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Erasmus student work placement mobility: A UK perspective

Hannah Deakin

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

Loughborough University

April 2012

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Abstract

International student mobility has become an increasingly important and prominent part of the global higher education landscape over the past two decades (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). Despite a long history within Europe, student mobility has increased significantly over recent years partly due to the support and encouragement provided by the Erasmus programme. Since its introduction in 1987, the Erasmus programme has traditionally facilitated student mobility for studies within Europe; however, in 2007 the programme expanded and now also supports student mobility for work placements. There is a growing body of literature on student mobility for the purpose of studies, but student work placement mobility has largely been overlooked in existing research.

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge and offers a new perspective on student mobility by exploring the drivers, experiences and effects of Erasmus work placement mobility. The UK has performed well in terms of Erasmus work placement mobility compared to its previous performance for Erasmus study abroad and therefore provides an interesting case study for this research. The findings presented in this thesis offer new insights into the motivations, experiences and perceptions of UK students who go abroad in Europe during their undergraduate studies to complete a work placement. Overall, this thesis stresses the importance of assessing subtypes of student mobility and highlights that work placement mobility is very different to study abroad in numerous ways.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The international mobility of students has increased significantly in recent years. Statistics suggest that there were a total of 2.9 million students studying abroad in 2006, compared with 1.3 million in 1995 and 0.6 million in 1975 (OECD, 2008). This number is expected to rise to 8 million by 2025 (Altbach, 2004). It has also been argued that these figures are in fact an underestimation of student mobility due to the availability and reliability of mobility data (Szarka, 2003; Kelo et al, 2006; Teichler, 2012). Over recent decades many countries and stakeholders have become more and more interested in student flows for many reasons, including the recognition that students need global skills in order to compete in a global economy (Szarka, 2003) and the imbalance of supply and demand for post-secondary education in many countries. There has also been increased competition in attracting the growing number of prospective fee paying international students (Altbach, 2004; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). These factors have led international student mobility to become an important part of the global higher education (HE) landscape over the past two decades (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007).

In migration studies, students have been under-researched as a mobile population despite their importance among human flows in the contemporary world (Findlay et al, 2006). Although research in this field has begun to increase, the focus of such studies has been almost exclusively on study abroad. Both credit mobility (mobility during the course of undergraduate studies) and degree or diploma mobility (mobility for the whole of a degree) have received attention over recent years from many fields of study. Despite this, a substantial gap in the student mobility literature exists as student mobility for the purpose of a work placement has rarely been discussed. This type of international student mobility has existed for some time; however, it has risen significantly in Europe over recent years due to the introduction of placements into the Erasmus programme in 2007.

King (2002) identified student mobility as an important form of European migration and stated that it is important to recognise the variety of migratory subtypes under this general category. Although King (2002) did not specifically mention student work placement mobility, it is an important subtype of international student mobility that has generally

been overlooked in favour of a concentration on study abroad. This thesis focuses on student work placement mobility through the voices of students who participated in the Erasmus work placement programme between 2007 and 2010. It presents an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the drivers, experiences and effects of Erasmus work placement mobility from a UK perspective. By doing so, it contributes towards the gap in existing knowledge surrounding international student work placement mobility and thus responds to the call made by King (2002) to acknowledge subtypes of student migration.

As discussed by Holloway et al (2010), over the past decade, geographers of diverse philosophical orientations have become progressively more interested in education, which has now become a significant theme in critical geographical thought (see, for example, Rutten et al, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Heffernan and Jöns, 2007; Smith and Holt, 2007; Smith, 2008; Hubbard, 2008; Olds and Robertson, 2008, Jöns, 2009). Geographers are now exploring phenomena such as school choice, education industries, knowledge economy formation, and the discourse of lifelong learning (Hanson-Thiem, 2009). International student mobility has also become an important area of geographical research (see, for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Waters, 2006; Findlay et al, 2006; 2010; Brooks and Waters, 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2011a); however, this remains a developing area that requires more attention (Holloway et al, 2010). As stated by Findlay et al (2006), student mobility should be of major interest to those engaged in understanding human flows in the contemporary world and therefore geographers are well positioned to explore student mobility as a major process in the internationalisation and globalisation of education.

This thesis aims to contribute towards the emerging field of geographies of education by investigating one increasingly prominent and important form of student mobility from a geographical perspective. Holloway et al (2010) stressed the importance of foregrounding young people as the subjects rather than objects of education within geographical research. This study adheres to this advice by focusing on the students' own perspectives and experiences. Although this thesis aims to focus exclusively on international student mobility for the purpose of work placements in industry, an exploration of this mobility contributes towards a more complete understanding of international student mobility more generally.

1.1 Research context

Student mobility in Europe is made up of both spontaneous mobility, which occurs outside of organised programmes, and organised mobility, which is facilitated by bi-lateral or multi-lateral schemes (Gordon and Jallade, 1996). The European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus) is the single largest programme at the European level aimed at facilitating organised student mobility, teacher mobility and cooperation between universities across Europe. The programme takes its name from the philosopher, theologian and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536) who lived and worked in several parts of Europe. The Erasmus programme has the objective to 'enhance the quality and to reinforce the European dimension of higher education by encouraging transnational cooperation between universities, boosting European mobility and improving the transparency and full academic recognition of studies and qualifications throughout the Union' (Europa, WWW).

The Erasmus programme was introduced in 1987, and in its first academic year 3,244 students from eleven countries participated in a period of study abroad. In 2009/10, 213,266 students participated in the programme and the number of countries participating had more than tripled (Europa, 2011). Erasmus is widely considered to be the most successful of the European Commission's educational programmes and it has been argued that Erasmus has acquired the status of a 'social and cultural phenomenon' (Europa, WWW). In 2007, the European Commission's Life Long Learning Programme (LLP) was introduced which led to major changes within the commission's education programmes. At this point, the Erasmus programme expanded to incorporate student work placements as one of its actions to facilitate student mobility.

Between the academic years 2007/08 and 2009/10, Erasmus facilitated the mobility of 85,893 European students who completed a work placement abroad during the course of their undergraduate studies. Erasmus placements have increased in popularity each year and of the 213,266 students that took part in the Erasmus programme in 2009/10, 35,561 (17%) took part in a placement. Erasmus work placements enable students to spend a period between three to twelve months in an enterprise or organisation in another participating European country (see Appendix A for participating countries). Students registered at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) holding an extended Erasmus University

charter can take part in a placement in a host organisation, which may be enterprises, training centres, research centres or other organisations, including HEIs in participating countries. Full recognition is given by the home HEI for the period spent abroad and students may be awarded an Erasmus grant to help cover the travel and subsistence costs incurred in connection with their placement period abroad. Students may also receive a financial contribution from the host enterprise/organisation and can combine a period spent abroad for both study and work placement (Europa, WWW). In addition, students who complete an Erasmus work placement are not liable to pay tuition fees to their home HEI during their time abroad, which is often required when completing a placement in the UK. Students can also apply to continue to receive their student loan during their Erasmus period, irrespective of the Erasmus grant and payments from the host company. This represents a major difference between Erasmus work placements and other study abroad and UK based work placement options, as students can receive many different sources of income to cover the costs of their Erasmus period (discussed further in chapter 6).

The specific aims of Erasmus student work placements outlined by the European Commission for education and training are as follows:

- 'To help students to adapt to the requirements of the EU-wide labour market.
- To enable students to develop specific skills including language skills and to improve understanding of the economic and social culture of the country concerned in the context of acquiring work experience.
- To promote cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises.
- To contribute to the development of a pool of well qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced young people as future professionals' (Europa, WWW)

In 2008, language assistantships in schools were also incorporated into the Erasmus work placement programme, having previously been administered by the British Council's language assistantship programme. This research, however, focuses purely on Erasmus work placements in industry.

It is important to note that work placements abroad are not a new phenomenon and have been occurring for some time in a European context. Various organised programmes have previously facilitated such mobility, however, not on the same scale as Erasmus. Work

placements abroad have also occurred outside organised programmes in forms of spontaneous student mobility. Findlay et al (2006) estimated that one third of mobility outside of organised programmes involves work placement of some kind; however, such movements have not been well documented and therefore the volume of work placement mobility that has occurred in previous years, and which occurs today, is difficult to establish. This is one of the reasons that work placement mobility has received so little attention in existing research.

It has been argued that processes of neoliberalisation in HE have meant that universities are increasingly being asked to produce commercially oriented professionals rather than public-interest professionals (Hanlon, 2000). Alongside these changes, Levidow (2002) argued that HE has become more synonymous with training for 'employability', rather than just academic learning. HEIs are now expected to prepare students to be employable in the economic labour market, which has increased the 'employability' role of these institutions, especially in times of recession (CBI and UUK, 2009). Students' lives are directed more to economic self-interest and credential acquisition and the idealism to work in the service of humanity is seriously diminished as universities operate as entrepreneurial, purely competitive business-oriented corporations (Elton, 2000). As Harkavy (2005: 15) observed, 'when universities openly and increasingly pursue commercialisation, it powerfully legitimises and reinforces the pursuit of economic self-interest by students and contributes to the widespread sense among them that they are in college solely to gain career skills and credentials' (quoted in Lynch, 2006: 7). Such ideas are apparent in the promotion strategies of Erasmus and work placement programmes. Phrases such as 'stand out in the crowd', 'get one step ahead of the other graduates' and 'with increased amounts of students with degrees you need something different to succeed' are commonplace within these promotions (British Council, WWW). In this sense, students are being encouraged to modify their skills through mobility in order to meet the needs of a neoliberal world. Links between Erasmus work placement mobility and wider processes of neoliberalisation are explored throughout this thesis.

1.2 Research rationale

There are currently two relevant areas of research that have received a significant amount of academic attention. Firstly, there is research that has explored student mobility for studies and secondly, there is research which has focused on students undertaking a work placement within their home country of study. There is, however, little research into international student work placement mobility.

Webber (2005) argued that 'while research into field education conducted in Anglo settings is extensive, there is a small but emerging field of research conducted on international or cross-cultural placements' (p.475). Similarly, Kristensen (1998; 2001) identified that transnational mobility in vocational education and training is a fairly recent phenomenon, the study of which combines elements from such diverse fields in pure and applied sciences as sociology, psychology, law, pedagogy, demography, educational research, political sciences, languages, history and geography. Kristensen (1998; 2001) argued that even though there are research and development environments in areas close to it (e.g. in the area of labour market mobility, comparability of qualifications, international qualifications, language training pedagogies in a vocational context etc.), it has not as yet established itself as a proper field for research in its own right.

This thesis contributes towards the emerging field of research identified by Webber (2005) and Kristensen (1998; 2001) by drawing attention to students within HE completing work placements abroad. This research is therefore informed by and takes into consideration both established areas of research (student mobility and work placement research) to investigate international student mobility for the purpose of a work placement. Subsequently, this thesis contributes towards the student mobility literature, which has neglected mobility for work placements, and also to the work placement literature, which has neglected work placements conducted abroad.

This research analyses the outgoing Erasmus work placement mobility of students from UK universities. As discussed by Brooks and Waters (2011a), UK students have not routinely been the subject of studies on international mobility and knowledge of this group of young people has been limited. Erasmus work placements have experienced varying degrees of popularity throughout the participating European countries in their initial years, with the

UK sending a comparably high volume of students abroad for this purpose. There has been a growing geographical interest in the UK's outgoing student mobility for study abroad in recent years due to the low levels of outgoing students when compared to other European countries. The impressive performance of UK students' uptake onto the Erasmus work placement programme is therefore somewhat surprising as UK students had become widely perceived to be 'ever reluctant Europeans' (Findlay et al, 2006). It appears, however, that UK students are far from reluctant to be involved in this particular form of student mobility. In light of the popularity of Erasmus work placements, outgoing student mobility from the UK needs to be readdressed. The UK therefore provides an ideal case study for this research and is discussed in more depth in chapter 4.

1.3 Aim and objectives

The overall aim of this research is:

'To provide an exploration of the drivers, experiences and perceived effects of Erasmus work placements in order to contribute towards an enhanced understanding of student work placement mobility'

To address this overall aim, three main objectives are explored in this thesis:

1. To examine the drivers of Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students
2. To explore how UK students experience an Erasmus work placement in industry
3. To examine students' perceptions of the effects of taking part in an Erasmus work placement (personally, professionally and future plans).

By addressing these three research objectives, this study explores the Erasmus work placement experience from the initial decision to take part, through to students' reflections on return from their placement. Although findings in relation to these three objectives are examined separately, in chapters 5, 6 and 7, links between these areas are discussed throughout this thesis.

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This chapter has introduced the study and the research rationale and begun to discuss the research context and methods employed.

Chapter 2 situates Erasmus student work placements within a wider conceptual framework and the existing literature. Firstly, this chapter explores the impact of transformations including internationalisation, globalisation, regionalisation, Europeanisation and neoliberalisation upon HE, in order to provide the conceptual framework for this research. Secondly, the literature that has focused more closely on international student mobility for studies and the relatively scarce literature on student work placement mobility are reviewed. Reference is also made to research that has examined student work placements conducted in students' home countries of study as this too is important for this research. This chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature in order to assess the contribution that this research makes towards existing knowledge.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods that have been employed in this study. Firstly, this chapter outlines the methods utilised in this research and the data analysis followed by a discussion of the research population and how participants were recruited. The final part of this chapter considers ethical considerations associated with and encountered when using these research methods.

Chapter 4 expands on the research context introduced in chapter 1 by providing the background context to Erasmus work placements and discusses why the UK is an interesting case study for this research. Overall, this chapter provides the historical and current position of student work placement mobility, in order to situate this study within the relevant research context.

Chapter 5 is the first of three empirical chapters. This chapter addresses the first of the research objectives, to examine the drivers of Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students. It discusses the way that motivating factors such as employability, failure to secure a work placement in the UK, language, finance and personal and biographical factors encourage the Erasmus work placement mobility of UK students. This chapter also outlines the role of HEIs in encouraging, and in some cases discouraging, mobility.

Importantly, this chapter reveals the numerous reasons why Erasmus work placements have been popular amongst UK students.

Chapter 6 assesses the second research objective, to explore how UK students experience an Erasmus work placement in industry. Firstly, this chapter examines the organisation of Erasmus work placements, including how students find and secure both their placements and accommodation. Secondly, it explores the students' activities and interactions whilst abroad followed by an investigation of the challenges faced by students. Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the support students received whilst abroad and the role of the Erasmus grant.

Chapter 7 reflects on findings in relation to the final research objective by examining students' perceptions of the effects of their work placements. Professional, academic, cultural and personal effects are examined; including how taking part in the Erasmus programme can influence students' future mobility plans and attitudes.

Finally, chapter 8 brings together the three analytical chapters to conclude and discuss the research findings overall. This chapter highlights the contribution that this research makes to existing knowledge and theory.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework and literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter places Erasmus student work placements into the context of a wider conceptual framework and the existing literature. The chapter is structured into two main parts. Part one explores the impact of transformations including internationalisation, globalisation, regionalisation, Europeanisation and neoliberalisation upon HE. This provides the conceptual framework for the research identifying the processes that have led to the increased prominence and importance of student mobility worldwide.

The second part of this chapter reviews the literature that has investigated international student mobility for studies and the relatively scarce literature on international student work placement mobility. This section firstly discusses the ways in which student mobility has been conceptualised, followed by an exploration of the many factors that have been identified to act as drivers and barriers to this mobility. Thirdly, literature focusing on the experiences of students whilst studying abroad is examined and finally, the effects of student mobility are considered. Throughout part two of this chapter, reference is also made to research that has focused on work placements based in students' home countries of study, as this body of literature is also relevant to this research.

As discussed in chapter 1, geographers' interest in education has grown over recent years; however, this remains an emerging and developing area of research within the discipline (Holloway et al, 2010). For this reason, the literature review presented here is interdisciplinary and draws on studies from fields such as sociology, anthropology and educational research, as well as geography, in order to review fully the student mobility literature. Overall, this chapter identifies gaps in the literature in order to assess the contribution that this study makes towards existing knowledge.

2.2 Transformations in higher education

Altbach et al (2009) stated that 'an academic revolution has taken place in HE in the past half century marked by transformations unprecedented in scope and diversity' (p.3). These transformations are linked to a rapidly growing number of students in many countries across the world due to different periods of university expansion and subsequent processes of internationalisation, globalisation, regionalisation and neoliberalisation. These processes provide the context within which both student mobility and student work placements have gained increased importance. It is important to note that the majority of the research that has investigated such transformations has occurred outside of geography. There is therefore a need for geographers to engage with these profoundly geographical themes of HE.

2.2.1 Internationalisation of higher education

Internationalisation with regard to HE generally refers to 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight, 2003: 2). Taylor (2004) described internationalisation as one of the most powerful forces for change in HE that has subsequently become high on the agenda at national, sector, and institutional levels (Knight, 2004). An exploration of the internationalisation of HE is important to this research as study abroad and exchange programmes have been described as the best known and most traditional form of internationalisation (Weirs-Jenssen, 2008) and as 'the most visible part of the internationalisation of tertiary education' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2008: 16). According to Hermans (2007), 'the mobility of students and staff can be seen as the first focus points regarding internationalisation arising on the political agenda of national governments and supranational bodies such as the European Union' (p.511).

Internationalisation is not a new term but since the 1980s it has become a buzzword in many different disciplines and areas of study. Within the education sector, the popularity of this term has rapidly increased during this time. According to Altbach and Knight (2007), the reason for this can be attributed to a period where 'the international activities of universities dramatically expanded in volume, scope, and complexity' (p.1). Enders and Fulton (2002) highlighted that the increasing use of this term draws attention to the fact

that the boundaries of what were once relatively closed national educational systems, and the features of once distinctive national institutions of HE, are being challenged by common international trends. These trends include the rapid growth in transnational activities, common policy approaches based on mutual observation, 'policy borrowing' and supra-national integration in HE. As argued by Knight (2011: 1), internationalisation as a term is now past the 'new flavour of the month' stage and is firmly embedded in institutional mission statements, policies and strategies as well as national policy frameworks.

According to Brooks and Becket (2011), internationalisation within HE is wide reaching and, given the interrelated nature of the different dimensions, is potentially difficult to implement or assess. Internationalisation is therefore a complex and contested term as it is used in various ways, in different countries and by numerous stakeholders, and subsequently has many different meanings and interpretations. As Knight (2004) argued, for some people it means a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers and international linkages, partnerships, and projects, whereas for others it means the delivery of education to other countries through new types of arrangements. It can also mean the inclusion of an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process, international development projects and also the increasing emphasis on trade in HE (Knight, 2004). Schechter (1993) similarly identified various aspects of internationalisation, suggesting that the goals of this process within HE were pragmatic (acquiring skills and knowledge for employability in a global context): liberal (developing an appreciation of cultural differences and intercultural sensibility) and civic (developing multidimensional global citizenship). Processes of internationalisation in HE therefore comprise of various elements and activities each with different goals and outcomes. Knight (2011) later asserted that, as internationalisation matures, it is becoming a more important and complex process but it is also becoming a more confused and misunderstood concept.

Van der Wende (1997) noted that two trends within the internationalisation of HE could be observed. The first trend involves a growth of specific, visibly international, border-crossing operations, e.g. student mobility, staff mobility, foreign language teaching and learning, cooperative research activities, or area studies. The second trend refers to the

universalisation, globalisation, internationalisation or 'regionalisation' of the substance and the functions of HE. These two trends combined have affected HE globally. It is important to keep in mind however that the context for internationalisation varies significantly between countries dependent on many issues including culture, the quality of education systems, language and previous experience of student mobility. Variations in internationalisation strategies are also present between HEIs within the same country making them difficult to assess. Internationalisation and the trends identified by Van der Wende (1997) have, therefore, not occurred globally in the same way at the same rate.

