did not read.</li> <li>• Postgraduates wanted information on academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, SPSS, marking criteria for assessments, campus navigation, student ID, grades, job opportunities, employability skills, IT, English language tuition, accommodation, transport, restaurants, shopping, tourism, social activities, registration with a doctor and the Schengen visa.</li> <li>• There was a desire amongst postgraduates to become part of the international student community and they wanted the university to put in place mechanisms by which this could be achieved: welcome events, city and campus tours, cultural exchanges, language classes, class activities and ongoing Facebook groups where they could interact with postgraduates from their own countries and other countries, build their network, gather support and gain access to the pool of information available.</li> </ul>
Objective 3 Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	RQ10: Were there any gaps in information provision during the stages of the decision making cycle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study fills a gap in the current research concerning gaps in information provision.</li> <li>• Pre purchase information was required on the application process, accreditations, provision for religions, student safety and recognition of the degree by the home government.</li> <li>• Pre arrival information needed to reassure postgraduates they had made the right decision and would enjoy the student experience, relieve any anxieties they had, prepare them for academic study and university life. Information was required on: health and wellbeing services, campus navigation, virtual campus tour, what to bring, academic study, referencing and assessments.</li> <li>• Postgraduates wanted pre arrival information and events to help them meet fellow students and adapt to the university environment: pre departure events in home country, university country societies, welcome events, induction sessions, city tours, a buddy system, cultural and language exchange events, English language tuition. Desired sources of information to connect with the university and fellow students were WhatsApp and Facebook groups, Reddit, Quora and Twitter.</li> </ul>

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Objective 3 Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	RQ10: Were there any gaps in information provision during the stages of the decision making cycle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once at university some postgraduates identified gaps in information provision regarding: accommodation, IT systems, employment, English language tuition, practical information (shopping, healthcare, visas, transport, finance), academic information (academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, SPSS, marking criteria for assessments). Desired sources of information were drop in chats with lecturers and videos.</li> <li>Vulnerable groups that lacked information included postgraduates who arrived early or late, lived alone off campus, came from a country that did not have a large representation, did not join friendship or study groups or country societies, were younger and lacked experience of travelling, working or studying abroad or did not study in a partner university.</li> </ul>
	RQ11: To what extent did the information provided structure the expectations of postgraduates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This study adds to the research on the impact of information provision on expectations.</li> <li>The information provided by WOM and university controlled sources structured the expectations of postgraduates as to the academic and student lifestyle they would experience at university.</li> <li>Miscommunication of information concerning the university and the student lifestyle wrongly structured expectations and led to lower or higher satisfaction levels.</li> <li>Postgraduates relying on university generated sources of communication rather than WOM information from current students were more likely to have incorrect expectations and lower levels of satisfaction.</li> </ul>
	RQ12: How did the information provided influence the level of postgraduate satisfaction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This study adds to the research on the impact of information provision on satisfaction levels whilst at university.</li> <li>Gaps in information provision as detailed under research question 10 led to participants feeling anger, frustration and dissatisfaction with the university experience and impacted on their satisfaction levels.</li> <li>Postgraduates who lacked information and were struggling to find accommodation or employment, could not operate the university IT systems, had issues with the finance department or how to access English language tuition and a doctor were more dissatisfied with their student experience than other postgraduates.</li> <li>Postgraduates who had access to the pool of information and support provided by their peers as discussed under research question 9 were most likely to be satisfied with the university experience.</li> <li>The vulnerable groups who lacked information as discussed under research question 10 were not as satisfied with the university experience compared to other postgraduates.</li> <li>When postgraduates experienced difficulties in trying to obtain information to understand the academic requirements of the lecturers for their assessments, because they wanted to gain high marks, or could not speak directly to the lecturer at any time to have their questions answered, they became dissatisfied.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 3 Explore any gaps in information provision during all stages of the decision making cycle and the influence of information provision on international postgraduate student satisfaction	RQ15: How informed were postgraduates during the process of making a purchase choice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study extends the current LIS research into another context. This research agrees with LIS scholars who identified that individuals, such as postgraduates, were limited in the amount of information that they could cognitively process and if they experienced information overload, they would dispose of information in order to take a shortcut to the final decision. The study also found that postgraduates would adopt a satisficing strategy and choose the first acceptable solution rather than optimise their information searches.</li> <li>• The level of informedness of prospective postgraduates varied according to the length and breadth of the information search process in terms of the number of sources and types and the time spent looking for information and linked to the Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology proposed.</li> <li>• The study found that despite living in an information rich world there was a lack of information used when making significant high involvement decisions. Many prospective postgraduates made the decision to study at the university with low levels of informedness as they had not performed a systematic information search process over a period of time.</li> <li>• Some postgraduates acknowledged the lack of information search and the fact that they were not fully informed however they were satisfied with the university experience. Only one student apologised for not being better informed and so questioned their level of informedness. Other postgraduates were dissatisfied with the decision that they had made to attend the university and regretted the lack of rigour they had employed in the information search process and their lack of informedness.</li> </ul>
Objective 4 Assess the factors that influence the information search process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates	RQ8: What factors influenced the information search and decision making cycle of postgraduate students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study extends the current research as it is the first time that a model of the decision making cycle has been devised that shows the factors that impacted on both the information search and the decision making processes.</li> <li>• Factors impacting on the breadth and depth of the information search and decision making processes and the rationality with which postgraduates approached these processes as identified in the literature included: age, gender, country of origin, role in the DMU, perceived risk, personality, parental education of prospective postgraduates and the time available to make the decision.</li> <li>• This is the first study that has recognised the influence of the experience of work, travel or study abroad, income sources, cultural norms, DMU members and roles, siblings' education, family member location and WOM recommendations on the information searching and decision making processes.</li> <li>• In the post purchase stage there were previously unexplored factors that impacted on the rigour with which postgraduates performed their information searches; postgraduate's country of origin, prior experience of studying at the University or a partner institution, travelling abroad and the presence of WOM influencers such as friends and other postgraduates.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 4 Assess the factors that influence the information search process and decision making cycle of international postgraduates	RQ8: What factors influenced the information search and decision making cycle of postgraduate students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postgraduates who were older, female, had work experience, perceived higher risk in the decision, did not have WOM sources of information, did not belong to collectivist cultures and countries, were the sole members of the DMU, had not travelled or studied abroad, did not have parents or family members in their DMU or living in the UK, did not have parents or siblings who had studied at university and whose personality was such that they desired not to experience a new challenge or adapt to a new environment performed a more systematic information search, were more likely to undertake a systematic and rigorous information search and take more time to evaluate alternative universities and consider their purchase.</li> <li>• When at university those postgraduates who had prior experience of studying at the University or a partner institution, had travelled abroad, had friendship or study groups, belonged to collectivist cultures and countries, performed less rigorous information searches and relied on WOM information.</li> <li>• There was a relationship between the rigour with which the information search process was carried out and the level of involvement in the decision linked to the postgraduates' perceived risk when making the decision.</li> <li>• This has practical application as universities need to understand the factors that impact on the decision making cycle of postgraduates as it will enable them to group prospective postgraduates into segments to be targeted and provide them with the types of information they require through the optimal channels</li> </ul>
Objective 5 Explore the contribution of current postgraduates and alumni to the pool of information available to prospective and current postgraduates when making their decision and studying at university	RQ9: How did postgraduate students contribute to the pool of information throughout the cycle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study extends the current research as previous authors have not looked at postgraduates' contribution to the pool of information.</li> <li>• International postgraduate students made a significant contribution to the pool of information available to other postgraduates throughout all the stages in the decision making cycle so information pool is placed at the core of the model</li> <li>• Postgraduates performed the role of information providers as they gave WOM recommendations and information as to which university to attend to prospective postgraduates, and WOM information once at university on all aspects of university life. They were also information searchers who used information contributed to the pool by other postgraduates and WOM influencers when making their decisions and answering their queries.</li> <li>• A virtuous circle of communication was created.</li> <li>• Universities need to stimulate WOM recommendations from alumni and encourage current postgraduates and other WOM influencers to contribute to the pool of information available to postgraduates whilst at university.</li> </ul>



Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 6 Provide conclusions on the role of information within international postgraduates' decision making cycle and the information requirements at each stage		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study adds to the current body of knowledge in the field of LIS and marketing as indicated in the academic contributions listed above and as stated below.</li> <li>• Rather than focus on information seeking behaviour and the information seeker the study explores the role of information in making a decision and how information is used by the information seeker and is grounded in real life experiences.</li> <li>• This study extends the LIS research by investigating the information needs of postgraduates in terms of the sources and types of information required, the role of the information provider and the contextual factors of the search that triggered the need for information.</li> <li>• Conclusions are provided above on the role of information within international postgraduates' decision making cycle and the information requirements at each stage.</li> <li>• Practical recommendations have been made to universities in section 7.1 to inform their marketing communications strategies in terms of segmentation, targeting, promotional media and messages based on the types of information required.</li> <li>• This study helps the UK Government and universities to understand the decision making process and information requirements of international non-EU postgraduates to attract them to the UK and then ensure they are satisfied whilst studying in the UK.</li> <li>• Universities and the Government can use the Decision maker and Information Searcher Typology of international postgraduates developed by the author to decide on the information needs of different segments.</li> <li>• A future toolkit for universities and the Government could be produced based on the findings and recommendations. The toolkit would help them to decide on segments of international postgraduates and other members of the DMU to target, how to position the UK and the institution as a favourable place to study and the media to use to communicate with the chosen target audiences. The toolkit could also address the information requirements of international postgraduates once at university to help contribute to their satisfaction levels.</li> </ul>
Objective 7 To contribute to the understanding of information behaviour by evolving a decision making cycle model		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study makes a theoretical contribution by evolving a new conceptual model of the role of information in the decision making cycle of individuals when making a significant purchase decision.</li> <li>• The model is of practical value to information providers such as universities. It helps them to understand the links between the information search and decision making processes, how consumers seek and use information and the types and sources of information required at different stages in the decision making cycle.</li> <li>• The author's proposed Iterative Decision Making Cycle model is unique as it builds on insights from a theoretical model from marketing and consumer behaviour scholars, and Kuhlthau, a LIS scholar, to create a new cyclical model.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Research Questions	Findings and Academic Contribution
Objective 7 To contribute to the understanding of information behaviour by evolving a decision making cycle model		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In creating the model built on the research surrounding two well established models, the author builds on existing theory and creates a new model that is useful and so answers LIS scholars' previous criticism concerning LIS research.</li> <li>• The model more accurately reflects consumer decision making in the current era and overcomes the limitations of previous consumer decision making models which were often sequential in design.</li> <li>• The model is a useful addition to the models already provided as it is a research based model which provides a framework that can be used to explore information searching behaviour within the context of making decisions pertaining to the purchase of high involvement goods and services.</li> <li>• Kuhlthau's Information Searching Process model is pictured as an inner ring in the model as consumers search for information throughout their decision making process</li> <li>• , so information search is no longer a distinct stage in the decision making process.</li> <li>• The model is cyclical which reflects the iterative nature of the information searching and decision making processes and the fact that consumers learnt from these processes to inform future decisions and information searching behaviour.</li> <li>• The model accommodates differing levels of rigour in information searching and decision making and both rational and emotional approaches to decision making.</li> <li>• The model accommodates that fact that decision making was not sequential and planned, multiple decisions were made on the way to purchase and shortcuts taken.</li> <li>• Additional factors are included in the model which impact on both the decision making and information searching processes and the degree of rigour and rationality with which consumers engage in these processes.</li> <li>• The model reflects the influence of membership of the decision making unit and the roles adopted by the DMU members of the information search and decision making processes of consumers.</li> </ul>