Although the use of the term internationalisation has increased in recent years, many commentators have argued that the international role of universities is not new and that in fact HE has played an international role throughout much of its history. Teichler (2004a) and Knight and De Wit (1995), for example, have argued that universities were international institutions, involved in various international activities, before a shift towards a nationalist period during the 19th and 20th century. As Teichler (2004a) stated, historians acknowledge that HE's strong national focus and relatively low level of mobility might have been temporary during the 19th and 20th century due to a period of nation state dominance. Teichler (2004a) went on to argue that universities have long been considered one of society's most international institutions and the knowledge stored, generated and transmitted is often regarded as being universal and not bound by borders.

These observations have led recent work to refer to changes in HE as 're-internationalisation', which is deemed more appropriate due to the historical role played by institutions of HE (Teichler, 2004a). An early identification of the shift towards a 're-internationalisation' of HE came from Brown (1950) who commented that 'the universities of the world today are aspiring to return to one of the basic concepts of their origin – the universality of knowledge' (p.13). Brown (1950) identified that internationalisation is by no means a new process; it was simply interrupted and halted during a nationalist period. Similarly, Muller (1995) called for a restoration of the 'universal character' of science and education that is also based on the assumption that HE in the past shifted from a global period to a nationalist period. Muller (1995) claimed that globalisation and 'the information age' required a shift to occur back towards a global era of education.

Knight and De Wit (1995) described how both Brown (1950) and Muller's (1995) work has been closely linked to that of Kerr (1992) who observed that education moved from a 'convergent' model of universal education 500 years ago towards a 'divergence' model where education, and HE, not only came to serve the administrative and economic interests of the nation state but became an essential aspect of the development of national identity. Kerr (1992) argued that we are now seeing a 'partial re-convergence', which he calls the 'cosmopolitan-nation-state-university' where nation state divergences in HE shift towards more universal convergence, based on the assumption that universities best serve their nation states by serving the world of learning.

Teichler (2004a) argued that international communication, cooperation and mobility have always served to transfer knowledge vertically (from places where a higher level of knowledge exists to places of a lower level of knowledge). In this sense, international cooperation between HEIs is not new. Teichler (2004a) did, however, predict that a substantial and rapid downward flow of knowledge could be expected from the recent growing trend towards internationalisation of HE. The introduction of programmes of international collaboration and exchange, such as Erasmus, have somewhat transformed the model of vertical transfer of knowledge to one based on more mutual benefit between universities of similar calibre. Internationalisation is therefore not necessarily a new process but is possibly different to previous forms of internationalisation, whereas many have argued that current processes are simply returning HE to its previous international role. Altbach and Teichler (2001) for example, suggested that 'at no times since the middle ages has HE been more international in nature' (p.5).

By and large, scholars analysing the internationalisation of HE share the view that internationalisation opens up more desirable opportunities than it produces dangers (Teichler, 2004a). For this reason, university internationalisation is acclaimed by many and is seldom criticised (Breton, 2003). For example, Hayden and Thompson (1995) presented a highly positive view of internationalisation, suggesting that international education has the potential to generate world mindedness, embrace global citizenship and may offer a platform to address global issues such as racism, global pollution and human rights. Breton (2003) similarly noted 'indeed, what harm is there in doing good, that is, in graduating students who, in addition to receiving well-rounded academic training, have acquired

international skills, opening a window to the outside world, to the campus, its curricula and research projects?’ (p.2).

Commentators such as Breton (2003) have, however, identified possible challenges and problems associated with the internationalisation of HE which include the knowledge gap between universities in developed countries and those in emerging countries, issues relating to the regulation of the global space of HE and the possible effects of brain drain from emerging countries. Other concerns that have also been raised include issues surrounding heritage degradation, diminishing language diversity, quality decline, negative curricular affects, problems with standardisation and qualification recognition, reducing the variety of academic cultures and structures and unequal power relationships (for example, Paasi, 2005). It has also been suggested that the rise in international student mobility, in part bought on by processes of internationalisation and globalisation of HE, reinforces the degree of interdependence and growing dependence of the peripheral countries on the core hegemonic powers (Barnett and Wu, 1995; Chen and Barnett, 2000). Critics have also argued that there is often a gap between internationalisation rhetoric and reality (Gacel-Avila, 2005) that has been encouraged by the lack of a universal agreement on what internationalisation within HE means (Elkin et al, 2005).

Teichler (1999) stated that ‘Internationalisation of HE can be viewed as a trend: unresistable, as those who resist fall behind. Or it can be viewed as a challenge, which might or might not be taken up, and which might be taken up differently’ (p.21). Most experts and actors in the field believe that internationalisation of HE is bound to grow, but that the aims and modes of internationalisation leave ample scope for development. For example, Hermans (2007) suggested that we might now observe employability in the EU and international market places as a main focus point of internationalisation. Hermans (2007) predicted that cooperation between HEIs and industry is pointing the way forward for the internationalisation of HE in the future. The internationalisation of HE is closely linked to processes of globalisation with the two concepts often being used interchangeably to refer to similar processes. It is important however to distinguish between these two processes and their impacts on HE.

2.2.2 Globalisation of higher education

Globalisation is considered to be the 'widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness' (Held et al, 1999: 2) and this process is frequently claimed to be having a significant impact upon HE (Enders and Fulton, 2002; Altbach et al, 2009). It must, however, be kept in mind that globalisation is a highly contested concept as are the effects this process has upon HE.

As Breton (2003) noted, it is perhaps unsurprising that globalisation has become a critical issue in contemporary university communities, and he identifies two major changes that have favoured this emergence. The first comes from the fact that societies are now organised around knowledge production, having evolved from an industrial development mode into a communications development mode. With this change, knowledge has become a commodity that is bought and sold, exported and imported like any other product. Secondly, Breton (2003) argued that not only have universities lost their monopoly over the production and distribution of knowledge and research activities but the presence of other market players now enjoying this same production capacity is leading to new university-institution-business partnerships or strategic alliances. Breton (2003) stated that 'these transformations potentially herald the coming of a new *modus operandi* in university communities, creating new stresses and fragmentation' (p.5). It has also been argued that globalisation has had an impact upon education policy which is thought about and made within the context of the pressures and requirements of globalisation (Ball, 2008). Ball's (2008) exploration of debates in contemporary education supports the idea that a new global 'policyspeak' (first suggested by Novoa, 2002) has developed as global trends and convergences facilitated by globalisation have transformed education.

The globalisation of the business economy has 'encouraged the development of a market for internationally orientated and qualified graduates' (Elkin et al, 2005: 318) where students have to acquire the skills required to be successful in coping with today's multicultural environment (Szarka, 2003). Kontio (2008) noted that due to globalisation, working life has become more intercultural which HE needs to respond to in order to ensure that students have the necessary skills to enter into global and intercultural working life. This has led to HEIs becoming charged with the role of producing graduates

with the required knowledge to work within globalised economies and so support national economies (Brown et al, 2002; Brown et al, 2008). According to Ball (2008), within policy, education is now regarded primarily from an economic point of view where the role of education is to be a producer of labour, skills, values and commercial knowledge as a response to the requirements of international economic competition.

It appears therefore that the role of universities has been transformed. Prokou (2008) commented that 'European universities are called upon to make students more employable, by cultivating their skills and by encouraging them to lifelong learning for enhancing their flexibility in the labour market' (p.387). The focus on employability is greater than ever with more graduates competing for jobs post-study. Prokou (2008) highlighted that educational planning has given way to the notion of graduate employability which is linked to many elements such as graduates' abilities, the type of work and the time of its acquisition after graduation, the qualifications of graduates when employed, the willingness and awareness of graduates regarding continuing education and the employability skills of graduates. The role of employers is also very important as they actually transform graduate employability to employment (Harvey, 2001). There is now seen to be a need for HEIs to create flexible graduates for an ever-changing labour market. For this reason, they cannot act independently of industry, as the two spheres need one another in order for the transition between the two to occur successfully for students.

From a graduate employment perspective, globalisation has transformed the occupational landscape, as graduates are now often required to function competently in environments that are international and intercultural (Whalley, 1997). Subsequently graduates are now seen to need to develop global perspectives (Lunn, 2008), global competencies and a global consciousness to become global-ready graduates (Hunter et al, 2006). There is evidence to suggest that employers have begun to favour graduates with a broad worldview due to processes of globalisation, which Shiel (2008) argued has served to reinforce internationalisation as a critical priority within HE. As will be discussed later in this chapter, study abroad is often claimed to help develop cultural awareness and thus better equip students for an increasingly connected world (Szarka, 2003; Fielden et al, 2007; Kontio, 2008). It could therefore be argued that globalisation has increased and sustained the demand for student mobility programmes in order to create graduates with

the requirements needed in a globalised world. As discussed by Kujipers and Scheerens (2006), the traditional notion of training for life, or for the purposes of a single organisation, has become out-dated. Within this new landscape mobility is a central characteristic of contemporary career development. Student mobility has therefore become more and more important due to changes brought on by globalisation.

As is the case with internationalisation, the globalisation of HE is not a single or universal phenomenon as it plays out differently according to the type of institution and geographical location (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2009). Networks between institutions are unequal with some being more intensely and widely connected than others, but it could be argued that this has always been the case. Altbach et al (2009), for example, argued that the academic world has always been characterized by centres and peripheries, whilst stressing that 'inequality among national higher education systems as well as within countries has increased in the past several decades' which is in part due to processes of globalisation (p.5). We must, therefore, avoid treating the globalisation of HE as a consistent or predictable process that occurs in the same way in all locations. It is also important to note that although HEIs often see themselves as objects of globalisation, these institutions are in fact agents of globalisation (Scott, 2000). This is due to the fact that universities are intensively linked and networked within and between the global cities that constitute the major nodes of a networked society (Castells, 2000). It could subsequently be argued that universities shape the networks that sustain globalisation processes making HEIs important actors within globalisation.

Despite the terms internationalisation of HE and globalisation of HE often being used interchangeably, they are in fact very different processes which some have argued are even opposed to each other (Scott, 2000). It is important to acknowledge that globalisation and internationalisation are different but closely related processes. Knight (2003) commented that, 'internationalisation is changing the world of higher education, and globalisation is changing the world of internationalisation' (p.17) which summarises the complexity of the relationship between globalisation and internationalisation. These two global processes are intertwined and go on to have dramatic affects upon the world of HE. Globalisation forms part of the environment in which the international dimension of HE is

becoming more important, which has led many to view internationalisation as an institutional response to the wider forces of globalisation (Altbach and Knight, 2007).

Marginson and Van der Wende (2007) examined the differences between globalisation and internationalisation, suggesting that globalisation was, and is, understood primarily in terms of the growing pressures of global economic competition, while 'internationalisation' continues to be synonymous with a more cooperative approach to HE. Marginson and Van der Wende (2009) later argued that globalisation cannot be regarded simply as a higher form of internationalisation and suggested that in some respects globalisation in HE is an alternative to the old internationalisation, even a rival to it. Marginson and Van der Wende (2009) pointed out that internationalisation, in its literal sense, is international; which refers to any relationship across borders between nations, or between single institutions situated within different national systems, whereas globalisation refers to the processes of worldwide engagement and convergence associated with the growing role of global systems that cross many national borders. Internationalisation may involve as few as two units whereas globalisation takes in many nations and is a dynamic process drawing the local, national and global dimensions more closely together (Marginson and Rhoades, 2009).

In support of Marginson and Van der Wende (2007; 2009), Scott (2000) identified three reasons why globalisation cannot simply be regarded as a higher form of internationalisation. The first is that internationalisation presupposes the existence of established nation states whereas globalisation does not. The second is that internationalisation is most strongly expressed through the 'high' and historical worlds of diplomacy and culture, whilst globalisation on the other hand is expressed in the 'low' and contemporary worlds of mass consumerism and global capitalism. The final reason identified by Scott (2000) is that internationalisation tends to reproduce or even legitimise hierarchy and hegemony because of its dependence on the existing unequal patterns of nation states, whereas globalisation can address new agendas because it is not tied to the past and is a restless, subversive force. Internationalisation and globalisation of HE are therefore separate processes, despite often being used interchangeably.

A key theoretical debate on globalisation centres on the scale in which today's internationalisation processes are taking place, which are often centred on tensions that exist between global and regional scales (Verger and Hervo, 2010). As indicated by Enders (2004), the distinctions between internationalisation and globalisation can be supplemented, if also complicated, by the concept of regionalisation.

2.2.3 Regionalisation and Europeanisation of higher education

Watson (2009) and Jayasuriya (2010) argued that the governance of HE has become less national, and more global and regional, as the supranational level has become important in educational policy formation (Robertson, 2007). These processes have led to regionalisation within HE which, as a concept, has aroused a great deal of interest and has been explored from multiple perspectives (Verger and Hervo, 2010). Europe is often seen as the 'paradigm of new regionalism' (Prado Yepes, 2006: 84) that is commonly referred to as Europeanisation.

Robertson (2009) identified that Europe's approach to internationalising HE is a multifaceted set of political strategies that, over time, have become more complex as an array of both national and European-level actors, such as the European Commission, respond to pressures in the regional and global economies. Robertson (2009) suggested that Europe's internationalising of HE involves three long-standing sets of projects. Firstly, a cultural project, to contribute to the construction of Europe as a distinctive entity and secondly, an economic project, to construct a competitive Europe. Thirdly, Robertson (2009) suggested the final project is political and aims to locate greater power at the supranational scale that would enable European level actors more control over regional and global affairs. The EU and the European Commission have for a long time intervened in matters regarding HE and European integration in the EU has been labelled as 'a pioneering regional integration process and currently one of the most advanced' (Verger and Hervo, 2010: 107). The European Commission became active in HE in the mid 1970s, when initiatives were restricted to encouraging cooperation and mobility between closed national systems so that control and power lay with member states (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2009). During this time initiatives such as Erasmus were introduced. Student mobility in Europe has therefore been a key part of Europeanisation in HE.

Europeanisation in HE has a variety of origins. Marginson and Van der Wende (2009), for example, suggested that one set of origins lies in the growth of international mobility of people and ideas, another in the international co-operation between EU countries in their economic, social and cultural activities and a third in the explicit commitment to a common European HE zone in order to facilitate such international activities within Europe. Marginson and Van der Wende (2009) argued that Europeanisation in HE began in internationalisation and continues to be sustained by it. They asserted that this has led to a form of globalisation on a regional scale. This demonstrates the complex relationships between globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation as they relate to and reinforce one another. As Dale (2009) noted, 'Europe, in the sense of the European Union, is involved in the construction of globalisation and globalisation frames economic, political and cultural possibilities for Europe' (p.25).

By synthesising the developments of HE in Europe towards internationalisation, Teichler (2004a) highlighted that we do not only experience a 'gradual trend of increasing international activities, or of a stronger international dimension for the core activities of higher education, but rather substantial qualitative changes – which might be called quantum leaps' (p.9). Teichler (2004a) identified and examined three quantum leaps with regards to their implications for HE in general. The first quantum leap refers to the change from a predominantly 'vertical' pattern of cooperation and mobility, towards the dominance of international relationships on equal terms often referred to as 'horizontal' mobility. The second quantum leaps surround the 'move from casuistic action towards systematic policies of internationalisation' (p.10) and the third quantum leap outlined by Teichler (2004) referred to the change from a disconnection of specific international activities on the one hand, and (on the other) internationalisation of the core activities, towards an integrated internationalisation of HE.

Regionalisation of HE in Europe has been supported by the Bologna declaration that was initiated in 1998/99 in response to rising global competition in HE. Despite growths in intra-European movements, Europe in general was losing out to the USA in terms of favoured location by foreign students and was also losing many of its own graduates and researchers to the USA. Initially, in 1998, the ministers of the UK, Germany, France and Italy called for the harmonization of degree structures to increase the strength of

European HE as a whole (Wachter, 2004). This went on to influence the signing of the Bologna Declaration, which therefore represents a bottom-up case of Europeanisation (Van der Wende, 2000). The declaration is a voluntary international agreement signed by 46 signatories pledging to undertake reforms needed to create a European HE area by 2010 (Papatsiba, 2006). In essence, the Bologna process aims to challenge national borders in HE in Europe (Teichler, 2012). This was to be achieved through the implementation of measures such as degree harmonisation, credit transfer systems, promotion of mobility and quality assurance and the development of a European dimension to HE. Compatibility and comparability among curricula across countries was promoted which had the implicit agenda to standardize education as a global commodity within a global education market (Wachter, 2004). Measures such as the 'three five eight' formula were implemented (which relates to the years and credits needed to gain a degree), diploma supplements and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (which aimed to facilitate student mobility) were introduced. These measures actively encourage regionalisation in Europe, partly through breaking down barriers to student mobility in Europe (Papatsiba, 2006). The results and outcomes of the Bologna process have, however, been debated. As argued by Teichler (2012), the Bologna process has contributed to increased inwards mobility of students from other parts of the world to Europe, but not to a more rapid rise in intra-European student mobility.

Despite this criticism, the Bologna process is often viewed as the powerful project of regionalisation in Europe and is closely linked to the Lisbon strategy. The Lisbon strategy which was launched in March 2000, aimed at making Europe the most dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010, within which education plays an important role. As stated by Pépin (2007), with the introduction of the Lisbon strategy, education was for the first time considered a key factor in the implementation of the EU's economic and social objectives. In 2000, the European Council also agreed to cooperate and to take joint measures of investing into research and development and eventually to establish a 'European Research Area' by 2010 (Teichler, 2012). The Lisbon strategy therefore aims to create a 'knowledge economy' at the European level in order to enhance the global competitiveness of Europe. The 'knowledge economy' is a widely used term but it must be acknowledged that it is also a messy and highly contested notion (Kenway et al, 2006). Ball

(2008) argued that the 'knowledge economy' is a 'much used term in relation to contemporary education policy but as a concept it is elusive and misleading' (p.19). According to Brown and Lauder (2006), the dominant view today is that we have entered a global knowledge economy, which is driven by the application of new technologies and collapsing barriers to international trade and investment, accelerating the evolutionary path from a low to a high skills economy. With the emergence of post-Fordism and related transformations in the mode of production, distribution and consumption, knowledge has changed in terms of its nature and status (Stoer and Magalhaes, 2009). The concept of a 'knowledge economy' has developed from the idea that knowledge and education can be treated as business products and as productive assets that can be exported for a high-value return (Ball, 2008). The concept of the knowledge economy has become important in strategies of Europeanisation.

The Europeanisation of HE has been examined here as it is often regarded as the most successful and well-known form of regionalisation in HE. The Erasmus programme is a key part of Europeanisation processes in the region and for that reason an exploration of this process is of prime importance for this research.

2.2.4 Neoliberalisation of higher education

As argued by Brooks and Waters (2011a), within the academic literature, neoliberalisation is often conflated with globalisation, however, it is important to keep the two terms analytically distinct. The major characteristics of neoliberalism emerged in the US in the 1970s as a response to stagflation and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of international trade and exchange. According to Olssen and Peters (2005), neoliberalism must be seen as a specific economic discourse or philosophy that has become dominant in world economic relations as a consequence of super-power sponsorship. Neoliberalism is therefore viewed as a politically imposed discourse that constitutes the hegemonic discourse of western nation states but is imposed worldwide.