### Appendix 21 Detailed Recommendations to Universities

Based on the evaluation of the literature, the research findings and the conclusions the following detailed recommendations are made to universities in Table 8.42.

Table 8.42 Recommendations to Universities

<b>Segmentation and targeting</b>	
Universities should segment the prospective postgraduate market and tailor communications messages and media to the different target audiences, so they are provided with the breadth of sources and types of information required at the time they are needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgraduates from the following countries could be targeted as they are growth markets for outbound students up to 2027; China, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Indonesia and Kenya, or have a large outwardly mobile population; Taiwan, Malaysia, Russia, Brazil and Syria</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Decision Maker and Information Searcher Typology identified could be used to identify different segments to target based on their decision making and information searching behaviour: New systematic, New semi systematic, New systematic shortcut, New semi systematic shortcut, Local systematic, Local semi systematic, Local limited, Experienced systematic, Experienced semi systematic, Experienced limited, Connected systematic, Connected semi systematic, Connected systematic shortcut and Connected limited</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could target members of the DMU such as parents, employers, agents and partner university staff and provide them with the sources and types of information required</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgraduates who are the sole members of the DMU perceive more risk in the purchase and could be targeted as a distinct segment. They are more likely to experience post purchase dissonance</li> </ul>
Once at university postgraduate students can be segmented into different groups according to their information needs and vulnerable groups could be targeted with additional information and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgraduates who are new international postgraduates compared to returning international students who studied an undergraduate degree at the university could be identified and additional information and support provided</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vulnerable groups of postgraduates should be identified. They are postgraduates who arrived, early or late, live alone off campus, come from a country that does not have a large representation, do not join friendship or study groups or country societies, are younger and lack experience of travelling, working or studying abroad or did not study in a partner university</li> </ul>