The neoliberal agenda attempts to offload the cost of public services, including education, on to the individual through processes of privatisation where citizens have to buy these public services at a market value rather than have them provided by the state (Lynch, 2006). Neoliberal politics are premised on the assumption that the market can replace the

democratic state as the primary producer of cultural logic and value, which has subsequently encouraged the marketization of HE (Lynch, 2006). This has introduced a new mode of regulation or form of governmentality within HE that replaced the preceding welfare liberal model (Ollsen and Peters, 2005). Neoliberal ideology presents students as economic maximisers who are governed by self-interest and responsible for their own individual success through the acquisition of human and cultural capital and credentials throughout their time in education. In this new market state, the individuals are held responsible for their own well being and success (Lynch, 2006). The role of government is now limited to providing the opportunity for all to enhance their employability, which has led to the rapid growth in higher education (Brown et al, 2002). Individualized learning has been promoted which naturalizes life-long re-skilling for a flexible, fragmented, insecure labour market (Levidow, 2002; Brown et al, 2002). It should, however, be noted that this has occurred in different countries to different degrees.

Neoliberalism, and the subsequent marketization of HE, has led current thinking to see international HE as a 'commodity to be traded freely and sees higher education as a private good, not a public responsibility' (Altbach and Knight, 2007: 2). Over the last decade universities have subsequently been transformed into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, which many have argued has challenged their public interest values (Rutherford, 2005). The view that education is simply another market commodity has become normalised in policy and public discourses (Lynch, 2006), which has transformed students into consumers. The introduction of tuition fees in many countries has also contributed to the development of this 'education market'. Globalisation processes have at the same time made it possible for students to purchase their education from locations globally. This has led to the development of an international student market where students seek out the best education to purchase on a global scale and institutions attempt to recruit the best, or most financially rewarding students. University league tables have become more important as students' decisions are often made globally and through the use of these forms of hierarchy. Within this 'global HE market' issues relating to class and inclusion exist, as the best institutions are often expensive and therefore only accessible to elite students. Student mobility can therefore lead to inequalities in terms of

educational opportunities (Waters, 2009; Brooks and Waters, 2010a). This will be examined further later in this chapter.

Neoliberal values have also been applied to young peoples' travel, leisure and educational practices with forms of mobility such as the student gap year being viewed within neoliberal discourses (Simpson, 2005). Simpson (2005) suggested that the rise of the gap year has 'professionalised and formalised practices of youth travel, bringing them into contact with neoliberal understandings of education and citizenship, where emphasis is placed on young people's acquisition of global knowledge as governable subjects with market potential' (p.1). Simpson (2005) argued that in the context of neoliberalism, young people are being encouraged to broaden their horizons and become 'better citizens' through participating in gap years. Heath (2007) claimed that the pre-university gap year provides students with an important means of gaining distinction over other students in the context of growing competition for entry to elite institutions and therefore raises important questions concerning the processes by which certain groups of young people are able to gain advantage over others during a period of educational expansion. Gap years and international experience have therefore become commodities centred on the acquisition of individualised forms of cultural capital that are assumed to be beneficial in the labour market. Furukawa (2008) described study abroad experiences as processes of forming, negotiating, and resisting neoliberal subjectivities. Furukawa (2008) discovered that the narratives of interviewees who had studied abroad were informed by neoliberalism, which drives young people to become skilled, flexible, and responsible workers and stated that rather than passively accepting neoliberal subjectivities, students struggle to negotiate social/cultural expectations that are shaped through both neoliberalism and rather traditional views mainly brought by their parents.

The first part of this chapter has explored transformative processes that have affected HE over recent decades including internationalisation, globalisation, regionalisation and neoliberalisation. It could be argued that these processes have encouraged international student mobility, but also that student mobility has reinforced and sustained these processes creating a reciprocal relationship. An evaluation of these processes has provided a conceptual framework for this research within which the empirical analysis will be situated.

2.3 Student mobility and work placements

The second part of this chapter reflects on the student mobility literature and research on student work placements both in the UK and abroad. As outlined in chapter 1, international student mobility has become an important issue in recent years for many reasons and has subsequently received substantial attention from academics from a variety of fields and disciplines. As will be made clear here, the majority of the literature based on student mobility, particularly within geography, has concentrated on study abroad giving little attention to work placement mobility.

2.3.1 Conceptualisations of student mobility

A good starting point is to assess the ways in which student mobility has been conceptualised in the existing literature. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) outlined three main ways in which student mobility has been conceptualised. Firstly, student mobility has been conceptualised as a subset of highly skilled migration where students are often classified as 'proactive immigrants' (Krzaklewska, 2008). Earlier research identified academics, researchers and students as part of the population of highly skilled migrants as the expectation was that these students would become part of the highly skilled labour stock of the future, with many nations hoping that they would remain or return to their country of training (Hugo, 1996). Secondly, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) stated that student mobility has been conceptualised as a product of globalization. With increased transport, communication and economic links between nations the flow of people has been accelerated. As discussed further in part one of this chapter, student mobility has risen within this general increasing flow of people, encouraged by the fact that national HE sectors have restructured around emerging international standards and training which is assumed to be required in a global economy (Altbach and Teichler, 2001).

The third way in which student mobility has been conceptualised, according to King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), is within research on youth mobility cultures and the geographies of consumption. These conceptualisations have tended to view student mobility as motivated less by traditional economic migration factors and more by experiential goals (King, 2002). This perspective identifies internationally mobile students as a 'migratory elite' who is

ready and willing to move, 'open to changes in their environment: language, personal entourage, lifestyle, working style' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; 51).

These dominant conceptualisations of student mobility have begun to be criticised over recent years. For example, Findlay et al (2006) argued that these conceptualisations leave out issues relating to social class inequalities in the opportunities and participation rates of student mobility. This limitation has gone on to gain increased attention challenging the entirely positive conceptualisations of student mobility by highlighting the privileged nature of the student mobility experience (for example Waters, 2006; Waters & Brooks, 2010a). This will be discussed further later in this chapter. It is clear, however, that the dominant conceptualisations of student mobility present student mobility as an inherently positive activity. Murphy-Lejeune (2008) argued that since the 1980s, 'mobility, and the experience of strangeness which it entails, has been constructed as an essential trait of post-modernity' (p.13). In this sense, mobility is seen to be an essential and positive part of the post-modern world associated with many positive outcomes. This entirely positive conceptualisation has, however, been criticised, as Ackers (2010) challenged the assumption that international mobility is linked to excellence. As argued by Ackers (2010), there is currently little research focused directly on exploring and exposing the relationship between mobility, internationalisation and excellence, which is an area that requires further attention.

Another important issue to consider when exploring the ways student mobility has been conceptualised is the choice of terminology between 'mobility' and 'migration'. As stated by King (2002), the distinction between migration and other forms of spatial mobility have been blurred over recent years as new forms of European migration have challenged such definitions. The United Nations (1998) recommended that a long-term migrant be defined as a person who moves to a country other than his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year, and short-term migrants be defined as a person who moves for at least three months but less than a year. Taking this definition into account, Erasmus students could be classified as either short term or long-term migrants as they can spend between three to twelve months abroad. Despite this, the use of terminology in this field of study has changed over time and as the types of student movements involved have developed. The

majority of researchers, particularly in recent years, have tended to use the term 'mobility' as opposed to 'migration' when discussing students' international movements.

Earlier studies (for example, King and Shuttleworth, 1995) tended to use the term 'migration' as the movements of students were more likely to be long term or for the full duration of a student's studies. More recently there is a preference for the use of the term 'mobility', which is in part due to the fact that movements now tend to be short term or built in to a specific course. Migration is more widely accepted to refer to 'movements outside one's country of origin into another for a variety of reasons, leading to changes in residence and legal status' but mobility is 'a more general term which applies to a phenomena other than movements from one national territory to another' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 4). As discussed by Findlay et al (2006), there is a clear preference for using the term mobility in studies that have looked at intra-European student transfers, particularly moves that are shorter-term, such as study and work abroad within the framework of a programme of study such as Erasmus. For the reasons outlined here, this study uses the term mobility as opposed to migration.

2.3.2 Drivers and barriers to student mobility

As discussed by King et al (2010), drivers to student mobility exist at three levels. Firstly, drivers exist at the macro-scale of economic and cultural globalisation and the internationalisation of HE. These macro-scale drivers have been examined in part one of this chapter. Secondly, drivers exist at the meso-scale of institutional initiatives and thirdly, at the individual-scale. The existing literature that has assessed the meso-scale and individual-scale drivers to student mobility are reviewed here as well as the barriers that have been found to restrict the mobility of students.

International student mobility has traditionally been perceived to be driven by students' desires to study in a country or institution where the standard of education is believed to be higher than they would otherwise receive at home. This form of 'vertical' mobility (Teichler and Rivza, 2007) has often been conceptualised as being driven by the desires of students to obtain the 'cultural capital' which is associated with an English speaking education (Waters, 2006). As mobility schemes such as Erasmus have increased in popularity, this explanation for mobility has become somewhat inadequate. Traditionally,

student mobility from 'developed' countries such as the UK has been governed by the requirement that language-course students spend time abroad (Findlay et al, 2006); however, increasing numbers of non-language students now choose to study abroad in universities of similar calibre than they would be able to access in their home countries. This growth in 'horizontal' student mobility has required previous understandings of the drivers and barriers to mobility to be reconsidered.

According to Krzaklewska (2008), exploring the motivations to study abroad is important as it can give insights into the values of today's students. Understanding the factors that influence this form of mobility is, however, complex as individual students and groups of students are influenced by many different factors. Drivers and barriers to mobility have been found to vary by geographical location due to factors such as country size, isolation, language, cultural values, attitudes towards mobility and expectations of students (Admit, 2000a; 2000b; Teichler, 2002) and also by discipline of study (Maiworm and Teichler, 2002a). Research that concentrates on students of one discipline or from one country may therefore not be widely representative to student mobility more generally. Gender has also been found to determine the drivers to mobility (Habu, 2000; Ono and Piper, 2004; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Park, 2010); however, this remains a relatively under researched area, particularly in a UK context (Brooks and Waters, 2011a). The main factors that have been identified to act as drivers and barriers to student mobility will now be outlined.

2.3.2.1 *The double influence of language*

It is often assumed that the only way really to learn the language of a foreign country is to go and live there (Coleman, 1997). Language therefore plays a key role in driving the mobility of students who wish to gain or improve their language skills (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). This is part of the reason why Anglophone countries are favoured destinations for internationally mobile students who wish to increase their proficiency of the dominant world language. It has often been found that language is a main driver to participation in mobility programmes such as Erasmus (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006); however, it has also been argued that language exerts a 'double influence' on international student mobility acting as both a driver and a barrier (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003).

Numerous research studies have identified language as a major barrier to student mobility (for example, Admit, 2000b; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al, 2006; Vossensteyn et al, 2010). Findlay et al (2006) identified that language was one of the two factors that emerged as the most prominent barriers to student mobility, along with finance. Findlay et al (2006) argued that the decreasing number of UK students choosing to study abroad in Europe was 'more than compensated for by rising flows to other world destinations, especially north America and Australia' (p.291). One of the reasons put forward for these changing geographies of UK outgoing student mobility was the influence of language which had formed a barrier to UK student mobility to European destinations and at the same time acted as a driver to English speaking destinations. Similarly, Vossensteyn et al (2010) found in a survey of students from seven European countries that 41% of students reported being at least partly discouraged from studying abroad because of limited foreign language skills; however, this did vary nationally. In all countries examined in the Admit (2000b) report, language was identified to be a barrier to mobility, particularly for French students, as they discovered that if the UK did not accept French students they often gave up on the idea of mobility. In light of such research, it could be argued that language in fact exerts a 'triple influence' upon student mobility acting as not only a barrier and driver to mobility, but also an influence that directs the flows of students to certain locations and away from others.

It has been reported that language barriers to mobility vary according to geographical location, academic discipline and socio-economic background. For example, engineers, students from less educated families and students from Estonia have been found to be the least confident about their language skills and are therefore less likely to study abroad (Admit, 2000b). Language as a barrier to mobility is therefore complex to assess, as a number of factors must be taken into account.

2.3.2.2 *Professional drivers to mobility*

It is commonly believed that a period spent studying abroad can lead to increased employability. This belief is often advocated by mobility programmes that aim to encourage student mobility, for example the British Council states 'your Erasmus experience will really help you to stand out in the job market' (British Council, WWW). The level to which student mobility is driven by students' desires to enhance their future

employability has been investigated by various research studies with conflicting results. As highlighted by Brooks and Waters (2011a), in particular we know relatively little about the way in which concerns about future employability feed into the decision-making processes of those students who move from western countries to pursue HE abroad.

Papatsiba (2005a) claimed that the motivation to become more employable is often a driver to participation in the Erasmus programme, stating that from the students' point of view, the European economic context 'modifies the professional 'map' by offering a larger career space, but also, by requiring new individual stances and competences' (p.180). For this reason, many students felt that a period spent studying abroad, either to increase knowledge of a foreign labour market and/or to improve language skills, was necessary for their professional career and future employability. Although employability has been identified as playing a role in encouraging student mobility, it has generally been found to be less influencing than other factors. For example, Vossensteyn et al (2010) discovered that the expected benefits to the future career ranked lower in terms of individual priorities than issues such as the opportunity to live abroad and to acquire soft skills and Findlay et al (2006) found that the opportunity to gain life experience was more important than factors such as employability from the student perspective. Similarly, Brooks and Waters (2009b) examined degree mobile UK students and reported that the desire to stand out in the labour market was not a main driver to student mobility with few students claiming their aim was to gain a stronger position in labour market. They did however suggest that there is some evidence to suggest that students' choices to study abroad may be underpinned by broader concerns about securing advantage within a congested graduate labour market. It has also been suggested that as the number of students studying abroad has increased, the relative labour market advantage of the experience has declined (Vossensteyn et al, 2010).

It could be argued that employability related drivers to student mobility have been intensified due to the expansion of HE, which many have argued has led to credential inflation (Collins, 2002; Van de Werfhorst and Andersen, 2005). As suggested by Brown and Heskeh (2004), the relationship between credentials and occupational position is less clear as more people gain access to university credentials. Credential inflation has led to increased competition where students need to do more to gain a positional advantage in a

congested labour market (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Employees now seek to differentiate between a growing number of graduates which has led students, who can afford it, to make decisions within global circuits of HE in order to obtain the best education they can buy to become employable (Waters, 2009). It is important to note, however, that this strategy is only feasible for certain students due to the financial implications of studying abroad. This means that study abroad, degree-mobility in particular, is often more accessible for students from privileged backgrounds.

2.3.2.3 *Financial factors and socio-economic background*

Financial obstacles are widely considered to be one of the biggest hindrances to student mobility and, despite the presence of the Erasmus grant, it has often been found that finance remains a barrier to student mobility in Europe (Admit, 2000b; Bauwens et al, 2008; Otero, 2008; Vossensteyn et al, 2010). It has, however, been reported that finance has diverse effects on mobility according to both country of origin and destination country making this issue complex to assess (Admit, 2000b; Vossensteyn et al, 2010).

Finance as a barrier to mobility is not simply an issue of available 'cash' since related factors, such as part-time employment, an extra year of student debt and housing contracts, may also present financial problems (Findlay et al, 2006). Vossensteyn et al (2010) also suggested that it is not only the gross level of the Erasmus grant which affects students' willingness to participate but also the practicalities of being funded for a period of study in an unfamiliar environment, including uncertainty about the costs incurred, the final level of the grant to be paid and uncertainty about the match between the payment schedule and the point at which expenses are incurred. Tang et al (2008) noted that the majority of UK students sampled in their study would like to have had an international experience during their study, if they had been provided with sufficient financial support. Vossensteyn et al (2010) estimated that the number of students who do not study abroad through the Erasmus programme because of finance is between 980,000 and 1.5 million. They did, however, acknowledge that this is a difficult estimate to make as even if financial barriers were removed other factors, such as personal relationships, may limit mobility.

In terms of work placement mobility, Brooks and Becket (2011) reported that students of international hospitality degree programmes were actively encouraged to take up the

opportunity of an international placement, but there were often difficulties related to financial constraints. Brooks and Becket (2011) argued that there is a need to develop more support for students wishing to undertake international placement or study exchanges in light of their personal circumstances. They suggested that greater engagement with industry partners is one way to achieve this support for students.

It is important to note that financial factors can also act as drivers to student mobility. In relation to degree mobility, it has been suggested that in the UK, students have been driven to study abroad due to the introduction of 'top up' fees (Clarke, 2006) and the increased targeting of overseas universities attempting to attract UK students (Brooks and Waters, 2011b). As students now pay for HE (since 1998 in the UK) they have become consumers who will seek out the best 'value for money' option when purchasing HE. Brooks and Waters (2011b) reported that increased opportunities for funding overseas has acted as a driver to UK student mobility, suggesting that as HE in the UK has become more expensive students have been driven to study abroad where financial assistance may be available. This is an important factor to consider due to the planned rises in UK university fees in 2012. This issue is examined further in chapter 5.

According to Varbanova (2008), in a report from the European Commission's high-level expert forum on mobility, 'the importance of the cost barrier is directly linked to the socio-economic background of the students or trainees' (p.14). It is widely acknowledged that, in the UK in particular, 'students taking part in study abroad programmes are not drawn from a representative cross-section of the population but come disproportionately from middle-class and privileged backgrounds' (Findlay et al, 2006: 303). Due to issues regarding finance, the Admit report (2000b) suggested that Erasmus is not seen as an equal opportunity programme and is instead seen as a programme where mainly upper or middle class students can participate. The issue of unequal participation in mobility programmes is important as it has been claimed that inequalities in student mobility opportunities at an individual and HEI level conspire with social class to reproduce uneven chances of students becoming 'Eurostars' or part of a European or global elite (Favell, 2008). There is evidence to suggest that this has long since been the case as discussed by Dhondt (2008), student mobility in South-Eastern European countries in the 20th century played a significant part in the so-called elite formation.

Research has often used data from the Erasmus programme to evaluate the socio-economic background of mobile students mainly due to the availability of this data set compared with other, unorganised forms of mobility. The findings of these studies have proved to be inconsistent. A European Commission study claimed to find little evidence of selectivity based on socio-economic background (European Commission, 2000). In contrast to this, the Euro Student 2000 report claimed that 'students from low-income families make substantially less use of the opportunities for studying abroad than those from families with higher income' (Schnitzer and Zempel-Gino, 2002: 115). This finding has since been supported by numerous research studies that have argued socio-economic background is a barrier to participation in the Erasmus programme (for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Messer and Wolter, 2005; HEFCE, 2009). King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) pointed out that Erasmus students are more likely to be female, white and drawn from higher social groups whereas males, non-whites and those from lower-status social groups are under-represented in Erasmus flows. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) commented that to some extent these selective characteristics do in fact reflect the fact that language students, who make up a high proportion of UK Erasmus students, are disproportionately drawn from these segments of the population; however, they also stressed that the selectivity is even more prominent among non-language students.

Parental educational and occupational background has also been found to affect participation in the Erasmus programme (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) concluded that the strongest predictor of UK student mobility was having a mother in professional or managerial employment. Having a father employed in these categories was also found to be significant, but less so than the mothers. Parental educational status also had an effect where the mother's educational achievements again had a stronger predictive influence than the fathers. Messer and Wolter (2005) similarly argued that the mother's educational background was a significant variable in participation in student mobility programmes amongst Swiss students. Findlay et al (2010) also discovered that UK students from families where one or both parents had HE were more likely to go abroad in search of a world class university than those from other backgrounds. The findings discussed here suggest that class inequalities exist in terms of both desire and access to student mobility opportunities.

It could be argued that the research explored here suggests that the relative risk aversion (RRA) (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997) mechanism is a relevant theory to consider when exploring participation in student mobility. RRA theory suggests that people make educational choices to avoid downward social mobility as a strategy of class maintenance. This theory has been used to explain why students from higher social class backgrounds are more likely to stay in education than those from lower classes as students use the social position of their parents as a reference for own aspirations (Keller & Zavalloni, 1964). Participation in student mobility is often determined by parental education and professional status and it could therefore be argued that student mobility has become a mechanism to avoid downward social mobility and therefore part of RRA strategies.