<b>Need Recognition Segments and Timing</b>	
<p>Universities should understand the triggers to need recognition to enable them to decide on the segments they should target with their communications. Knowledge of the timing of need recognition allows universities to schedule their communications at an appropriate time. An appreciation of the role of influencers in triggering the need to study helps universities to identify influencer segments and target them with relevant and timely communications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could advertise their postgraduate programmes in the graduate job sections in print and online media where prospective postgraduates are looking for jobs</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should actively promote the options regarding postgraduate study at their institution to undergraduate students while they are in the last two years of studying at a UK or overseas university or partner institution. Promotion should be increased in the final year of study and shortly before graduation as this is often when the need is triggered. This will help the university become one of the choice set of brands</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Those who graduated with an undergraduate degree who had been working for one or two years could be targeted by universities with communications to trigger the need for a postgraduate qualification as this was often the time that they started to consider further study</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities running courses which equip potential postgraduates with the skills to progress to a postgraduate degree such as English language courses could provide the students with the types and sources of information to persuade them of the benefits of further study at the university and the lecturers with the tools to promote this</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing potential students and influencers such as parents, siblings, family members, friends, lecturers, agents and employers who often trigger the need for postgraduate study, with the sources and types of information needed to inform them of the benefits of studying a postgraduate degree at the university could help to encourage prospective students to study at the university (see communications for enrolled postgraduates section below)</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Motivate Study</b>	
<p>Universities should tailor the messages they use to trigger a need in prospective postgraduates for further study. Communications messages should then position the university as best fulfilling postgraduates' needs in order to attract them to study at the institution. Messages to international postgraduates should focus on the three key motivations to study a postgraduate qualification: employability, English language skills and cultural understanding and entrepreneurship. Universities should fulfil the promises made to prospective postgraduates whilst they are at university and provide them with the support required to develop their employability and English language skills and gain the competences and knowledge required to become entrepreneurs.</p>	<p><b>Employability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prospective postgraduates' prime motivation to pursue further study was to gain employability skills to progress their careers and this should be the focus of university communications to prospective students</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses should be positioned as offering the development of employability skills that postgraduates need and how these skills will help them to find jobs in the industries desired quickly after graduation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information should be provided to prospective postgraduates on career prospects, employability statistics, average earnings of graduates, careers linked to different courses, recognition of the degree by employers, employability skills developed when studying a course and success stories of employed graduates</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should communicate the support offered by the university careers service to postgraduates to help them find jobs whilst at university and after graduation, write their CVs, prepare for interviews and assessment centres</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should promote opportunities for work placements, work experience and part time jobs whilst at university</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should focus in their promotional messages on opportunities for postgraduates to attend careers fairs, develop business contacts and network with employers</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should communicate opportunities to stay in the country afterwards and work to those prospective postgraduates who are allowed to do so</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Messages linked to employability should emphasise the reputation of the university for business, the number of business courses offered, the modern, high technology facilities and links with the business community</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst at university every opportunity should be taken to communicate the links between what is being taught to the employability skills required by graduate employers. This will help postgraduates understand employers' requirements</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The careers service should focus on providing postgraduates with the guidance they require to develop the skills needed for the type of roles they are planning to apply for in the industries they are targeting</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Motivate Study</b>	
<b>Employability</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The careers service should promote vacancies and actively help postgraduates during the summer months when postgraduates are focusing on their future careers</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should equip postgraduates with the skills they need for the careers that they want to pursue. In order of importance the required skills were problem-solving, communication, leadership, IT, technical, teamworking and creativity</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating employability skills workshops into the taught programme throughout the year would develop postgraduates' skills and make them aware of what they could be doing to enhance their graduate attributes</li> </ul>
<b>English language and Cultural understanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities could target those postgraduates who come to the UK to study to improve their English language skills and enhance their understanding of different cultures. Messages could focus on enhancing employability attributes and the ability to interact with people from different countries in the workplace or when running businesses.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to attend English language classes should be communicated to students in a way that makes it easy to understand the communication. A short video is one option. Secondly the option to enrol in the classes should be as easy as possible and communicated through various channels including during class time</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class exercises could be planned so that students from different nationalities are mixed together so that English becomes the language spoken</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class activities or assessments should include the opportunity to learn about the cultures of fellow students. For example, students could research different cultures and present to other students on their cultures</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group projects could be designed whereby the successful cultural interaction of the group is part of the assessment criteria</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postgraduates should be actively encouraged to form study groups within their courses to support each other through academic study and assessments. The groups could comprise postgraduates of different nationalities and those who have already studied at the university in the UK or in a partner institution overseas</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Motivate Study</b>	
<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could target the entrepreneur segment of the market who are motivated to study a postgraduate qualification to acquire the marketing and management skills, English language capabilities and cultural understanding required to set up their own business or run the family business. Many of these students opt to study business rather than entrepreneurship courses</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities to enhance postgraduates' ability to run their own business and market it could be emphasised in university communications</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Testimonials from alumni who have successfully set up their own business or been successful in running the family business could be included in university communications</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An entrepreneurs' group could be set up through Facebook or face to face informal meetings arranged to allow postgraduates to network with like-minded entrepreneurs and build their contacts</li> </ul>
<b>Media Channels for Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
Universities should use the media channels that prospective postgraduates consult when deciding on a university to choose and recognise the important role that WOM sources play in triggering a need amongst potential postgraduates and informing them of universities and courses to attend.	<b>Agents and Staff in Partner Institutions</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should actively target agents and academic staff in partner institutions as they have a significant role to play as trusted and credible sources of WOM communication for prospective and current postgraduate students. They make recommendations to students to form their choice set, communicate the benefits of postgraduate courses and actively sell courses. Throughout the decision making process agents and partner staff provide advice and support which is valued by participants and reassures them</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agents are an important target audience for universities. Universities should recruit agents, train, motivate, remunerate and maintain positive relationships with them in target countries to support prospective postgraduates through the decision making process</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgraduates respond well to agents who were prior students of the university as they perceive that they have prior experience of studying there so universities should try and recruit where possible past students as agents</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should identify staff in partner institutions as target audiences and motivate them to recruit and support prospective and current postgraduate students</li> </ul>



<b>Media Channels for Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Agents and Staff in Partner Institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should provide agents and staff at partner universities with information concerning every aspect of the university, its courses, application and enrolment process, accommodation, preparation for study, the city, Government's visa policies, the weather, tourism and travel in the desired format (eg website, presentations, brochures, testimonials) so they can answer all the questions that prospective postgraduates have prior to arrival in the UK</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The module leaders of the host institution could brief undergraduate students by Skype during the joint delivery of the programme to help them understand the requirements of the current assessment and the expectations of studying in the host institution. This could encourage them to consider the university in their choice sets for postgraduate study</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could run Skype sessions to give current undergraduates an idea of what it is like to study a postgraduate qualification in their institution and motivate them to apply</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University representatives should support events run by agents and partner institutions to recruit new postgraduate students</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should capitalise on events arranged at partner institutions such as university fairs and graduations and provide opportunities for prospective postgraduates to mix with alumni of the UK university to get their questions answered and receive recommendations</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint programmes can be established for prospective postgraduates who want to spend part of their degree studying in their home country and the rest of the time in the UK university. These joint programmes are desirable to some prospective postgraduate students</li> </ul>
<b>Current Students and Alumni</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prospective postgraduates who have friends currently studying at an institution will rely heavily on them as a source of information concerning the student experience, academic study and lifestyle. Universities should recognise the lifetime value of current students who become alumni and maintain a relationship with postgraduate alumni in the long term</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should deliver consistently high quality services to postgraduates and should encourage WOM recommendations from students studying at the institutions and alumni to prospective postgraduates, their families, staff at academic institutions and employers through appropriate relationship marketing activities</li> </ul>

<b>Media Channels for Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Current Students and Alumni</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term relationships could be maintained by establishing an alumni network through newsletters, social media groups and social and networking events organised by the university. Annual celebration events could be hosted to remain connected with alumni</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities could produce publicity and run events to raise awareness of the university in the home country using alumni who have successfully gained employment and had a positive student experience</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WOM recommendations from alumni could be captured in testimonials to be used in communications on the website, in brochures and social media</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities could actively connect current and prospective postgraduates together and encourage communication by alumni of the benefits of studying at the university to employers, prospective postgraduates and industry representatives by running networking events in the foreign country, mentoring schemes and social media groups</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alumni could be invited to undergraduate graduation and be present during postgraduate fairs</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using testimonials from satisfied postgraduate students and linking to postgraduate social media posts which focus on the student experience and life after graduation helps to provide tangible evidence of the quality of the postgraduate educational services being offered</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should encourage alumni employed after graduation to promote the name of the university within their workplaces and encourage the recruitment of further postgraduates from the university by their companies</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current postgraduates could be introduced to classes of undergraduates in the foreign institution through Skype sessions and become buddies to those students who join the university the following year</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should encourage current postgraduates to take pictures and to make videos of their experiences whilst at university and post them on social media, then the university can follow them on their social media accounts</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should provide current students and alumni with the core messages of the institution and up to date statistical information on, for example, satisfaction and employability, so they can promote the institution to prospective postgraduates and help to differentiate it from competitors</li> </ul>

<b>Media Channels for Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Current Students and Alumni</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could position postgraduates as partners of the university rather than consumers, so a relationship is built with them and they become advocates of the university</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could encourage postgraduates to become student representatives and input their ideas into proposals for new courses and initiatives</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could offer postgraduates a residential trip and opportunity to undertake a short placement</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could create alumni groups on LinkedIn and maintain them</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could employ international postgraduates to create meaningful content on social media to be accessed by future postgraduates</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities can encourage students to post photos and videos to social media by running a competition to generate new photos such as the campus tour competition</li> </ul>
<b>Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should target parents as a distinct segment who have specific needs and provide them with the information they require to help trigger their children's need for postgraduate education and help their children to make the final decision.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents need to be reassured by universities that the amount of finance required to send their children to a university in the UK is worthwhile</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information should be provided to parents regarding the reputation of the university, employability prospects on graduation and opportunities to gain skills to set up a business or work in the family business after study.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should reassure parents that their children will be safe and happy in the university environment and will enjoy their student experience.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents in countries such as China could be targeted by university representatives who speak their language, for example Mandarin.</li> </ul>
<b>University media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should use the most popular online channels to communicate with their target audiences: university websites, Google and Baidu searches, ranking websites and online student reviews</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should ensure that the university website includes testimonials from students through YouTube videos and Instagram especially for those students who do not know past or current postgraduates at the university</li> </ul>