The socio-economic background of students has also been identified to influence degree-mobility. It has been argued that education structures previously protected and benefited the middle classes who could gain advantage due to their 'cultural capital'. This advantage has however been threatened by the expansion of HE, meaning that the middle classes now have to search for new ways to maintain their advantage and privilege (Brown, 2003). Waters (2006) examined these debates within an international dimension and suggested that the middle classes have employed strategies to enable them to stand out from the growing crowd of qualified students. Waters (2006) argued that in Hong Kong, middle-class families pursue international education in order to escape a highly competitive, exam-driven education system whilst at the same time acquiring scarcer, more valuable, academic credentials. Brooks and Waters (2009a; 2009b) later focused on UK students and supported the earlier findings of Waters (2006), commenting on the privileged nature of overseas study among UK university students, particularly at undergraduate level. Here it was suggested that a minority of highly privileged young people are making their HE decisions within global rather than national or regional circuits. This too, supports the assertion that study abroad has become a strategy employed by the middle classes to gain positional advantage through the acquisition of human and cultural capital.

The European Commission's high level expert forum on mobility commented that 'without targeted help, mobility risks to be the preserve of elites, with young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds being locked out because it is costly and because the benefits it brings are not evident to them' (2007: 12). There is, however, evidence to suggest that

inclusion in Erasmus is beginning to improve. Otero (2008) for example stated that 'in spite of still important socio-economic barriers to the take-up of the programme, access has been moderately widened' (from 1998/99 to 2004/05) (p.135). Contrary to this, the Euro student report (2009) reported that social background remained an important factor affecting student mobility although this did vary by country. For example, this was especially apparent in Bulgaria, Italy and Slovenia and less so in Austria and Switzerland. There is therefore some way to go if Erasmus is to become an equal opportunities programme irrespective of socio-economic background. As argued by Murphy-Lejeune (2008), at present, for some students mobility is an 'obvious choice but for others it will only be an impossible dream' which has created a situation where there are 'the chosen ones and there are the doomed' (p.12).

2.3.2.4 *Institutional factors*

Different countries, and institutions within them, have varying strategies and processes in place to facilitate student mobility; however, the role that HEIs play in encouraging or discouraging student mobility has been relatively neglected in existing literature. Institution type has, however, been found to affect how active particular universities are in encouraging the outward mobility of students in the UK. Findlay et al (2006) identified that 'old' universities were more active in this sense than 'new' universities. New universities are defined as former polytechnics and colleges that were given university status after 1992 and old universities are defined as having been established prior to this date. This difference can partly be explained due to the fact that 'old' universities tend to have more socio-economically advantaged students who are more likely to study abroad in general and because these 'old' universities tend to have more securely embedded language departments which are the most active in outward mobility. These are generalisations, but do begin to demonstrate how institutional structures can affect outgoing rates of student mobility.

Findlay et al (2006) highlighted that despite the fact that most HEIs make some reference to the desirability of international mobility in their mission and policy statements, only a third of the HEIs who responded to their questionnaire had a specific strategic plan for student mobility, and even fewer had specific numerical targets. They also noted that many comments were made to suggest that apart from the drive to recruit high-fee

overseas students, HEIs had little in the way of strategies for student mobility especially in relation to encouraging exchange schemes such as Erasmus with European students who pay little or no fees. It must, however, be noted that the findings of Findlay et al (2006) may now be out-dated as internationalisation strategies within HEIs may have developed rapidly in recent years.

Due to a lack of strategic plans for mobility, HEIs may create barriers to mobility by providing little encouragement, support or information to students regarding study abroad programmes. This was acknowledged by the European Commission's high expert forum on mobility (Varbanova, 2008), as they commented that there is a lack of awareness of the advantages of having a mobility experience that is often exacerbated due to promoters of mobility lacking adequate knowledge and incentives to encourage mobility. It was also suggested here that within institutions complex administrative procedures act as a deterrent to encouraging mobility. Konito (2008) advocated that overcoming institutional barriers and importantly creating a positive attitude amongst personnel within HEIs is essential for encouraging students to participate in international activities. As noted by Adia et al (1994), the success of student mobility within institutions is often due to mobility 'champions' who are individuals, often academics, who introduce or campaign for student mobility. Adia et al (1994) suggested that the availability of funds, from programmes such as Erasmus, add impetus to the cause of these 'champions', allowing them to increase outgoing mobility.

Within HEIs the issue of information availability may also act as a barrier to mobility. Vossensteyn et al (2010) found that information about the Erasmus programme was a problem for some students. In their survey 53% of respondents claimed that more information would have convinced them to participate in Erasmus however in contrast to this only 16% of the students who actually participated claimed they had encountered problems in terms of information availability. Likewise, the ESN (Erasmus Student Network) report into the obstacles to student mobility in Erasmus discovered that students were not satisfied with provision of information at their home and host university (Bauwens et al, 2008). The ESN stated that it is important to notice that a lack of information can influence other aspects of students' lives abroad such as recognition of courses, financial aspects and social integration. Information type and availability relating

to studying abroad are therefore important issues within HEIs. Fielden et al (2007) also outlined institutional barriers to student mobility including unclear institutional strategies, lack of encouragement, inadequate support and funding and argued that it is important to remove these barriers to facilitate student mobility from the UK. Fielden et al (2007) asserted that the benefits of studying abroad were not being adequately portrayed to students, which he argued was an important issue to address within HEIs.

In 1989, the ECTS (European credit transfer system) was launched within the framework of Erasmus to encourage the recognition of courses attended at foreign universities. However, this recognition only applies to mobility to European institutions partaking in Erasmus and therefore mobility outside of Europe may still be restricted due to recognition. The ECTS is also considered insufficient due to problems relating to the management of credit transfer and administration (Teichler, 2001). Vossensteyn et al (2010) established that an average of 34% of students surveyed from six European countries identified that fears with credit recognition influenced their decision not to participate in Erasmus, with the number reaching 60% in certain countries. Vossensteyn et al (2010) commented that in several countries this fear is compounded by the fear that problems with credit recognition will go on to delay graduation and additional costs may be incurred due to accumulated student loans, tuition fees and postponed earnings. Recognition within HEIs can therefore also act as a barrier to mobility.

An institutional barrier to participation in work placements based in the UK is that demand for placements often outstrips supply (Ellis and Moon, 1999). As argued by Little and Harvey (2006), the problem of placement availability should not be downplayed as the 'Futurefit' report (2009) found that 35% of students claimed they would have liked to have taken part in a special programme to develop their employability skills but this was not offered. It is important to note that the current economic climate may also be making it more difficult for students to find work placements. For example, Taggart (2009) reported that the economic downturn has hit student job placement programmes at Northern Ireland's universities with the University of Ulster currently allowing some students to skip placements because many businesses cannot take on students. Interestingly, Damien McGivern, the head of the Careers Development Centre at the University of Ulster, suggested that due to this lack of placement availability 'students maybe have to look a bit

more broadly for opportunities locally, nationally and even internationally' (Taggart, 2009:1). The recession and a lack of placements may therefore encourage students from the UK to take part in an international work placement. This is explored in chapter 5.

2.3.2.5 *Personal and biographical factors*

It is difficult to generalise about personal and attitudinal factors that encourage or restrict student mobility (Findlay et al, 2006). A distinction also needs to be made between personal motivations that encourage students to study abroad and personal characteristics that may influence this mobility (King et al, 2010).

In terms of personal characteristics it has been suggested that the personal traits and individual personalities of students can determine whether students chose to participate in study abroad programmes or not. Goldstein and Kim (2005) concluded that US students who studied abroad differed significantly from those who did not, particularly in terms of concern about completing their academic course, their expectations of studying abroad, ethnocentrism, prejudice, and foreign language interest. Similarly, Bakalis and Joiner (2004) found that Australian 'students with a high degree of openness and a high tolerance of ambiguity were more likely to participate in an exchange program, whereas students revealing a low degree of openness and low tolerance of ambiguity were less likely to participate in a study abroad program' (p.290). Findlay et al (2006) also reported that students who had studied abroad often commented on the inward-looking nature of students who had not studied abroad and made comments about the British students' attitudes towards mobility in general.

It has also been argued that personal experiences of mobility and cultural encounters can act as drivers to student mobility. For example, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) suggested that the main difference between students who become mobile, and their peers who do not, is the acquisition of mobility capital. Mobility capital is defined by Murphy-Lejeune to be a sub-component of human capital that is derived from the international experience gained by living abroad. An individual's mobility capital is argued to comprise of four main elements: family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaption and personality features. These four elements determine an individual's mobility capital that can be a driving force to mobility.

Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) suggestion that previous experiences of mobility can affect the likelihood of student mobility has been supported by Findlay et al (2006) and Maiworm and Teichler (2002b) who found that mobility prior to university increases the propensity to take the mobility option during HE. As stated by Findlay et al (2006), it is important to acknowledge that previous experiences of mobility are linked to socio-economic background and the mobility cultures students are embedded in.

The influence of mobility capital on student mobility is contentious, as siblings do not always follow the same path in terms of mobility. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) accounted for this difference as the effects of the 'travel bug' in which feelings and emotions play a large part. Whether students acquire this travel bug is dependent on personality differences between siblings. Brooks and Waters (2010) have argued that the way 'mobility capital' is defined by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) downplays both its socially reproductive effect and its interactions with other forms of capital. They suggested that instead of understanding it as a sub-component of human capital it would be better conceptualised as a form of capital which exists alongside the others identified by Bourdieu (1997) (economic, social and cultural) and which can be both converted into these other types of capital and produced by them also (Brooks and Waters, 2010: 154).

Brooks and Waters (2010) argued that degree mobile students from the UK are often influenced by their parents, and other family members, through the development of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). 'Habitus' normalises travel and can give students confidence in dealing with new cultures and can thus encourage students to study abroad. Brooks and Waters (2010) reported three main ways in which this was created. Firstly, through experiences of travel as children for family holidays, secondly, through experiences of overseas travel as a result of their parents' work and finally, having one or more parent who had been born overseas and retained strong links to that country. Similarly, King (2003) noted that a third of his sample of mobile students had an international family background with at least one parent of non-UK nationality. Brooks and Waters (2010) also highlighted that friends often provided links to specific countries or institutions that subsequently helped minimise mobile students' fears of the unknown.

A personal driver to degree-mobility has also been found to be the opportunity to escape perceived failure in the home country HE system. Brooks and Waters (2009a) noted that student mobility had often been perceived to be the first choice of students moving from east to west, which emphasises the importance of international HE as a high-prestige for those students who can afford it. However, Brooks and Waters (2009a) argued that in many cases an overseas education offered UK students a 'second chance' at accessing elite education which they did not gain access to at home. In this sense, mobility to a globally recognised university abroad was a way of escaping failure to gain a place at their university of choice at home. This was particularly found to be the case where parental aspirations were high and students wanted to attend a prestigious university even if it meant moving abroad for their degree. For UK students, who can afford it, student mobility is therefore a substitute to a highly prestigious degree gained in the UK.

Similarly to Brooks and Waters (2009a), Findlay et al (2010) assessed the motivations and experiences of UK degree mobile students. Here it was found that there was a diverse range of motivations driving international mobility with the dominant influence being the desire to attend a world-class institution. Findlay et al (2010) also discovered that failure to gain a place at their desired UK university was a trigger to mobility, which supports the suggestion made by Brooks and Waters (2009a) that mobility often provided an opportunity for a 'second chance of success'. Other important drivers were found to be the opportunity for adventure (50%) and the desire to take the first step towards an international career (34%). Waters et al (2011) similarly reported that notions of fun, enjoyment and the pursuit of happiness abroad featured strongly in the reasons why UK students decided to pursue HE abroad.

2.3.2.6 *Gender and the drivers to student mobility*

Gender differences in the mobility of academics have begun to receive increased attention (for example, Ackers and Gill, 2008; Leemann, 2010; Jöns, 2011); however, as discussed by Brooks and Waters (2011a) very little has been written about gender in relation to international students. Student mobility research that has taken gender into account has focused on Japanese students in the US (Ono and Piper, 2004) and in the UK (Habu, 2000) and East Asian students in Canada (Park, 2010). Brooks and Waters (2011a) suggested that such research has offered a 'useful corrective to 'gender-blind' studies of migration' in

relation to international students (p.67), but argued that in particular there has been very little said on the issue of gender in relation to UK international students.

In a study for the Erasmus student network (ESN), Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2006) asserted that females were more likely to choose learning about different cultures, practicing a foreign language, increasing academic knowledge and enhancing future employment opportunities as their motivation to go abroad whereas males wanted to have fun and meet new people. A report produced by NUS (2010) also reported differences in the drivers to mobility according to gender as females rated the chance to become more confident and self-reliant higher than males and females were more likely to be motivated to improve language skills. As will be discussed in chapter 4, it is widely known that gender inequalities exist in participation rates of student mobility programmes such as Erasmus as considerably more females participate than males. If the reasons for this unequal participation are to be established, further work in this area is needed.

Many factors have therefore been identified as drivers and barriers to different forms of student mobility and these factors vary according to geographical location, area of study, previous mobility experiences, gender and also due to personal characteristics. The context of each study investigating the drivers and barriers to mobility is therefore important to consider. Although the drivers and barriers to mobility have been categorised here it is important to note that a variety of these factors are likely to influence students at any one point which will be interwoven in the decision making process. This research will draw on this body of literature in order to assess whether the drivers to work placement mobility are the same as study abroad (see chapter 5).

2.3.3 The student mobility experience

The experiences of mobile students have been relatively neglected in previous research and have been identified as a substantial gap in the available literature (Figlewicz and Williams, 2005). There are notable exceptions to this (for example, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002 and Tsoukalas, 2008) but overall, little attention has been paid to the lived experiences of mobile students. In particular, the experiences of work placement students in industry abroad have been overlooked.

McLeod and Wainwright (2009) contended that more needs to be done to evaluate fully the study abroad experience supporting Engle and Engle (2003) who stated that educators and administrators should 're-orient their focus from an appraisal of the sheer numbers of students participating in international education to the quality of their experiences abroad' (p.1). Exploring the experiences of mobile students is however difficult as Killick (ND) stated what emerges is a highly complex and significantly individual experience across participants and types of mobility. It has also been suggested that the reasons why students chose to study abroad can influence the type of experience students have (Chirkov et al, 2007).

Although under-researched, there is a general consensus that student mobility is a positive experience for those who participate (Teichler, 2004b). Tsoukalas (2008), for example, suggested that the life of an Erasmus student is very intensive creating a memorable period of their lives. The Erasmus experience is suggested to 'involve unusual levels of licence and indulgence and often a touch of emancipation as well' (Tsoukalas, 2008: 134). Tsoukalas (2008) found that these experiences often took a heavy toll on students' well being with many claiming to have come close to exhaustion. On return from their Erasmus experience, however, students were found to return to their normal lives with routines less 'special' than those whilst abroad. This creates a 'double life' of Erasmus students identified by Tsoukalas (2008) to be 'complex and sometimes even contradictory' (p.131). Murphy-Lejeune (2008) also identified the intensive nature of the study abroad experience commenting that 'the general experience is a potentially intensive formative situation in that individuals are pushed to change under pressure from the environment' (p.25).

The experience of studying abroad is often presented as an opportunity to experience a new culture, meet people from a range of backgrounds and nationalities and get first hand experience of the host society. The extent to which this occurs has however been debated. Coleman (2010) argued that during a year abroad students move in three concentric social circles: English-speaking peers, international groups and local native speaking groups (cited in Meier and Daniels, 2011). De Federico de la Rúa (2008) similarly found that Erasmus students build three types of friendship ties characterised largely by the nationality groupings of the friends: local people, compatriots, and people from other countries. The level to which students interact within these three groups during a stay abroad has been

debated and will be further examined in this study.

Murphy-Lejeune (2002; 2008) identified that students control how much they choose to engage with the mobility experience whilst abroad with some students not fully participating in local life, having limited contact with locals and refusing to speak or learn the host language. Waters and Brooks (2010b) similarly found that degree mobile UK students often socialised with other British and international students whilst abroad, many of whom were from privileged backgrounds. This separation and isolation produces an exclusive cultural environment where interaction with locals is limited. Waters (2007) previously explored this issue reporting that exclusive 'clubs' are often actively formed in international schools in Hong Kong, where students' exposure to experiences of difference is limited. Waters (2007) described a sense of common identity and mutual recognition that binds groups to ensure the social reproduction of class status. A lack of social interaction with students from the host society has also been identified to be problem for international students in England. UKCOSA (2004), for example, found that social integration was a key problem for overseas students in England.

It has been argued that Erasmus students form exclusive groups whilst studying abroad. Tsoukalas (2008), for example, discovered that Erasmus students create networks where social bonding, information sharing and mutual support can take place that creates a distinctive Erasmus experience. Tsoukalas (2008) commented that Erasmus students share a common experience that brings them together into a 'psychosomatic resonance' with each other creating a social community that is often exclusive in character. Tsoukalas (2008) reported that although the Erasmus students were from various European countries, which often created language issues, these communities developed forms of communicating through rituals and symbolic means. These activities create a 'very distinctive group; a group with self-conscious and proud members' (Tsoukalas, 2008: 136) where social cohesion and solidarity is high. Tsoukalas (2008) described the exclusive character of the Erasmus experience and social groups as limiting the cultural mixing and intercultural learning of the Erasmus experience.

The organisation and structure of periods of study abroad have been identified to encourage the formation of exclusive social groups of international students. For example,

Kristensen (2004) argued that as many stays abroad are organised as group exchanges it can be easy for a participant to 'hide' in the group and avoid contact with locals. Kristensen (2004) suggested that this reduces the chances of intercultural understanding that is often a goal of study abroad. It has also been argued that courses taken at universities whilst abroad are sometimes exclusively arranged for international or exchange students which this can limit interaction with locals (Dervin, 2007). These prescribed environments, Dervin (2007) commented, means that students are rarely able to meet locals apart from tutors, teaching staff and shop assistants. Fincher and Shaw (2009) pointed out that institutional factors have enforced the segregation of international students from the 'wider society' in Melbourne leading them to create insular and tightly bound groups that many students found hard to escape. Collins (2008) also demonstrated that social and cultural segregation of international students in New Zealand was often caused by architecture and housing practices, although separation also occurred through choice. In terms of Erasmus students, they are often provided with accommodation that is usually in specially designated areas of university campuses and living areas alongside other Erasmus and international students. This organised housing has been found to have an impact on the social inscription of the students (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Papatsiba 2003; Dervin, 2007) as these living arrangements encourage the development of exclusive groups of international students. There is evidence to suggest that the exclusive groups that are often formed by international students whilst abroad are not always favoured or chosen by students. Teichler (2004b), for example, reported that 18% of students claimed that it was a serious problem that they had too much contact with people from their own country and Stronkhorst (2005) found that more than 40% of both study and intern abroad students from two Dutch universities had problems socialising with locals.

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) conducted one of the few research studies that has investigated the experience of work placement students abroad and compared this experience with study abroad. A French programme was focused on in this project named the *Ecole Europeenne des affaires de Paris (EAP)* which is a three year abroad programme involving study and work experience in three European languages and contexts. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) found that during the work placement element of the EAP students had more contact with locals that went on to enhance cultural discovery. Students also reported that

this experience enhanced their integration into local society when compared with the study abroad period. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) therefore acknowledged that the social interactions students engage in whilst abroad are dependent on the type of mobility students engaged in. Meier and Daniels (2011) similarly found that students who worked abroad were more likely to build strong bonds with locals than those who studied abroad or completed a language assistantship as the latter were more likely to build relationships with individuals from their home country or other international students. Meier and Daniels' (2011) study focused exclusively on language students and they themselves acknowledged the study was relatively small scale (ten work placement students). These two studies (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002 and Meier and Daniels, 2001) acknowledged that the type of mobility experience can affect students' access to locals and therefore their social experience whilst abroad; however, this remains an under-researched area. This research has found evidence to support this argument, which will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Research has tended to conclude that the majority of Erasmus students are either very satisfied or satisfied with their experience (Figlewicz and Williams, 2005). Negative aspects of the student mobility experience have however been identified. Maiworm and Teichler (2002b) for example studied the problems faced by Erasmus students and found that one fifth of students stated they had experienced serious problems whilst studying abroad regarding issues such as administrative matters, accommodation, recognition and credit transfer, financial matters and guidance concerning the academic programme at the host institution. The extent of problems encountered was found to vary according to host country; for example, students encountered academic problems most in France, Spain and Italy and least in the UK. Language was more of a problem in France, Italy, Norway, Germany and Finland and administration more so in Greece, France, Austria, Italy and CEE countries. The ESN Survey (2006) also identified problems within the Erasmus experience as nearly 20% of students felt discriminated against during their stay mostly because of them being foreigners (8% of all respondents) and their poor language skills (6%) (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006). Teichler (2004b) identified issues with accommodation amongst mobile students stating that 23% of students reported serious problems with respect to accommodation with half living in university dormitories. Problems included poor quality, noise, high prices and distance from university. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) also

identified problems with housing reporting that a number of students changed their living arrangements during their stay due to 'disharmony' (p.156).

Papatsiba (2005a) investigated the problems faced by Erasmus students and found that French students who had taken part in the Erasmus programme did acknowledge difficulties but overall they spoke of the experience positively. Papatsiba (2005a) suggested that this period seems to be driven by a specific rationale, which makes any situation, positive or negative, potentially educational where everything becomes a lesson learned. Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) commented that 'practically everything in the European student experience may be assessed as a benefit. In other words, even the negative or difficult aspects of the stay are eventually perceived as enriching, adding significantly to their life experience in the present and potentially beneficial in the future' (p.230).

2.3.4 The effects of student mobility and work placements

In the existing literature on academia, mobility is most often presented as something positive and associated with a variety of benefits and positive outcomes (Musselin, 2004). As there are many different forms, flows and types of student mobility these effects are extremely varied and are often determined by factors such as the duration of stay abroad (Dwyer, 2004; Stronkhorst, 2005; Kehl and Morris, 2006). Research has identified a range of effects associated with student mobility for studies and work placements conducted in students' home countries of study. In the following sections, outcomes in terms of employability, academic effects, personal development, language skills, European identity and future mobility are explored.

2.3.4.1 *Employability*

Student mobility is widely accepted to make a positive contribution to developing employability attributes in learners (Ehiyazaryan, 2009). The link between student mobility and employability has however been described as the 'missing link in the story', particularly in the case of students from the UK as this connection has been under-researched in the existing literature (King et al, 2010). As expressed by Waters (2006), one of the limitations of existing literature on employability is its strong national focus, which results in little reference being made to the international dimensions of HE and graduate employability.

Fielden et al (2007) argued that 'although every study abroad office proclaims that a period of study abroad makes applicants more attractive to employers, there has been very little tangible evidence to confirm this' (p.14). Assessing the effects of study abroad on career and employment outcomes is difficult. This has previously been due to the absence of employer surveys to determine whether recruiters value students' international academic experiences in their hiring practices and the lack of specific detail on 'first-destination' or subsequent employment (Findlay et al, 2006). Numerous employer surveys have since attempted to address this gap analysing whether employers favour international experience. The majority of these surveys have reported that employers favour graduates with a broad world view, global perspectives and traits which have regularly been associated with a time spent abroad (Bakalis and Joiner, 2004; Fielden et al, 2007; Hermans, 2007; Trooboff et al, 2007; Archer and Davison, 2008; Brooks and Becket, 2011).

Daly and Barker (2005) stated that due to increased competition within the marketplace, graduates require skills such as intercultural competencies to make them more employable. Study abroad has been seen as effective in providing students with such international knowledge and skills (Daly and Barker, 2005). Leggott and Stapleford (2007) noted that international experiences enhance the employability skills of students as employers are seeking the kinds of communication, negotiation skills, self-sufficiency and self-efficacy skills that are developed through such experiences. Study abroad is therefore assumed to provide students with the skills to become what Hunter et al (2006) termed 'globally ready graduates'. In contrast, Ehiyazaryan (2009) discovered that different types of employers favoured international experience to different extents depending on the business and requirement and therefore not all employers valued international experience. Similarly, Van Hoof (1999) found that US job recruiters tend to favour national work experience over international work experience.

The outcomes for Erasmus and non-Erasmus students in terms of employability have been debated as some studies have suggested that the outcomes appear to be similar between the two groups whereas other studies have found that credit mobile students were more likely to be employed in professional, managerial and other high-status jobs, had higher average salaries and less experience of unemployment (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). It has

also been reported that former Erasmus students are often convinced that the Erasmus experience was helpful for them to obtain their first job (Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; Jahr & Teichler, 2002; Kehm, 2005; Bracht et al, 2006; Teichler & Janson, 2007) and that Erasmus students find jobs quicker after graduation when compared to non-mobile students (Cammelli et al, 2008). It has been suggested that the employability related benefits of study abroad through Erasmus have declined as the experience has become more common (Ballad and Williams, 2004; Teichler and Janson, 2007; Teichler, 2012); however, this has been found to vary nationally (Teichler and Janson, 2007).

Crossman and Clarke (2009) studied the relationship between international experience and graduate employability in the views of Australian employers, academics and students. Crossman and Clarke (2009) found that all three stakeholders they surveyed identified clear connections between international experience and employability. This connection was made given outcomes associated with the forging of networks, opportunities for experiential learning, language acquisition and the development of soft skills related to cultural understandings, personal characteristics and ways of thinking (Crossman and Clarke, 2009).

Bracht et al (2006) noted that only 16% of former Erasmus students surveyed consider their income to be higher than that of their peers not having spent any study period abroad and Teichler & Janson (2007) claimed that former Erasmus students do not believe that their status and income are superior on average to those of formerly non-mobile students. Cammelli et al (2008) found there to be a small advantage in terms of wages for previous Italian Erasmus study abroad students when compared to non-mobile students which increased slightly over a five year period (see also Messer and Wolter, 2005). It has however also been acknowledged that there are several elements which must be taken into account, such as occupational condition at graduation and characteristics of the job held at the time of the interview, which affect these results.

Teichler and Janson (2007) concluded that the temporary study period in another European country undertaken in the framework of Erasmus is professionally valuable but report that the impact is stronger for the career horizontally than vertically. This means that Erasmus offers more opportunities in the way of increasing international mobility,

international competences, and visibly international work tasks but fewer opportunities to increase success and income in employment. These findings are supported by Bracht et al (2006) who found that Erasmus mobility was not frequently viewed as an access route to high-flying careers but rather as a door-opener into the labour market and by Ballard and Williams (2004) who argued that Erasmus mobility does not provide significant salary gains or higher-level jobs but was an efficient tool to accelerate entrance into the labour market. Furthermore, it has been suggested that study abroad can impact students' future career plans (Hannigan, 2001; Ingram and Peterson, 2004). It has also been found that students who complete an internship abroad are more likely to report that their time abroad ignited interest in a career direction and to have acquired skill sets that influenced their career path more so than study abroad (Dwyer and Peters, 2004).

There are many explanations as to why a period spent studying abroad can go on to be professionally beneficial and enhance the employability of students who participate. Bakalis and Joiner (2004) for example reported that Australian students who studied abroad experienced the benefits of developing important life skills such as maturity and confidence, an increased global outlook, enhanced communication skills, cultural sensitivity and adaptability as well as access to global networks which may go on to provide employment opportunities in the future. Bakalis and Joiner (2004) suggested that these personal benefits were highly valued by multinational corporations that may benefit students in their search for employment. In a study of employers in Slovenia, Flander (2011) discovered that in the event that two students had applied for a job where one had been abroad on an extended internship and the other for study purposes, 60.7% of the respondents would favour the student who had pursued a placement abroad. A period spent working abroad may, therefore, be more beneficial in terms of employability than study abroad. This is however an under-researched area and the differences between types of mobility and employment outcomes have been generally neglected.

Despite the positive links made between study abroad and employability it is important to acknowledge that a period spent studying abroad may not be purely beneficial to students in terms of employability. Brooks and Waters (2009b) for example found that students who had completed the whole of their undergraduate degree abroad often felt disadvantaged in the labour market claiming that a lack of knowledge about the

institutions in which they studied was a problem. They also found that students felt they had been disillusioned about how much of a positive the experience would be for them in relation to the impacts on their future careers.

In terms of work placements conducted in students' home countries of study, it is a widely held belief within the HE community that work experience gives students the opportunity to acquire a range of attributes which can enhance their employability and even increase their salary. This belief has been supported by findings from numerous studies (for example; Bowes and Harvey, 1999; Blackwell and Harvey, 1999; Blackwell et al, 2001; Auburn, 2007; HEFCE, 2009; Paisey and Paisey, 2010). It has also been suggested that work placements can help shape students' future plans (Little and Harvey, 2006).

2.3.4.2 *Academic effects*

Student mobility has become associated with enhanced degree results and improved academic performance. This has contributed towards increasing importance being placed on student mobility by HEIs (Findlay et al, 2006). Numerous studies have attempted to examine the academic effects of student mobility with the general consensus being that this mobility can have a positive effect on academic studies.

Findlay et al (2006) found that Erasmus students were more likely to get first-class degrees or 'good' degrees than non-Erasmus graduates. Findlay et al (2006) did, however, acknowledge that there are many factors associated with degree performance, notably entry qualifications and subject of study and it is unlikely that Erasmus and non-Erasmus students are comparable in these respects. They did in fact find that when just those students on degrees involving a language component were separated, Erasmus and non-Erasmus graduates had similar proportions of 'good' degrees. HEFCE (2009) reported that 75 per cent of Erasmus students surveyed received a first or an upper second-class degree, compared to 81 per cent for students on other periods of study abroad, and 60 per cent of other students from four year courses. Sanz-Sainz and Roldan-Miranda (2008) similarly found that Spanish students improved their academic grades significantly after a stay abroad regardless of the country they visited, with lowest achievers in particular making the most progress. This research also acknowledged the limitation of the research design

as no control group was present and there were various other reasons why students' grades may have improved in the final year of studies.

Student mobility has also been suggested to have a 'warming up' or 'turning on' effect on subsequent education (Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Bracht et al, 2006). Teichler and Jahr (2001) discovered, through a longitudinal study, that about half of Erasmus students went on to participate in graduate, professional or other types of advanced study, suggesting that studying abroad had encouraged students into continuing their education. Bracht et al (2006) also argued that temporary student mobility stimulated former Erasmus students to be interested in advanced education. It has been claimed that studying abroad can lead to changes in the characteristics and values of students, which can have a positive impact on academic skills and performance. Hadis (2005) for example found that US students who studied abroad benefitted from increasing their independence and open-mindedness, which subsequently had a positive impact on the intrinsic value that students place on education and their academic focusing. The academic effects of student mobility can therefore be both direct and indirect.

A negative academic effect of study abroad has been identified by Fiorella de Nicola (ND) who identified the 'post-Erasmus syndrome,' that consists of students having trouble adapting back to their former lifestyle and returning to university following a period spent studying abroad. Here it was suggested that students often struggle to adjust back to university in the UK, which could negatively affect their studies. In general, the academic effects of student mobility have, however, been found to be positive.

Internships, or work experience, are very popular in the US with the Society for Experiential Education estimating that at least one-third of all college students complete internships before graduation (Oldman and Hamadeh 1994). For the most part however, these internships remain locally based. Toncar and Cudmore (2000) argued that such placements are not sufficient for students studying international marketing or international business management, as in these disciplines international work experience is essential. Toncar and Cudmore (2000) supported the assertion that work placements/internships provide a form of experiential learning that can bridge the gap between classroom learning and knowledge application outside of the university and

argued that students of certain disciplines can benefit from these placements being internationally based. They suggested that the experiential learning element of placements abroad is what differentiates work experience abroad from studying abroad.

One of the few studies identified in this literature review that has assessed the opinions of students who took part in a work placement abroad was Steinberg's (2002) project investigating academic quality in experiential programmes abroad. Steinberg (2002) surveyed US students at IES (Institute for International Education) who had completed an internship or field placement abroad. Steinberg (2002) reported that while college faculty and staff were often uneasy about experiential components of study abroad, students themselves found them to be a valuable part of their learning experience. It was reported that the placements had not only enhanced students' language skills but had also reinforced their intercultural learning which positively impacted on overall learning in the new context.

In terms of work placements conducted in students' home countries of study it has been suggested that students who complete a placement often graduate with a higher degree classification (Wallace 2002; Gomez et al, 2004, Mandilaras 2004, HEFCE, 2009; Mendez and Rona, 2010). Work placement students have also been found to gain a wider understanding of their subject area, more disciplined attitudes to work, greater ability to contribute to discussions using real life situations, new ways of seeing their discipline, increased skills working as a team, increased confidence and time management and organisational skills (Little and, Harvey 2006; Smith et al, 2007). It has also been suggested that a workplace setting can help develop competencies which cannot be developed in a classroom environment such as political awareness, the ability to cope with uncertainty and change and specialist degree knowledge and skills (Arnold et al, 1999). It should however be noted that the positive relationship between work placements and academic studies has been contested. For example, Duignan (2002) found no significant difference in academic performance of business undergraduates who had undertaken a placement and those who had not and Driffield et al (2011) argued that the reason placement students achieve higher degree results is because better students do work placements.

Little and Harvey's (2006) survey of work placement students completing a placement in their home country of study also brought to light a number of negatives from the students' perceptions such as missing out on graduating with friends, a loss of motivation with learning and difficulties adapting back to university life and schedules. They did, however, continue to state that these drawbacks were not found to outweigh the benefits of work placements. There has also been criticisms made of work-based learning due to the variability of the effectiveness of such programmes suggesting that the beneficial effects of work placements are not always present (for example Martin, 1997). Webber (2005) suggested that a major problem for some work-based programmes is that there is a lack of integration between what is taught at university and what is required in the workplace setting.

2.3.4.3 *Personal development*

Despite student mobility often being associated with increased employability and improved academic performance, in general, personal and cultural benefits have been emphasised as to be the main outcome from a period spent studying abroad (for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Assessing the effects of mobility upon personal development is difficult, as unlike outcomes such as examination results or future migration patterns, personal development cannot easily be measured or quantified. Despite this, research has begun to explore the effects of mobility on personal development, again often focusing on Erasmus students.

King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) stated that general personal development was a main outcome of study abroad with career prospects and academic learning being secondary to areas of personal development. Stronkhorst (2005) also found that the element of having fun, followed by personal growth were the main value of a stay abroad from Dutch students' perspectives. Similarly, Papatsiba (2005b) found that the experience of studying abroad was beneficial for French Erasmus students at the personal level as students claimed they saw tangible proof of their own increased capacities to adapt to the changing environment of our times and had in many cases developed a positive image of themselves. This suggestion was supported by Otero (2008) who found that the Erasmus period abroad shaped the personal attitudes and values of participating students.

Research has also found that students' intercultural communication skills, intercultural adaptability and intercultural sensitivity can be affected by periods spent studying abroad. Williams (2005) claimed that students who study abroad exhibited a greater change in intercultural communication skills than students who did not study abroad and that the greatest predictor of intercultural communication skills was exposure to various different cultures. Bauwens et al (2008) similarly reported in an ESN survey that students who went abroad were better prepared for intercultural dialogue and were therefore said to be the future European leaders enhancing intercultural dialogue. Feast et al (2011) found, in a study based on students from the University of South Australia, that participation in study abroad fulfilled its objectives of encouraging students to develop cross-cultural understanding, intercultural communication and international perspectives.

Anderson et al (2006) argued that students who studied abroad lessened their tendency to see other cultures as better than their own and improved their ability to accept and adapt to cultural differences. Otero (2008) similarly found that over 92% of students reported that the period abroad had changed their understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background to a large or some extent. In an earlier study, Bryan and Sprague (1997) also found that former participants in an overseas internship programme for student teachers from the US had experienced a long-term, positive impact that included an increase in sensitivity to and empathy for students from other cultures and of different language backgrounds. As stated by Kauffmann et al (1992), a period spent studying abroad can therefore lead to the development of soft skills, such as enhanced interest in international affairs, world-mindedness, and cross-cultural empathy.

Tang et al (2009) pointed out that students, on return from a period abroad, were often motivated to help in supporting international students in the UK. They argued that this may go on to improve international students' experiences in the UK as it has been found that many international students in the UK fail to establish satisfactory relationships with home students or local people (Pritchard and Skinner, 2002). Tang et al (2009) labelled their research as an 'early attempt' to link incoming and outgoing HE mobility as previous research had treated the two as separate and unlinked processes. Tang et al's (2009) research is the only study that has addressed this issue and it therefore remains a gap in the literature that requires further attention.

2.3.4.4 *Language effects*

According to DeKeyser (2007), 'a semester abroad is often seen as the ultimate opportunity to practice a foreign language, in terms of both quantity and quality of input and interaction' (p.208). For this reason, the majority of language degrees include a period spent in the country of the language studied as it has long been assumed that the combination of immersion in the native speech community, combined with formal classroom learning, creates the best environment for language learning (Freed, 1995). The language outcomes of a time spent studying abroad have however been debated.

Findings by researchers such as Meara (1994), Lapkin et al (1995), Guntermann (1992) and Sanz-Sainz and Roldan-Miranda (2008) consistently found that students believe their language skills to have improved from a time spent abroad. DeKeyser (2007) however pointed out the limitations of self-assessment studies and argued that studies that have compared self-assessments and actual objective tests have often found a very low correlation (for example, Allen, 2002). In contrast to this, other studies have found improvements in language competencies following a period spent studying abroad (for example and Llanes et al, 2011).

Ife (2000) argued that students taking part in a year abroad often lack awareness of how to exploit fully the opportunity to improve language skills and are often conscious of their weak performance in terms of language whilst abroad. Cubillo et al (2008) found that in comparison to language students who did not study abroad, study abroad students experienced similar gains in listening comprehension which challenges the view that studying abroad is more beneficial than staying at 'home'. Cubillo (2008) did, however, also suggest that there are significant differences in the way learners approached listening tasks according to whether students studied abroad or not. Students who had studied abroad also achieved higher levels of confidence and self-perceived ability during their study abroad period. It is important to note that this research was based on students who participate in a five week study abroad programme in Spain and therefore the effects may be more prominent in programmes of a longer duration.

Pellegrino (1998) stated that 'learners who opt to spend a significant amount of time in the country of the target language are exposed to frequent and intense opportunities to

interact with native speakers, to activate their linguistic and sociolinguistic skills to achieve real communicative goals' (p.91). For these reasons, a period spent abroad is assumed to improve students' language learning, more so than in the university classroom environment. This positive assumption of the effects of study abroad on language proficiency is somewhat challenged by research studies highlighted earlier in this chapter, which have found students to have limited interaction with locals whilst abroad and to spend the majority of their time in Erasmus communities. Dwyer and Peters (2004) discovered that US students who studied abroad experienced greater long-term language benefits than students who completed an internship abroad and also found that those who attended a local university were more likely to maintain contact with host-country friends than those who worked abroad. The language outcomes of a stay abroad can therefore depend on the type of mobility students engage in as well as the host country; however, these differences remain under researched and will thus be investigated in this study.