<b>Media Channels for Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<p><b>University media</b> contd.</p> <p>Universities should ensure that the information provided through their media channels paints a true picture of what life is like as a postgraduate studying at the university so that their expectations are correctly structured.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The website should provide all the types of information required by prospective students while evaluating alternatives, applying and post application (see recommendations on university and course and post application communications)</li> <li>• Universities should make the information on their website clear and the website should be well-structured and easy to navigate so prospective postgraduates can quickly locate the information they require</li> <li>• Images and videos on the website are remembered by prospective postgraduates and should be tailored to them as a target audience</li> <li>• Students want to see images of people like themselves on the website and in social media so different nationalities should be included. For those students from collectivist countries seeing postgraduates like themselves in mixed friendship groups will give them a positive impression of the university</li> <li>• Prospective postgraduates like to watch short videos and each course should have its own video stressing a positive student experience and the employability message</li> <li>• Universities should provide virtual tours of the university on the website and the opportunity to have a live online chat with university staff or contact them by email</li> <li>• Universities should carry out keyword research to understand the most popular search terms to ensure search engine optimisation e.g. rank, best, top, school, Masters, university, postgraduate</li> <li>• The majority of the participants did not go onto social media however they remembered seeing Instagram images and YouTube videos on the website. Universities should ensure that the university is visible on the most popular social media: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for students who do actively use social media and for those especially who do not who do not have WOM sources they can rely on</li> <li>• Universities could help postgraduates find a university to study in by producing a 'Find your Perfect Masters' app</li> <li>• The contact details of university staff should be clearly visible on the website and the offer made to prospective postgraduates from these staff to provide any advice needed</li> <li>• Less important sources of information for international postgraduates included open days and visits, the prospectus and educational fairs. Universities can decide whether to focus on the more important online sources.</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<p>Universities should try and make the decision making process for prospective postgraduates as easy and stress free as possible by providing them with the types of information they require to help them make decisions regarding the country, city, university and course to choose.</p> <p>Postgraduates are wary of marketer controlled information so the university's communications messages should, as far as possible, be positioned as coming from the current postgraduates themselves regarding the services offered by the university. The content should be interesting</p>	<p><b>Country Decision Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK Universities and the UK Government compete with universities globally and other countries for postgraduate students. They need to understand the types of information international postgraduates use when evaluating countries in order to provide that information and position the country as a desirable study destination</li> <li>• Universities and the Government could highlight the positive reputation that the UK's education system has and how the UK universities and specific university programmes compete on a global basis for international postgraduate students</li> <li>• Prospective postgraduates require information on how their employability in their home market and in overseas markets could be enhanced by studying in the UK. Reassurance that employers have a positive perception of the quality of the education delivered in the UK and that the UK's qualifications are recognised by employers in the home country and overseas could be provided. Tangible evidence of job opportunities in home and overseas markets and testimonials from employed graduates from different countries helps to prove graduate employability</li> <li>• Information on the visa policy regarding the number of times that an international student can exit and enter the UK and opportunities to work in the UK whilst studying is required</li> <li>• Universities could continue to lobby the Government to change the visa policy and allow international postgraduate student to stay in the UK for a longer period of time after graduation and obtain work in order to prevent a decline in numbers</li> <li>• A comfortable climate is desired amongst international postgraduate students who use information on the weather to help them choose a country to study in. Information, images and testimonials regarding the weather in the UK could be provided to them</li> <li>• For prospective postgraduates from collectivist cultures who want to study with their peer group so they will have friends and a support network, information on the profile of the UK population of overseas students of importance to them in terms of nationality and age. Universities can promote the fact that their country attracts large numbers of students from certain countries with a certain age profile</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Country Decision Communications</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive points of differentiation for studying in universities in the UK compared to other countries should be stressed in communications. The UK as a study destination has lower tuition fees than in America and Australia, Cambridge English is spoken and cultural differences between the UK and some countries like Malaysia are easier to adapt to. Similarly, the shorter length of a UK postgraduate degree programme compared to Australia, Canada, the USA and Thailand is an advantage as it saves students money and allows them to start working more quickly. The location of the UK is a differentiator for postgraduates whose home countries are geographically proximate so they can travel home more easily to visit relatives or in the case of an emergency</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prospective postgraduates are looking for countries to study in that have a safe environment and low crime rates. Universities and the Government could provide data to evidence the safety of the UK as a study destination</li> </ul>
<b>City Decision Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should promote the benefits of living and socialising in the associated city in their communications especially if the city is perceived positively in the UK and overseas</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prospective postgraduates are concerned with how they will cope with the weather especially in universities in the North of England or Scotland. Universities could use testimonials to reassure them that current students cope with the climate</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information regarding the location of the university and its proximity to other major cities such as London, tourist attractions, the countryside and the coast, the cost of living in the city and the ethnic profile of the city population should be provided to prospective postgraduates</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities located near cities that are perceived to be safer with lower crime rates have an advantage over universities in cities that are perceived by postgraduates to be less safe. Information on safety and crime rates in the city could be provided by universities</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgraduates are interested in finding out about the environment in the city and how this will impact on their student lifestyle. Types of information which should be provided by universities include the quality of life and healthy and natural environment in the city, whether the city is peaceful, clean, tidy and easy to live in and if it is relatively lively with activities for students to participate in</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about the creative aspects of the city, opportunities to network with creative and business people and the presence of local industries is important to postgraduates looking for contacts for jobs in the future. Universities could consider providing testimonials from current students to evidence these types of information required by prospective postgraduates</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>University and Course Decision Communications</b>  <b>Reputation and ranking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reputation and ranking of the universities and their courses were key types of information that influenced prospective postgraduates' choice of university. Universities should provide information on reputation, rankings and student satisfaction in university communications</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The impact of rankings varied between different countries with postgraduates from Africa and Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Saudi Arabia relying on them to a greater extent as a type of information. Communications could be tailored to each market according to the importance placed on this type of information</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A good reputation amongst people in other countries and good rankings were based on positive student experiences and universities should encourage the communication of those experiences by alumni in their home countries as discussed above</li> </ul>
<b>Course Curricula</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The course curriculum was one of the most important types of information required by prospective postgraduates to help them decide on the course and the university that they wanted to study at. The modules offered helped to differentiate one university's courses from another. Comprehensive information on course curricula could be provided by the university so prospective postgraduates can easily compare the modules offered on one course with another course in the same university or another university which was of importance to prospective postgraduates</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could provide certain courses which were in demand amongst prospective postgraduates; Global Marketing, Public Relations and Corporate Communications and popular modules in digital marketing and social media marketing</li> </ul>
<b>Profile of postgraduate population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A balanced ethnic mix of students from the UK, Europe and international countries was a unique selling proposition for some prospective postgraduates and this should be emphasised in university communications</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could communicate to prospective postgraduates the opportunities for them to interact with students from different countries, learn about their cultures and improve their English language skills</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could also reassure prospective students who want a community of students from their own country that the university works hard to encourage students from the same country to support each other through the student union, social media and study groups, cultural events, language classes and so on</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Profile of postgraduate population</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Images used by the university could picture ethnically diverse groups of students working together in the classroom and interacting together outside the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>Student Lifestyle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lifestyle that the postgraduate would experience is communicated by current students to prospective postgraduates. Universities could support this WOM communication with their own communications message.</li> <li>• Universities could promote the positive aspects of the student lifestyle at the university, in the city and whilst travelling elsewhere to prospective postgraduates. This could be undertaken through student testimonials, encouraging current postgraduates to post images and videos on social media and then link them to the university's social media</li> <li>• Universities could provide information to prospective postgraduates on what the student experience was like for current postgraduates whilst studying at the university: how they learnt, studied, met friends, interacted with lecturers and spent time on the campus, in the city and elsewhere</li> <li>• Universities could provide testimonials from students regarding the ease of adaptation to student life and the culture in the UK and what they had learnt from their cultural and social experiences</li> <li>• Universities could provide videos of actual class sessions and simulate class sessions online in order to provide prospective postgraduates with a taste of the postgraduate's experience in class</li> <li>• Universities could provide prospective postgraduates with the email address of current postgraduates whom they could contact directly to answer their queries</li> <li>• If universities offer a support programme for postgraduates which aims to increase their coping skills, provides culturally sensitive counselling, encourages them to talk about acculturative stressors and normalise their experiences, then this should be promoted to prospective postgraduates</li> </ul>
<b>January Start</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having the opportunity to start a postgraduate qualification in January was perceived to be of benefit to prospective students. The lack of availability of universities who offer courses starting in January means that this is a differentiator for universities and should be strongly promoted</li> <li>• Allowing postgraduates to study a joint programme, starting off in their home countries and then continuing the next part of their studies in the UK, allows students to save money and continue to work in their home countries for longer. Universities who offer such a programme have a competitive advantage over those that do not, and this should be communicated</li> </ul>