2.3.4.5 *The formation of a European identity*

It has often been claimed that a period spent studying abroad can have an effect upon students' national identities (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Papatsiba, 2005b; Fligstein, 2008; Sigalas, 2009; 2010). This is a particularly important issue to investigate at the European level, as one of the political motivations to facilitate student mobility in the region is to foster a European identity to contribute towards integration in Europe (discussed further in chapter 4). This is made clear by the European Commission's high-level expert forum on mobility as they state that 'mobility breaks down barriers between people and groups, building a sense of EU citizenship' (2007: 9). The European Commission have for a long time asserted this view without the support of sufficient evidence. A number of studies have since tested these claims but results have been somewhat contradictory. It is also important to note here that the concept of a so-called 'European identity' or 'consciousness' is itself contested (Lehning, 2001; Strath, 2002).

King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) found that students from the University of Sussex who had taken part in a year abroad programme in Europe during their undergraduate studies had a greater knowledge of and interest in European affairs than their counterparts who did not complete a year abroad. Students who had studied abroad were also more favourably inclined towards European integration and the majority claimed to see themselves as

belonging to a European cultural space. In relation to European identity, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) argued that students who had completed a year abroad were more likely to see their identities as, at least partly European. Limitations of this research were acknowledged as a number of complexities may have affected the results. For example, socialisation patterns before studying abroad may affect issues relating to identity and the possibility of dual-identities also presented a challenge to the results; for these reasons King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) stated that their results are indicative.

In contrast to King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), Papatsiba (2005b) found that French Erasmus students were somewhat unaware of the wider rationales to encourage European integration and citizenship and rarely expressed an interest in the construction of Europe. Papatsiba (2005b) also reported that students showed hardly any increased level of European identity after a stay abroad. Sigalas (2009; 2010) supported the view of Papatsiba (2005b) and argued that whilst participation in the Erasmus programme did enable British students to improve their foreign language skills and learn more about other European countries, it did not foster a European self-identity or a sense of European pride. Sigalas (2009; 2010) commented that participation in Erasmus did help British students feel more attached to Europe and to acknowledge they have things in common with continental Europeans but it did not contribute towards the development of a European consciousness or identity. Interestingly, Sigalas (2009; 2010) did in fact find that Erasmus students were more likely to have a stronger European self-identity than non-mobile students, but this was not seen as the result of the overseas experience of studying abroad as students with stronger European identities were more likely to take part in Erasmus. Similarly, Wilson (2011) conducted a panel study of British, French and Swedish Erasmus students and found that Erasmus students may be more pro-European than their peers but this was because students who choose to take part were already more pro-European.

The methods employed in research investigating the effects of student mobility on identity have in recent years been subject to debate. For example, whether a control group of non-mobile students is needed and if surveying students before and after a period of mobility is appropriate (Sigalas, 2009). It must also be noted that the studies discussed above focused on students of different nationalities and differences in findings are possibly due to

national differences in the effects of mobility on identities. The extent to which student mobility can lead to the development of a European Identity is therefore greatly contested.

2.3.4.6 *Mobile students = Mobile graduates?*

There is a general consensus that mobility during the course of university leads to a much greater likelihood of international mobility after graduating (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Tremblay, 2005; Findlay et al, 2006; Dreher and Poutvaara, 2006). There has however been little empirical evidence to support this claim (Parey and Waldinger, 2007). One reason for this lack of evidence is data availability as most graduate surveys do not contain information relating to study abroad during a student's under-graduate career, and graduates who work abroad are generally not sampled in national surveys of the sending countries (Parey and Waldinger, 2007). Therefore the majority of the research discussed here is based on student surveys.

The question as to whether mobile students return to their home country, stay in the host country or travel elsewhere has important policy implications both for the home and host country (Dreher and Poutvaara, 2006). This issue is linked to debates surrounding 'brain drain' as it has often been assumed that talent will move from developing to developed nations that may be encouraged by student mobility. The concept of 'brain drain' has however been greatly debated in recent years (see, for example, Favell, 2008) being replaced by the concept of 'brain circulation' as mobility patterns have been revealed to be much more complex than 'brain gain' theories suggest (Ackers, 2005; Jöns, 2009). Findlay et al (2010) reported that degree mobile students with the strongest A level results were more likely to want to return to the UK and therefore international student mobility should not be interpreted as a brain drain of the UK's brightest young people. In the European context, the effects of student movements upon future migration is particularly important as a major political rationale of facilitating student mobility within Europe is to facilitate the development of a European labour force (discussed further in chapter 4).

It has frequently been argued that students who have been mobile during their undergraduate studies are more likely to live or work abroad after graduation than students who have not studied abroad (Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Bracht et al, 2006; Oosterbeek and Webbink, 2006; Parey and Waldinger, 2007;

2011; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008; Cammelli et al, 2008). It has also been asserted that degree mobile students are likely to become internationally mobile after graduation, although this has been found to vary by host country (Findlay et al, 2010). Furthermore, it has been suggested that students who study abroad are more likely to go on to develop careers with a global aspect or which involve international assignments (Kehm, 2005; Norris and Gillespie, 2009). This correlation has been suggested to occur because a period of student mobility can act as 'trial run' for further geographical moves which are often back to their host country (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Parey and Waldinger (2007) asserted that such findings suggest that international student exchange may play a major role in facilitating later labour migration. They go on to acknowledge the effective role which Erasmus has played in increasing labour market mobility in Europe as they found that of the students who study abroad in a European country and work internationally after graduation, two thirds end up working in a European country. Whilst examining such debates within a European context, it must be kept in mind that the concept of a European labour market has been debated. For example, Musselin (2004) argued that due to strong divergences among national recruitment and careers processes, academic labour markets in Europe remain highly national and a European labour market is therefore still missing.

The relationship between temporary mobility and future moves has nevertheless been identified in research that has examined the effects of academic mobility of researchers. For example, Ackers (2005) found that a very high proportion of scientists moving at doctoral and post-doctoral level had experienced some form of undergraduate mobility and often used the networks developed at that stage in their career as the basis for future mobility. Similarly Jöns (2009) argued that visiting academics to Germany often engaged in subsequent academic mobility and collaboration, encouraging other students and researchers at different career stages, in both home and host country, to engage in academic mobility between the two countries.

Teichler and Jahr (2001) outlined the limitations in researching the future mobility of mobile students. They stated that a reason for the lack of response from some of the cohort in their longitudinal study could have been due to the most-mobile students not being able to receive the questionnaire, which could have led to under reporting Erasmus students' future mobility. Teichler and Jahr (2001) also pointed out that if they wanted to

measure the effect of the Erasmus programme they also needed to have analysed a 'comparison group' of graduates who had been internationally mobile as students without Erasmus support and respective study conditions and provisions. They also argued that international competences, such as foreign language proficiency, could only, in part, be attributed to the study abroad period since their survey showed that a high proportion of mobile students had had international experience prior to the study period abroad. Therefore the international competences and the inclination to opt for mobility on the part of former Erasmus students could, in part, be due to earlier international experiences.

When analysing the effects of student mobility, the possibility that individuals who spend part of their undergraduate studies abroad are systematically different from individuals who do not leave their home country cannot be ignored (Parey and Waldinger, 2007). For this reason, Parey and Waldinger (2007) took a range of factors into account, such as scholarship and funding availability to go beyond simply identifying a correlation. When this range of factors was taken into account the correlation between student and future mobility was still found to be present. It has also been suggested that students' satisfaction with their stay abroad affects their future mobility plans as those who were more satisfied were more likely to consider moving abroad in the future (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006). The type of student mobility has also been found to play a role here as Dwyer and Peters (2004) found that US students who studied abroad were more likely to work or volunteer abroad than students who completed an internship abroad.

2.4 Conclusion

Part one of this chapter examined the numerous transformative processes (internationalisation, globalisation, regionalisation and neoliberalisation) that have greatly affected HE over recent years. This provides the conceptual framework for this research. Part two of this chapter reviewed the student mobility literature and the few studies on work placement mobility. Reference was also made to the body of literature focusing on student work placements based in students' home countries of study. This situates the current research within the context of existing literature.

Throughout this chapter reference has been made to the scant literature on student work placement mobility. This review has shown that in the field of student mobility studies, student work placements remains an under researched topic, particularly in a UK context. It has been argued that work placements abroad can be beneficial to many stakeholders; however, this research has tended to focus on students from the US (for example, Toncar and Cudmore, 2000; Adler and Loughrin-Sacco, 2003). Where students from the UK have been included, this has included language students only (Meier and Daniels, 2011). In particular, students' motivations, experiences and outcomes of this form of mobility are yet to be fully understood. As highlighted here, and supported by academics such as Kristensen (2001; 2004) and Webber (2005), the field of research which explores international work placements is emerging but remains deficient. This study aims to contribute towards filling this gap in the literature by examining the Erasmus work placement mobility of UK students. This research therefore widens our understanding of different forms of student mobility for purposes other than study abroad, thus making a valuable contribution to existing literature.

This literature review has also identified gender to be a substantial gap in existing literature as the drivers, experiences and effects of mobility are most often treated as gender neutral. The lived experience of mobile students has also been identified in this chapter as a gap in the student mobility literature. There are notable exceptions to this (for example, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Tsoukalas, 2008); however, this remains an under researched area requiring further academic attention (Figlewicz and Williams, 2005; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009). In particular, differences in the experiences of students according to different types of mobility have been neglected.

The review of the existing literature presented in this chapter informs the methodological approach adopted in this study. Murphy Lejeune's (2002) approach in 'student mobility and narrative in Europe' has been described as pioneering and has been heralded as becoming a 'minor classic in its genre' (King et al, 2010: 5) as the approach taken privileged the voices of the students. The tone of Murphy-Lejeune's study is reflected in Byram and Dervin's (2008) book 'students, staff and academic mobility in HE' as the majority of chapters in this volume focus on the experiences of mobility from the participants' perspectives. According to King et al (2010), such an approach adds considerable nuance to

more standardised findings from other research investigating student mobility. The methodological approach adopted in this study has been heavily influenced by such research and will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Research methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods that have been employed in this research in three main parts. The first, explores the methods utilised in this study and how the data collected were analysed using NVivo9 software. Secondly, the research population of this study and how participants were recruited is discussed. Finally, this chapter considers ethical considerations associated with and encountered when using these methods. This study was designed to meet the overall research aim of providing an ***‘exploration of the drivers, experiences and perceived effects of Erasmus work placements in order to contribute towards an enhanced understanding of student work placement mobility’*** and to address all three of the research objectives outlined in chapter 1.

This study employs a multi methods approach focusing on qualitative research methods whilst using quantitative secondary statistics to provide the appropriate research context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 UK students who had completed an Erasmus work placement in industry and 40 reports/commentaries written by Erasmus work placement students were also analysed. Participants were recruited from eight UK universities and a range of academic disciplines. The students completed a range of work placements in various European countries. Interview duration ranged from one hour to two and a half hours and reports from 400 to 5,000 words. As outlined in chapter 1, this research aims to evaluate the Erasmus experience from the students’ perspective. The methods used in this research were therefore chosen to prioritise the students’ voices above all else.

3.2 Methods

A multi methods approach is adopted in this study. Quantitative statistics from secondary sources were used to establish the background context for this research and qualitative analysis of student reports/commentaries and semi-structured interviews were completed to explore the research aims and objectives. As discussed by White (2010), 'quantitative secondary data may be used to support a project that is inherently qualitative in nature but for which justifications in terms of importance is derived from statistical information' (p.69). This research utilises this approach in order appropriately to justify and contextualise the study whilst responding to the research aim and objectives in a qualitative way.

Quantitative and qualitative methods have previously been used to investigate student mobility as well as mixed-methods approaches. Both options were available in this study; however, qualitative methods were chosen in order to prioritise students' motivations, experiences and perceptions. There is a long-standing debate surrounding the use of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies in human geography. Quantitative methods involve the use of physical (science) concepts and reasoning, mathematical modelling and statistical information to understand geographical phenomena (Clifford et al, 2010). Quantitative practices in geography date back to Greek attempts to measure the circumference of the earth, but it was not until the 1960s that the term 'quantitative geography' was coined (Sheppard, 2001). In the 1970s there was the so-called 'quantitative revolution' as quantitative methods became more sophisticated and widespread (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). With the quantitative revolution came an increased focus on the scientific rigour of research leading to the adoption of 'objective' methods in a bid to conduct valid, reliable and representative research.

The emergence of humanistic geography and phenomenology in the 1970s and 1980s challenged the dominance of quantitative methods and the objective approaches associated with this method. Humanistic geographers criticised positivist approaches based on quantitative methods for their claims to objectivity, instead arguing that human behaviour is subjective, complex, messy, irrational and contradictory (Clifford et al, 2010). Methods began to include the growing use of literature, art and other non-traditional sources (Winchester, 1996) and methods such as interviews, participant observation and

focus groups became popular. Personal experiences and the individuals behind the statistics became more important as geographers sought to 'restore people to the heart of geographical enquiry' in a bid to achieve a 'truly human geography' (Limb and Dwyer, 2001).

As discussed by Limb and Dwyer (2001), qualitative methodologies aim to explore the feelings, understandings and knowledge of others through methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation. These methods are characterised by an 'in-depth, intensive approach rather than an extensive or numerical approach' and have been used by geographers to explore some of the complexities of everyday life in order to gain a deeper insight into the processes shaping our social worlds (Limb and Dwyer, 2001: 6). Qualitative geographical research subsequently tends to emphasise multiple meanings and interpretations 'rather than seeking to impose any one dominant or correct interpretation' (Winchester and Rofo, 2010: 8). Human geographers have increasingly used qualitative methods over the last few decades, which reflects changing theoretical, philosophical and methodological approaches in the discipline.

Methodological debates and commentators, such as Hammersley (1992), Brannen (1992) and Owens (2006), have tended to treat qualitative and quantitative methods as polarized opposites; however, Winchester and Rofo (2010) suggested this might prove to be a false dichotomy. Similarly, Clifford et al (2010) argued that whilst taken at face value the two approaches do appear to be incompatible, it is important not to see them as binary opposites as subjective concerns often inform the development and use of quantitative methods and it is also possible to work with qualitative material in scientific ways. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches remain important in human geography and the methods are also frequently combined in a 'mixed methods' or 'multi methods' approach. As suggested by Schoenberger (1992), 'different methods miss different things, and this is why access to a range of research strategies is useful' (p.217). The multi methods approach adopted in this research allowed for establishing the context and patterns of Erasmus work placement mobility and for examining the motivations, experiences and perceptions of this form of mobility. The following sections discuss the three methods utilised in this research.

3.2.1 Use of secondary sources

A quantitative analysis of secondary data relating to European mobility programmes was completed prior to the collection of qualitative data. Secondary sources consist of information that has already been collected for another purpose but which is available for others to use (White, 2010). Secondary sources can be quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of the two; in this research, quantitative sources were used.

The analysis of secondary statistics was essential in order to assess the impact of the Erasmus work placement scheme on UK outward mobility. This method allowed the establishment of the wider context of Erasmus work placements and the popularity of Erasmus work placements among UK students to be explored in comparison to other participating countries. Data were gathered from the European Commission and British Council websites and also directly from the European Commission and British Council where data required was not freely available online. As noted by White (2010), secondary data can provide justifications for the choice of topics and location and demonstrate that there is a research issue that merits being developed into a project. In this study, secondary data revealed the topical nature of Erasmus work placement mobility and justified why work placement mobility from the UK is a fascinating and relevant case study (discussed further in chapter 4).

The use of secondary data was also valuable to select participant universities. Statistics relating to outgoing Erasmus mobility by HEIs provided by the British Council, and research using university websites, facilitated the selection of the range of universities to include in the research. In some cases, additional information was requested directly from the university in order to establish how many students had taken part in an Erasmus work placement in industry. Secondary data were therefore essential in the initial stages of this research study for establishing the context and research population.

3.2.2 Textual analysis of student reports/commentaries

A qualitative analysis of 40 reports and commentaries written by Erasmus work placement students was completed following the analysis of secondary sources. Many universities require Erasmus work placement students to complete a report on return from their time abroad. In some cases these reports are used for assessment and in others they provide

feedback to the home institution. The reports varied in length from 400 to 5,000 words and were obtained directly from students or via university websites where the reports were freely available in order to avoid issues of confidentiality and data protection within universities.

Due to the infancy of the Erasmus work placement programme, and the absence of literature focusing on student work placement mobility, the analysis of student reports was beneficial as it allowed for the identification of certain topics that were important to explore in the interviews. In this way, the analysis of student reports informed the interview questions and provided an overview of the types of issues that may be important to cover in the interviews. The analysis of students' reports made it possible to ask relevant questions from the first interview and therefore made the interview process more effective. Fifteen interviews were conducted with students who had also provided a report to be analysed prior to the interview. The resulting background knowledge about the interviewee, such as where students had gone to complete their placement, for how long and what their general experiences were, allowed for the exploration of certain aspects in more depth during the interviews. This allowed the interviews to flow more easily and for rapport to be quickly developed.

Prior to the analysis of these reports it was anticipated that students would only include positive accounts of their experiences, as they were aware the reports might be used for assessment or as a promotion tool. For this reason it was feared that students would fail to report any problems encountered, which would affect the findings and not present a representative picture of the full experience. In practice, it was actually found that students did include problems they encountered whilst abroad, which was often in the form of advice for other students to ensure they did not make the same mistakes.

Drawbacks regarding the use of student reports did, however, come to light. It became apparent, both when searching for placement reports and during interviews, that the expectations between universities and departments regarding placement reports varied greatly. Whilst some are expected to complete reports of up to 5,000 words in the host language, others have no report requirement to pass the year at all. In some cases, students are required to produce a critical review of the company in which they work,

others have to write either a reflective review, log book or blog on how they are coping whilst abroad and others are required to evaluate how the placement has benefitted them academically. It was not uncommon for students to have to do more than one of these reports during their placement year. Many students commented during interviews that they thought this was unfair once they became aware of this through talking to other placement students from other universities. It is possible that the dissatisfaction the students expressed in relation to writing reports may have also affected the reliability of the reports produced.

The use of student reports therefore had both advantages and drawbacks. The student reports provided a much smaller amount of data than the interview transcripts, however, as the students were restricted to how much they could write in their reports they tended to write about the most important part of their experience and the main benefits gained. In this way, the reports allowed main topics and themes to be brought to light that could then be explored further in interviews. The benefits therefore outweighed the drawbacks.

3.2.3 Interviews

Following the analysis of student reports, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 students who completed an Erasmus work placement in industry. Interviews lasted for between one hour and two and a half hours. Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) defined an interview as a 'face-to-face verbal interchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons' (p.101). This definition now appears to be out-dated as with the emergence of the internet new forms of interviewing have increased in popularity that often bypass face-to-face interaction. Bryman (2001) describes the type of interview outlined by Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) as an 'archetypal' interview that is an encounter where an interviewer sits in front of the respondent asking questions. This 'archetypal' interview is often heralded as 'the gold standard of interviewing' (McCoyde and Kerson, 2006, 390). Both 'archetypal' face-to-face interviews (25) and online interviews using Skype (15) have been conducted in this research.

The growing interest in qualitative methods in human geography fostered a proliferation of interview-based studies in the discipline (Winchester, 1996). Interviewing is now

considered to be the most commonly used qualitative technique in social science research, with semi-structured being the most widely used type of interview (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Owens, 2006). Semi-structured interviews have a pre-determined order, but can take a 'fluid' form, where each can be tailored to the different interests, views and experiences of the respondent (Valentine, 1997) and allow for flexibility in the way topics are addressed by the informant (Dunn, 2010). Semi-structured interviews often unfold in a more conversational manner than structured interviews (Longhurst, 2003), which can empower participants as their views and experiences can be divulged without any structural restraints (Limb and Dwyer, 2001). Similarly, Owens (2006) identified that a major advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that they are a carefully planned but flexible instrument, which allows the researcher to direct and control the focus of the conversation while at the same time being responsive to what the interviewee says. For these reasons semi-structured interviews were conducted in this research.

It was important to consider the location of the interviews as it has been found that where interviews are held can make a difference (Denzin, 1970). As discussed by Elwood and Martin (2000), selecting appropriate sites in which to conduct interviews may seem to be a relatively simple research design issue; however, in fact it is a complicated decision with wide reaching implications. Elwood and Martin (2000) asserted that the interview site embodies and constitutes multiple scales of spatial relations and meaning, which construct the power and positionality of participants in relation to the people, places and interactions discussed in interviews. For this reason, it is widely advised that interview locations should be as neutral as possible (Longhurst, 2010). In this research, face-to-face interviews were conducted in meeting rooms at universities, either within academic departments or at the university library. Three interviews were also conducted in London at RDF media offices that were booked via a pre-existing contact of the researcher.

The university as an interview location has benefits and drawbacks. As Flowerdew and Martin (2005) warned, conducting interviews within the formal university environment can contribute towards producing a more stilted, formal interview. An effort was made to book small rooms many of which provided a relatively informal setting. Large conference rooms were not used as it was assumed this would produce a less favoured atmosphere for the interview to take place in. Students appeared relaxed during interviews and talked freely

about their experiences and it is therefore believed that the university as a location did not impact the interview process in the ways outlined by Flowerdew and Martin (2005). In most cases, the interviewer travelled to the university where the interviewee had previously, or was currently, studying. In this sense, it could be argued that the interviews were conducted on the participants 'territory'. This has been suggested to be beneficial to the interview process as participants may be more willing to open up in an environment that they are comfortable and familiar with. This setting also helped to build conversation and rapport prior to the interview as in many cases interviewees met the interviewer to sign them into the department or library. In these cases, students talked about the university and their experience at the university prior to the interview beginning allowing conversation to develop. This created what Dunn (2010) termed a 'warm up' period, which has been found to be important to establishing rapport.

Students were in all cases given the option, within reason, where they would like to be interviewed and the majority chose the university site. Giving interviewees an option as to where they would like to be interviewed can be beneficial as it can make interviewees feel empowered (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Longhurst (2003) stated that the main consideration for the location of interviews is that the interviewees feel comfortable in the space. Giving students the option as to where they were interviewed ensured they felt comfortable in the space. Interviewing students who had completed their placement in 2009/10 meant asking for their time during their final year of studies and this had to be taken into account. In these cases, the participants' own university was the most convenient location to conduct the interviews. It is believed that offering this convenience in the initial email requesting participation may have facilitated many final year students to participate who might not otherwise have done so had additional time or travel to an interview location been required.

It is also important to consider the order of questions or topics prior to an interview (Dunn, 2010). As advised by Flowerdew and Martin (2005), interviews should begin with 'general descriptive or factual questions which signal to the interviewee that you would like them to talk freely and not give yes or no style answers' (p.119). This approach can allow time for interviewees to 'warm up' which in some cases can take some time (Longhurst, 2010). Dunn (2010) stated that interviews should begin with easy to answer questions suggesting

that asking respondents about their duties or responsibilities or involvement with the topic of interest may be a good opening point. In line with this advice, easy to answer questions were chosen to begin the interviews to allow conversation and rapport to develop between the interviewer and interviewee. Students were firstly asked questions about their degree course and the requirements within the course. More abstract, thought provoking questions were kept until later in the interview as recommended by Longhurst (2010), creating what Dunn (2010) refers to as a pyramid structure.

An interview guide was used in order to remind the researcher of important topics to discuss and to outline the structure of the interview (see Appendix B). The interview guide was heavily influenced by a review of the literature presented in chapter 2 and also informed by the student reports. For this reason, it was essential that the analysis of student reports was completed prior to the interviews. The interview guide was designed to follow a chronological sequence beginning with questions about why the students wanted to participate in Erasmus, followed by questions about their experience whilst abroad and finally the perceived effects of the experience. As noted by Murphy-Lejeune (2002), chronology cannot always be assured as some of the issues investigated are intermingled, but this sequence helped give the interview structure and allowed the students to reflect on the experience from beginning to end. This chronological sequence was successful and led to data that followed an ideal pattern for analysis. The analysis chapters of this thesis will continue to follow this chronological sequence by first looking at the drivers, then the experience and lastly the effects of mobility. The interrelations and connections between these three areas will be acknowledged and explored throughout.

A major benefit of using an interview guide is its flexibility (Dunn, 2010), as it allows the researcher to focus on areas that may arise to be important to individuals and therefore certain questions may be developed during the interview. Likewise, it allows the researcher to identify factors that are not as relevant to certain interviewees. A benefit of using an interview guide rather than a set of worded questions is that it allows the interview to flow more naturally rather than the researcher reading out questions which may sound overly formal or insincere (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). This can, however, also be a drawback of using an interview guide as in this situation the researcher must formulate research questions 'on the spot', whilst ensuring that they are coherent and

easily understood by the interviewee (Dunn, 2010). For the reasons discussed here, a mix of worded questions and topic areas were used to guide the interviews (see Appendix B). Dunn (2010) argued that this capitalises on the strengths of both interview guides and schedules as carefully worded questions were used as reminders and also as fall backs if formulating 'on the spot' questions become difficult.

Although an interview guide was used, each interview was different and allowed to flow with the conversation as it developed with the respondent. As identified by Owens (2006), this can lead to changes in the 'shape' of the interview where the logical sequence planned in an interview guide may not be followed. Flowerdew and Martin (2005) argued that this often means that interviewers have to complete feats of mental gymnastics to ensure all themes are covered. It was, however, important to allow themes to develop when they arose in order to maintain a fluid conversational style to the interviews. The interview guide proved to be invaluable to maintain this balance between structure and flexibility. The chronological structure of the guide also made it easier to return to the correct 'shape' of the interview.

Dunn (2010) stated that it is important to prepare for the closure of an interview so as not to allow rapport to dissipate at the end of the interview; this can be especially important if follow up interviews may be an option. As advised by Flowerdew and Martin (2005) and Dunn (2010), interviews should be ended on a positive note and must not be rushed. This was ensured as the final question asked interviewees to sum up their overall experience and to offer any advice to students thinking of completing a placement abroad.

3.2.4 Online/SKYPE interviews

Although interviewing is the most commonly used qualitative technique used in social science research, face-to-face interviews can be problematic as they require the researcher to set up a personal interaction, which may be difficult due to geographic dispersion, time and financial constraints or other logistical considerations. This was a problem in this study as the research population was geographically dispersed at the time of the interview. For this reason, 15 of the interviews were conducted online via Skype.

Technological advancements have allowed many of the problems associated with face-to-face interviews to be overcome as new modes of interviewing have been facilitated with

the rise of internet mediated research (IMR). Increased bandwidth and the availability of inexpensive, relatively easy-to-use technologies have made the option to conduct online interviews more viable in recent years (Saumure and Given, ND). IMR, which has been heralded as a new 'methodological frontier', holds great potential for collecting data in an innovative manner (Madge, 2010), and as suggested by O'Conner et al (2008), 'online research methods provide great methodological potential and versatility for research' (p.271). Despite this, little has been written about the potential of ICT as a medium of research for geographers and the uptake of such methods has been limited (Madge and O'Conner, 2004).

Online interviews can be asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous interviews are 'non real time' and therefore do not require the researcher and respondent to be online at the same time. Synchronous interviews are 'real time' and therefore more closely resemble a traditional research interview (Madge, 2010). Synchronous online video and voice interviews were conducted in this study via Skype. Skype is a form of conferencing software that has increased in popularity over recent years. Skype is available for free download and provides a variety of communication options, including connecting with other Skype users, phoning landlines or mobile phones, as well as providing messaging and file transfer capabilities.

A number of advantages and disadvantages associated with online interviews have been identified. Dunn (2010) identified five general sets of advantages associated with the use of online interviews; they allow access to an expanded sample, they reduce interviewer effects, enhance convenience, allow for more reflective responses and are cost saving. In addition to this, as O'Conner et al (2008) discussed, online methods mitigate the distance of space that enables research to be easily internationalised without the usual associated travel costs. Online interviews can therefore be valuable for researchers who wish to contact participants who may otherwise be difficult to reach, such as the less physically mobile, socially isolated or people living in dangerous areas. The lack of visual clues in voice only online interviews, such as age, gender, and ethnicity have also been suggested to be a benefit as this can decrease interviewer effect (O'Connor et al, 2008). It has also been stated that online interviews can be a useful forum for asking sensitive/embarrassing questions (Madge and O'Connor, 2004).

O'Connor et al (2008) commented that researchers had reported many differences between online and onsite interviews including issues relating to interview design, the building of rapport and ethical problems. As O'Connor et al (2008) stated, 'in the disembodied interview all the subtle visual, non-verbal cues which can help to contextualise the interviewee in a face-to-face scenario are lost' (p.276). Hay-Gibson (2009), Chen and Hinton (1999) and Saumure and Given (ND) have also acknowledged that the lack of non-verbal cues in online interviews can prove challenging for both the interviewer and interviewee. Additional challenges, such as the possibility that participants may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable being filmed, the requirement of participants to obtain the correct software, technological competence and Internet connection are also present (Hay-Gibson, 2009). In this sense, accessing a relevant and representative sample may pose a potential problem (O'Connor et al, 2008) and as Saumure and Given (ND) argued, ethical and technical issues may need to be managed to ensure that individuals' rights are respected and that everyone feels comfortable participating in the study when using online interviews.

A number of strategies have begun to develop to address the challenges faced when using online interviews. For example, in terms of building rapport, O'Connor and Madge (2001) used photographic exchanges to build a relationship before interviews were conducted. O'Connor and Madge (2001) argued that the exchange of information via email to arrange interviews often facilitated the development of rapport. This also occurred during this research as in many cases a number of emails were exchanged between the interviewer and respondent. In some cases, students had also provided a report prior to the interview. As mentioned previously, this often allowed rapport to develop easily during the interview process.

It was essential that Skype interviews were conducted in this research, as if face-to-face interviews alone were conducted, geographically mobile participants would have been excluded. This would have greatly challenged the validity of the research findings, especially in relation to objective three that aimed to explore future mobility. The other option available was to conduct telephone interviews but Skype was deemed a more effective research tool, mainly due to the fact that Skype facilitates video calling. It was also assumed that interviewees would be more comfortable giving the researcher their

Skype name, as opposed to a phone number, as the interviewee can easily erase the interviewer as a Skype contact after the interview whereas interviewees may be wary about providing a stranger with a telephone number. The use of Skype in this research also allowed for greater flexibility of both the interviewer and respondent. Interviews could take place at night if this was more convenient for the interviewee and this was often the case with interviewees who were in full time employment. The associated health and safety risks of interviewing at night were not an issue when using Skype to conduct these evening interviews. In the case of students studying for their final year at university, the use of Skype meant that the interview did not take up a large amount of time as the students could be interviewed at home when they were available. It is believed that the use of Skype allowed some students, who may have possibly been reluctant to attend a face-to-face interview, to participate.

Video and voice only interviews were conducted via Skype in this study. In a small number of cases, interviewees expressed a preference to be interviewed without video, but the majority were comfortable to be interviewed using video. No major differences were identified in the quality of data collected between the two approaches; however, in a small number of cases the use of video did prove to be useful. For example, one interviewee showed the interviewer a notice board where they had a postcard from every European city they visited during their Erasmus period. This led to interesting discussions surrounding the interviewee's experiences of travel and therefore the use of video had facilitated the interview process.

Despite these benefits, a number of potential problems and drawbacks were encountered when using Skype in this study. Generally, online interviews were shorter in duration than face-to-face interviews; however, this was not always the case as the longest interview conducted (two and a half hours) was in fact conducted via Skype. This was not deemed to be a major problem as all relevant topics were covered and there was not a lack of data gained from online interviews. A possible explanation for why the Skype interviews were shorter is reduced rapport between interviewer and interviewee due to a shorter warm up period. This was mainly because in the case of the face-to-face interviews the participant usually met the interviewer outside of the interview room or on campus to sign the interviewer into the department or library where the interview would take place. This gave

time for pre-interview conversation, which aided the building of rapport. In the case of Skype interviews, this was more difficult as prior to the beginning of the interview an adequate connection had to be established and voice quality confirmed. Informed consent also had to be gained verbally which involved the interviewer reading out a short, scripted passage to the participant. This was necessary in order to conform to ethical guidelines; however, it did not produce the best environment to build rapport prior to the interview.

Although differences were identified in terms of rapport between online and face-to-face interviews this was not deemed to be a significant issue for this research; however, in research where sensitive issues or upsetting topics are a focus this may be more of a problem. It is also important to note that personality was an influencing factor. In some cases, Skype interviewees were more respondent and rapport was established more easily than in a number of face-to-face interviews. Online rapport was therefore only an issue when interviewing an individual who was more reserved or less responsive.

Another problem identified with the use of Skype interviews was the higher level of last minute dropouts and 'no-shows' than with face-to-face interviews. All face-to-face interviews were attended and six out of 15 Skype interviews did not take place when originally arranged. The majority of participants who were not online at the arranged interview time did then go on to arrange an alternative interview time but it appeared that participants found it easier, and more acceptable, to miss an interview online as opposed to face-to-face. This is most likely due to the level of commitment an interviewee feels towards the meeting as in face-to-face interviews they are aware the interviewer has travelled to meet them and arranged a suitable room. The interviewee is therefore likely to feel more responsibility to show up at the arranged time.

Technological problems also occurred in two of the interviews that were conducted with participants based outside the UK. In both cases, turning off the video function and creating a voice call solved the problem as the use of video can slow a connection down. During one interview, participant distraction was also a problem. In this case, the participant was at work and appeared to be distracted. The interviewee appeared to acknowledge this was not the best setting to conduct the interview and asked if the interview could be postponed until later that day. When the interview was restarted the

setting made a big difference as the participant appeared more relaxed and willing to talk freely about his experience. The location and setting of the interviewee is therefore an important factor to consider when using online interviews.

Despite the potential problems outlined here, there is growing support for the use of online software such as Skype to conduct interviews for research. Overall, the experience of the researcher in this study supports the suggestion made by Denscombe (2003) that the quality of responses gained through online research are much the same as responses produced by more traditional methods. According to Madge and O'Conner (2004) there should, however, be 'guarded optimism' about the validity of these new methods (p.9). Online interviewing cannot be seen as a simple solution to the problems associated with face-to-face interviews. James and Busher (2009) for example suggested that 'the online interview presents both methodological and ethical potential and versatility in social science research' but it also presents 'methodological and ethical challenges that need to be addressed when using the internet to conduct research' (p.6). James and Busher (2009) asserted that online interviews should not be perceived as an easy option and similarly, Cooper (2009) argued that online interviewing is 'not as simple as point and click' (p.250).

Meho (2006) concluded that whilst a mixed mode interviewing strategy should be considered when possible, online modes, can be, in many cases, a viable alternative to face-to-face and telephone interviewing. As Madge (2010) suggested, it is very unlikely that IMR, such as online interviews, are going to replace more conventional, face-to-face research; rather, she stated that it represents another option in the 'methodological toolkit' of geographers (p.174). The main benefit of using Skype in this research was that participants who would otherwise have been excluded, but who were extremely important, could be included. It was therefore apparent that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks in relation to the use of this method for this research.

3.2.5 Data analysis – the use of NVivo9

Reports and interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo9, which is a form of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). NVivo was used to store, organise, code and to some extent analyse all the qualitative data collected for this research. CAQDAS is increasingly used in qualitative research analysis, but the use of such software

has been heavily debated (Crowley et al, 2002).

Concerns have been raised that CAQDAS may guide researchers in a particular direction thus challenging the validity of research findings (Seidel, 1991). It has also been argued that using CAQDAS distances the researcher from the data and encourages quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Crowley et al, 2002), which may subsequently create homogeneity in methods across the social sciences (Barry, 1998). Benefits of using CAQDAS have also been identified, for example, it has been argued that using software in the data analysis process adds rigour to qualitative research (Richards and Richards, 1991) and can greatly enhance research quality (Wong, 2008). As stated by Stroh (2000), computers can also offer a solution to the problems of drudgery and resultant potential for error in a manual system. Manual and computer assisted methods can also be used together and it has been argued that this approach is likely to achieve the best results (Welsh, 2002).

As discussed by Wong (2008), traditionally, researchers 'cut and paste' and use coloured pens to categorise and code data but the use of software specifically designed for qualitative data management greatly eases this laborious task. Assistance in coding data was found to be the main benefit of using NVivo in this research. NVivo was used to create codes relating to particular research questions and themes that emerged in the data. This allowed themes to develop further and aided the analysis and writing up of the research results. Schiellerup (2008) criticized NVivo, arguing that the relationship created between codes was too hierarchical; however, this problem was not identified during the analysis of data in this study. It is believed that without NVivo the process of coding and analysing data would have been significantly more time consuming. The use of NVivo also ensured that interview transcripts and reports were secure as all files were password protected.

A problem encountered when using NVivo in this study was the lack of affordable and available training or guidance for using the software despite the benefits this software can offer researchers (discussed further in Deakin et al, forthcoming). Stroh (2000) highlighted that there are few guidelines to qualitative data analysis using CAQDAS, so qualitative researchers are largely forced to devise their own analysis scheme. As elaborated in Deakin et al (forthcoming), this problem can, in part, be addressed by peer-to-peer learning and teaching, which is an area that should be developed further within HEIs in the future.

Another problem encountered was the reliability of the software when large amounts of data had been imported. The software would often crash, resulting in a loss of work when dealing with large amounts of data. Despite these drawbacks, overall, the use of NVivo greatly aided the analysis of the qualitative data collected in this study.

3.3 Research population and recruitment

The target research population of this study are UK students who completed an Erasmus work placement during the course of their undergraduate studies between 2007-2010. In addition to this, participants were selected by university type, academic discipline, course requirements and gender. The aim was to gain a sample of participants that would represent as wide a range of students as possible. Participants were recruited through various methods in order to reach the target sample size of interviewees.

3.3.1 Research population

Online research using university websites and relevant statistics was completed in order to select eight universities that were included in this research (figure 1). Selecting students from eight universities was necessary in order to reach the targeted sample size of 40 students. The chosen institutions have had varying success in terms of outgoing numbers of Erasmus work placement students but have all sent enough students abroad through the programme to allow for a suitable number of students to be contacted. These particular institutions were also selected as they represent three generations of UK universities, including redbrick, plate-glass and post-1992 universities, subsequently ensuring that a wide variety of students were included in the research. This was important in order to ensure that the experiences of students from a variety of disciplines and universities with varying departmental and university support could be compared. The resulting findings about variations of institutional support (discussed in chapter 5 and 6) would not have been identified if students from one discipline or one university had been included in the study.