<b>Communications Messages to Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Staff Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic and non-academic staff who have experience and actively support students at university is desired by prospective postgraduates and should be emphasised in university communications</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could provide information on the qualifications and length of experience of their lecturing staff to prospective students. Staff profiles could include examples to demonstrate the friendliness, approachability and support provided by lecturers. This would help to demonstrate that the teaching staff deliver a high quality educational service. This information could be used on the website and in promotional campaigns</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The friendliness and helpfulness of non-academic support staff could also be covered in communications</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teaching quality within the university, the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate study and teaching styles in the UK and other countries were important differentiators for prospective postgraduates and should be covered in communications</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could communicate the university's unique teaching style to prospective postgraduates and how it encourages independent thinking, the expression of one's own ideas and arguing one's point, the ability to think creatively and use one's imagination, and the development of practical skills such as communication, presentation and brainstorming</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could focus in their communications on how the teaching style allows postgraduates to apply theory to practical real life business situations so enhancing the students' knowledge and understanding and preparing them for the workplace or running their own business</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could communicate to prospective postgraduates any differentiators such as smaller class sizes, high staff student ratios, less lecturing and more workshops and assessments comprising more courseworks and less examinations</li> </ul>
<b>Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prospective postgraduates have a favourable impression of modern buildings and the use of advanced technology. Universities could ensure that information on the level of technology used in the classrooms, computer labs and library and the quality and modernity of the facilities offered in terms of the accommodation, buildings, classrooms, sports centre and student union is communicated through the website and other communications media</li> </ul>

<b>Communications Messages to Prospective Postgraduates</b>	
<b>Further information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on the library regarding its facilities, size, opening hours and the availability of books and databases could be provided to prospective postgraduates as they help to differentiate one university from another. 24/7 opening hours, availability of software programmes, computers and large collections of books and online databases are positively perceived by postgraduates</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should ensure that they provide information to answer prospective postgraduate questions on the following topics: support for different religions, advice on safety in the university, how to apply for accommodation, accreditations from other bodies, recognition of the course by the home government and opportunities to engage with current international students at the university</li> </ul>
<b>Application Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application process and pre and post application communications impacted on the number of prospective postgraduates applying to a university and whether potential students felt reassured that they had made the right decision to apply to the university. Universities could ensure that the application process is quick and easy, that there are no requirements for additional fees or information and that offers are made quickly</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the application process for prospective postgraduates who have studied at partner institutions is easier, quicker and without the need for an IELTS test then this should be communicated to this segment of students</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent email contact should be maintained with applicants to ensure that any queries they have can be answered</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The contact details of relevant members of the academic and non-academic staff should be provided so the prospective postgraduate can have their queries answered about making the application and to reassure them regarding living and studying at the university</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The university website should contain answers to all the questions prospective postgraduates have concerning living and studying at the university (as discussed in recommendations concerning university and course decision communications above)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agents should be provided with all the information they need to be able to reassure applicants and purchasers that they have made the right decision (as discussed under agents)</li> </ul>

<b>Communications for enrolled postgraduates</b>	
<p>Once postgraduates have purchased a degree, university communications should focus on providing these students with the types of information they need through the correct sources before they arrive at the university, on arrival and then whilst studying at the institution</p>	<p><b>Pre Arrival Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre arrival communications from universities should reassure prospective international postgraduates that they had made the right decision in applying to the university and would allay any concerns about the transition to postgraduate study, living at university and finding friends once they arrived. Universities could also help to establish communications channels to support a community of international postgraduate students who could help each other during their student journey</li> <li>• Postgraduates could be given the contact details of a member of the academic staff with whom they could have a conversation in order to answer their questions on academic study and where to gain further information</li> <li>• Universities could set up Facebook accounts for courses and international postgraduates and attach postgraduate students once they have accepted their offer. Postgraduates should receive a welcome message or video from the Programme Leader and pertinent information links and videos with the information required. Emails could also be used to send information to postgraduates containing video messages</li> <li>• Universities could encourage the building of friendship groups prior to arrival through Facebook groups, putting postgraduates in touch with societies for different nationalities and encouraging partner institutions to put postgraduates in touch with each other</li> <li>• Universities could host pre-departure meetings for international postgraduates at partner universities through university representatives</li> <li>• Universities could provide information to postgraduates who have accepted their offer on welcome events, induction activities, the health and wellbeing service, campus navigation, what to bring, accommodation, sport, the Student Union, employment opportunities, eating out, shopping and term dates</li> <li>• Information could also be provided by universities on the visa application and interview, tuition fees, deposit, course details, transport, timetable, finance, health checks, the weather, tips before coming to the university and safety</li> </ul>

<b>Communications for enrolled postgraduates</b>	
<b>Pre Arrival Communications</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postgraduates wanted to prepare for academic study prior to arrival so information could be provided to them on how to approach academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, time management and previous postgraduates' best advice about studying at the university</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The parents and supporters of postgraduates could be targeted through the prospective postgraduate with information that they would want to know about the university and student life such as reputation, employability record, safety and the student lifestyle at the university</li> </ul>
<b>On Arrival Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On arrival at university postgraduates wanted to feel that they belonged to the university, were given the opportunity to meet fellow students and to quickly adapt to the university environment. There is an opportunity to run tailored international postgraduate events to help the transition, build a community and allow students to network with each other</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postgraduates could be collected from the airport and after arrival at the institution they could be briefed on their accommodation, transport, shopping and sports facilities</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On arrival events should realign any miscommunication that has been received and structure expectations regarding student life and study</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A personal video call could be made to postgraduates on arrival</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities could provide events to ensure that postgraduates feel part of the university community and encourage them to form friendship groups such as welcome events, campus tours, city tours, cultural and language exchange events, meeting in a restaurant or for afternoon tea, a treasure hunt, Chinese origami or calligraphy workshops, English language tuition and social events that are not based on drinking alcohol</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities could set up social media groups by nationality so postgraduates can communicate with their peers and build up their support network</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities should ensure that practical information concerning accommodation, transport, food shopping, restaurants, registering with a doctor, keeping safe and obtaining a visa is provided to all postgraduates on arrival at whatever time they arrive pre or post the semester starting. Videos are a preferred source of information</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postgraduates could be buddied up with existing students who have already studied at the university, for example undergraduates that have gone onto study a postgraduate course or postgraduates who have remained at the university or peer assisted learning (PAL) students</li> </ul>

<b>Communications for enrolled postgraduates</b>	
<b>On Arrival Communications</b> contd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University campuses are often perceived to be confusing places to navigate. Sending out campus maps prior to arrival, putting a virtual tour on the website and organising campus tours on arrival would help students locate their classrooms, sports facilities, library, health centre and so on</li> <li>• Postgraduates who have never studied in a UK institution could be provided with an induction over a two week period that teaches them the expectations of academic staff in the institution</li> <li>• During the induction postgraduates could undertake exercises in library searching, referencing and academic writing and produce academic work that is then marked during the induction and detailed feedback provided to the student</li> <li>• Postgraduates could be briefed on accessing teaching materials, timetables and other relevant information online</li> <li>• A tour of the city could take place and any gaps in knowledge concerning shopping, transport, restaurants, social activities, tourist attractions and so on could be addressed</li> <li>• Postgraduates could be shown how to access university IT support services and download WIFI and IT programmes onto their computers</li> <li>• Postgraduates could be supported in registering with a healthcare provider and filling out any other paperwork required</li> <li>• Bridging English classes could start during induction and the location and timing of subsequent classes publicised</li> <li>• Employability could be a focus with postgraduates being made aware of the services offered by careers and how to access them and how to locate job opportunities. They could have the opportunity to work on their CVs, and cover letters and do interview training</li> <li>• The development of IT skills through workshops and access to online teaching materials could be provided</li> <li>• Universities could provide postgraduates with an academic personal tutor on arrival who appraises the student's work whilst at university</li> </ul>

<b>Communications for enrolled postgraduates</b>	
<b>At University Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once postgraduates were at the university they were keen to learn as much as possible to support them in their academic study and assessments, to help to establish their desired lifestyle and gain the skills required for employment. Universities could provide tailored ongoing communications to postgraduates with regular campus updates, events, services, student news and views</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could provide additional information and tuition on the IT systems to postgraduates who are less knowledgeable about IT, for example those from African countries</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information concerning academic study should be clearly signposted to postgraduates in class or outside class. Information is required on academic writing, reading, referencing, report writing, library searching, SPSS and marking criteria for assessments. Postgraduates could be provided with practical class activities to help them learn the necessary academic skills and understand the requirements of assessments</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could accommodate those postgraduates who want to be able to drop in and see a lecturer at any time without making an appointment</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could do more to help postgraduates find accommodation. This is especially relevant for those that do not have a large cohort of students from their home country who can support them or those that arrive near the start of the semester when accommodation is scarcer.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further support could be offered to postgraduates who are from countries who send fewer students to the University (India, Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya). Opportunities for these postgraduates to locate students from the same country could be offered. Links to any relevant international societies could also be provided</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities could identify groups of postgraduates with enhanced informational needs, such as those that travel or study abroad for the first time, arrive at the university out of term time, are from a country that does not send many students to the university, did not study at a partner institution or those who live alone off campus, and target them with additional information regarding support.</li> </ul>