Figure 1: Participants' university details and outgoing work placement mobility (Data Source: European Commission, 2010 and direct from universities, 2010)

University & year university status established	University type	Outgoing Erasmus work placements (2008/09)	Students interviewed		Reports analysed		Students interviewed and reports	
			Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Manchester University (1880)	Red Brick	178	2	5	4	10	6	8
Leeds University (1904)	Red Brick	152	5	13	6	15	11	14
Sheffield University (1905)	Red Brick	65	5	13	4	10	9	11
Aston University (1966)	Plate- glass	116	4	10	2	5	6	8
Loughborough University (1966)	Plate- glass	24	10	25	5	13	15	19
Salford University (1967)	Plate- glass	39	6	15	12	30	18	23
Sheffield Hallam University (1992)	Post 1992	49	2	5	2	5	4	5
Bournemouth University (1992)	Post 1992	37	6	15	5	13	11	14
Total		660	40	100	40	100	80	100

As this research did not aim to explore Erasmus work placements from the viewpoint of any one academic discipline in particular, a variety of students were included. As discussed in chapter 2, previous research that has explored student mobility tends to focus on students from a limited number of academic disciplines, which can lead to problems relating to wider validity. Figure 2 shows the subject areas of the students interviewed (the equivalent data for reports were not always available) using the new International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), designed by UNESCO. This classification is also used by the British Council and therefore allowed for comparisons to be made between the research sample and overall UK mobility. Where students were studying a joint degree course such as International Business and French, the first subject was classified. This was necessary for classification; however, full details of interviewees' course titles are included in Appendix C. As can be seen in figures 2 and 3, although interviewees were not drawn proportionately from the same subject areas, the population studied is relatively representative to the UK's overall participation in Erasmus work placements in 2009/10.

Figure 2: Interviewees' subject areas (Data source: 40 semi-structured interviews)

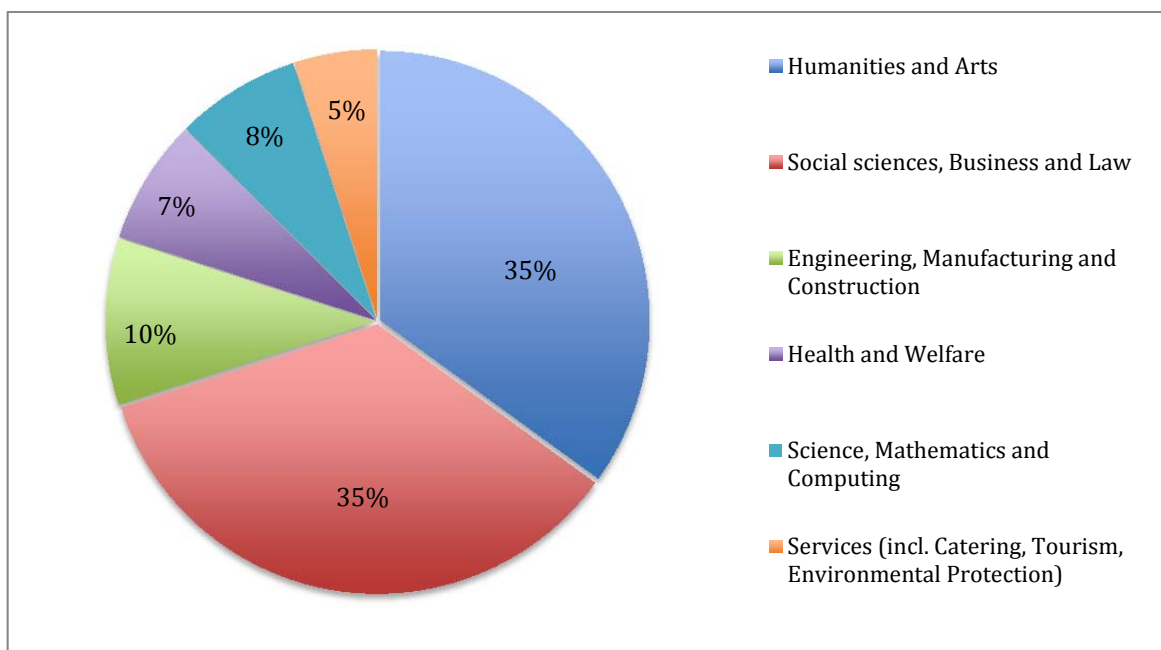
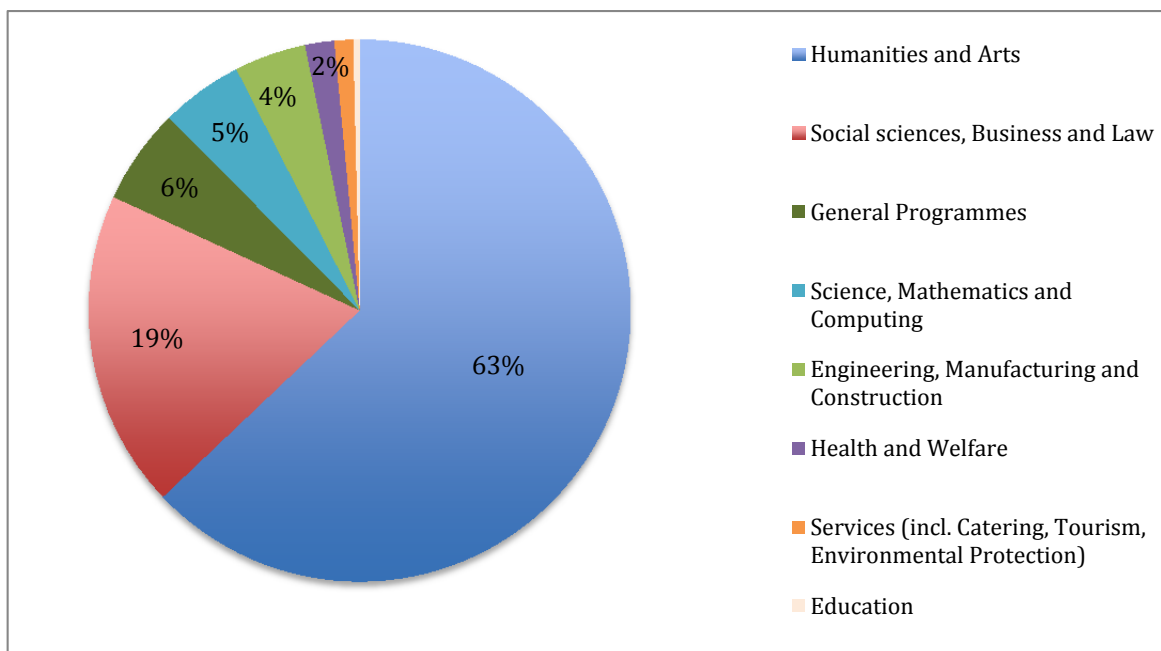


Figure 3: Total UK outgoing Erasmus work placement students by subject areas 2009/2010 (Data Source: British Council, 2011)



An equal gender split for both the interview participants and reports was almost achieved (figure 4). Previous studies have tended not to take gender into account or not to achieve a gender balance of participants. This study, in contrast, aimed to explore gender differences in relation to all three research questions.

Figure 4: Participants' gender (Data source: Researcher's own data)

Gender	Interviewees		Reports		Overall	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
Male	19	48	17	43	36	45
Female	21	52	23	57	44	55
Total	40	100	40	100	80	100

Approximately 62% of Erasmus placement students in the academic year 2009/10 were female, which was somewhat higher than the share of female students in the total student population in the 32 participating Erasmus countries in the same year (54%) (Eurostat, WWW). In terms of UK outgoing work placement mobility, in 2009/2010 66% of participants were female, which is slightly higher than the European average. As shown in figure 4, the gender split achieved in this study was therefore representative of the UK's outgoing work placement mobility, including slightly more females than males.

Four course types were sampled in this study: Non-language students, language students, sandwich course students studying languages alongside another subject, and students who studied a non-language degree course with one language module included. An equal number of students studying some aspect of languages and non-language students were included in the study (figure 5). This allowed the differences between language and non-language students' motivations, experiences and perceived effects to be explored. Again, gender was taken into account here, so that differences between course type and gender could be identified. A relatively equal split of females according to course type was reached, but this was less even for male participants. This is likely to be due to the lower number of male language students in the UK student population generally.

Figure 5: Number of participants studying languages and non-language degree courses and gender (Data source: Researcher's own data)

Course type	Female		Male		Overall total	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
Non-Language	6	28.5	14	74	20	50
Language	6	28.5	1	5	7	18
Joint Language	5	24	3	16	8	20
Language Module	4	19	1	5	5	13
Total	21	100	19	100	40	100

As can be seen from figures 2 and 5, interview participants came from a variety of degree courses and subsequently had varying requirements built into the course they studied. Some had a compulsory placement abroad built into their course, others had to go abroad to work or study, others had a compulsory placement which they could complete either in the UK or abroad and a number of students had no compulsory placement or time abroad in their course with the Erasmus placement being an entirely optional extra (figure 6).

Figure 6: Course requirements of interviewees (Data source: Researcher's own data)

Course requirements	Female		Male		Overall	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
Placement	6	29	6	32	12	30
Placement Abroad	2	10	1	5	3	8
Time Abroad	10	48	3	16	13	33
Optional	3	14	9	47	12	30
Total	21	100	19	100	40	100

Eight of the interviewees (20%) had also studied abroad during their undergraduate studies. These students turned out to be a particularly interesting group as they could reflect on the differences between the two experiences and the different reasons for choosing to do each option (discussed in chapters 5 and 6).

Interviewees completed their placements in a range of host countries as the aim was to explore Erasmus placements overall and not from one host country perspective (see Appendix A). Three students had undertaken two Erasmus placements (six months in duration) in two different countries. Although a large proportion of the interviewees worked in Germany, France and Spain, this is relatively representative of the UK's outgoing Erasmus work placement mobility (see Appendix A).

3.3.2 Participant recruitment

Recruiting a sufficient amount of appropriate participants is a challenge that all research projects must overcome. The methods used to recruit participants are often depended on the type of research being conducted and the target population. Participants in this study were contacted via email with the help of gatekeepers, via Facebook, through snowballing techniques and using on the spot recruitment.

As an initial point of contact, Erasmus coordinators within the participating universities were contacted via email to request participation in the study. Meetings then took place with those who requested them and the eight universities shown in figure 1 agreed to participate. These coordinators then acted as 'gatekeepers' in order to recruit participants. The gatekeepers forwarded emails and information about the research to students in order to recruit participants. In three cases, gatekeepers also invited the researcher to study abroad fairs allowing the researcher to perform 'on-site recruiting'.

3.3.2.1 Email recruitment

The use of email to conduct online surveys and interviews has been thoroughly investigated by researchers (for example, Meho, 2006; McLafferty, 2010; Madge, 2010); however, the use of email and online messaging to recruit participants for face-to-face interviews is yet to be fully explored. Access to Erasmus work placement students is complicated as the only direct access to these groups is via the universities in which they study. As universities would not be willing to provide the researcher with students' home

addresses, the forwarding of emails to these students was essential. This was problematic as universities only had access to students' university email addresses that expire post-graduation. The timing of approaching students was therefore an important consideration. For this reason, students who completed a work placement in 2008/09 were approached in April 2010 before they graduated and lost access to their university email addresses. Students who wished to participate were asked to provide an alternative email address that could then be used once interviews began in October 2010. Students who completed a work placement in 2009/10 were approached in October 2010 once they had returned to university for their final year following their placement. Getting the timing of email correspondence correct was therefore important, as if contact was not made in time, access to a whole year group would not have been possible.

In this research, the use of email to recruit participants was effective as it allowed the researcher to access large numbers of potential participants, whose alternative contact details were not available. This was also a time and cost efficient method of recruitment. There have been potential issues identified with regards to using email to recruit research participants. For example, it was predicted by Selwyn and Robson (1998), that as e-mail use became more widespread and electronic communication became more common, there would be information overload, and thus research via e-mail runs the risk of becoming marginalised as a form of electronic 'junk mail'. They support Berge and Collins (1995) who asserted that as electronic discourse increases, the average individual will be inundated with e-mail, so much so that attending to every mail message would be almost impossible. Attempts to gain information and research participation via e-mail by researchers may therefore be simply ignored. As argued by Selwyn and Robson (1998) and Thach (1995), e-mail messages can be deleted quickly, and unlike the standard mail questionnaire or interview, the respondent can discard e-mail at the touch of a button.

It became clear during the initial contact stages of this research that universities attempt to protect their students from 'email overload', particularly from researchers. When approached to act as gatekeepers, a number of Erasmus coordinators and university staff replied that they had a policy not to forward research requests to students or that they were trying to reduce the number of emails sent to students as they were aware students were, as one Erasmus coordinator described it, 'inundated with requests on their time'. For

this reason, some universities were not willing to forward emails to their students and of those that did, many warned the researcher not to be too optimistic about response rates as they were also aware students received many requests to take part in research and surveys via email. One university was included that could not forward emails to students but instead put a notice on their website and noticeboards to request participation.

3.3.2.2 Gatekeepers

The problems encountered in relation to email contact were important to overcome, as it was the most effective way to contact possible participants. It became clear at this point that in terms of recruiting participants, gatekeepers would be the key to the success of the study. Campbell et al (2006) defined gatekeepers as ‘those who provide – directly or indirectly – access to key resources needed to do research, be those resources logistical, human, institutional, or informational’ (p.98). Gatekeepers can have varying levels of power that is often determined by the type of research being conducted. Much has been written about the power of gatekeepers in relation to research involving children participants and other vulnerable groups (for example, Barker and Smith, 2001; Valentine et al, 2001; Barker and Weller, 2003; Morrow, 2008). Often, research focusing on such vulnerable groups or research that investigates a particularly sensitive topic, such as sexuality, may also rely on snowballing techniques (Browne, 2005). In this sense, participants themselves can become gatekeepers to their friends and social networks that may then go on to participate in the research. The role of gatekeepers is therefore complex as a gatekeeper may represent a large organisation with access to a large group of people who have had the same experience or it may be an individual with friends who are the target of a research project.

Campbell et al (2006) noted that discussions relating to gatekeepers and problems relating to access are limited in influential geography textbooks and journals. Campbell et al (2006) argued that the relationship between the researcher and the gatekeeper has been oversimplified as it is often portrayed as unidirectional and predominately static in form and in time (p.98). Campbell et al (2006) asserted that the relationship is in fact more complex than this as when research is conducted over extended periods of time the relationship changes and evolves which subsequently has impacts upon the research.

As the Erasmus work placement programme is relatively new, many of the target population were only accessible through their universities. Online data revealed which UK universities had performed well in terms of outgoing numbers of Erasmus work placement students but gatekeepers within universities were needed in order to establish whether these figures represented language assistantships or work placements in industry. Gatekeepers were also needed in order to contact the students who had taken part in the programme, as the universities were the only official direct link to these students. It became apparent early in the research design process, that gatekeepers within universities would be essential for the success of participant recruitment for this reason.

The information and conditions requested by gatekeepers within universities varied. Whilst some were happy to agree to forward on emails to students, others were more cautious and requested detailed information about the research in terms of where interviews will be conducted and any risks to their students. One university in particular requested a meeting that lasted for two hours in duration in order to understand fully the aims of the research before they agreed to be involved. Another university department insisted that the research go through their university's own ethical clearance process, involving numerous email exchanges to provide information requested by the ethics board and a face-to-face meeting. Gatekeepers in this study therefore varied widely in how involved they wanted to be in the research process. Once established, gatekeepers within universities were extremely useful as they allowed trust to be developed between the researcher and participants. As a member of staff at their university had contacted them, students were more likely to trust that the research was a valid project to participate in.

3.3.2.3 Snowballing

The snowballing technique was also used for recruiting participants. The term snowballing, or chain sampling, refers to a process of using contacts to help find new contacts that can then help to find other contacts. This allows the researcher to build up layers of contacts as the recruitment process gains momentum and 'snowballs' (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005). Snowballing is more useful in certain projects than others. Snowballing can be particularly useful when the research population is difficult to contact or when the researcher is an 'outsider' to the research population, making establishing contact with participants problematic. An example of this is Longhurst (2003), who used snowballing to contact first

time pregnant women, where initial contacts were used to 'open doors' to other pregnant women they knew. Snowballing can also be helpful in identifying interesting participants for a research project that the researcher may not be aware of (Gibson et al, 1999). In this research, snowballing was used as interviewees were asked to put the researcher in contact with other students, who also took part in the Erasmus work placement programme from either their own university or other participating universities.

Longhurst (2003) suggested that the strength of the snowballing technique is that it helps researchers to overcome one of the main obstacles to recruiting interviewees, gaining their trust. Potential participants may be more likely to take part in the research if it is recommended to them by an acquaintance or if they are aware of others who have had a positive experience participating in the research. This appeared to be the case in this research as many of the participants recruited through snowballing had previously received contact from the researcher via their university coordinator. On many occasions, these participants said they had not even acknowledged the email or said they did not know why they did not respond to take part but were very willing to participate once a friend had approached them. The snowballing approach was therefore effective as it recruited participants that were not willing to take part in the research when other forms of contact had been used. This supports the suggestion that email is not always the most effective way to recruit participants due to issues surrounding email overload.

As discussed by Longhurst (2003) and Owens (2006), a problem associated with the snowballing technique is that it is important to make sure multiple initial informants are used to begin the snowballing process to avoid recruiting all informants from a narrow circle of like-minded people. This did become an issue at one point during the research process as a student from Loughborough University put the researcher in contact with five other students from his circle of friends. After three of these contacts had been interviewed, it became apparent that the experience of the group had been very similar with the group being quite exclusive and spending time only within the group who they had travelled with. For this reason, no more interviews within this group were completed to avoid including too many participants from this narrow social circle, which would have provided a more limited representation of the overall experience.

3.3.2.4 Facebook

The social networking site Facebook was also used to recruit and contact participants. Facebook was launched in February 2004 by its founder Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University. Facebook offers a wide variety of services to its users including; the ability to search for and add people as friends, send private or public messages, share links, photos and videos, update personal statuses and create and join. In July 2010, it was announced that the site had more than 500 million active users, which is approximately one person for every fourteen in the world (Facebook statistics, WWW).

Facebook has received a considerable amount of attention from academics, who have explored questions such as how Facebook is used and perceived (Lampe et al, 2006; Joinson, 2008; Viswanath et al, 2009), the effects of Facebook use (Ellison et al, 2007; Toma, 2010) and privacy issues associated with Facebook (Jones and Soltren, 2005; Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Dwyer et al, 2007). The ways in which Facebook is being used in HE is also beginning to gain attention from academics (Bugeja, 2006; Madge et al, 2009; Green and Bailey, 2010; Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010). A substantial gap in this emerging body of literature is any acknowledgement or exploration as to how Facebook could be used as a tool in academic research.

Open profile Facebook groups used by Erasmus work placement students were accessed to contact students within the chosen universities to request participation. In some cases these groups were open for everyone to view and in other cases university coordinators/gatekeepers gave the researcher permission to join the group. Facebook was also used to organise meetings with and maintain contact with research participants that had initially been contacted via email. Gatekeepers within universities, who forwarded an email to students on behalf of the researcher, requested that students contact the researcher via email or Facebook if they were willing to be interviewed. In most cases, students opted to use Facebook, suggesting that many students prefer this method of communication, as opposed to their university email accounts. In some cases, international coordinators within universities were much more willing to contact students who were part of a Facebook group than to forward emails to all students. Facebook was also used as part of a snowballing technique, where participants provided the researcher with links to their friends' Facebook pages or provided their friends with the researcher's Facebook

contact details. Again, participants were often more willing to put the researcher in contact with people via Facebook than email.

Facebook is commonly used by undergraduates from a variety of disciplines, including geography, to aid them in their dissertation projects. A simple Facebook search reveals hundreds of groups set up by students requesting others to join and participate in their research. These groups are often used to distribute a link to an online questionnaire or used to set up interviews. Facebook is widely being utilised by students to aid them in recruiting participants for their research projects and although these research studies are likely to be on a small scale it could be argued that undergraduates are leading the way for other academics that could also utilise Facebook in the research process. An example of a research study that has used this method is Brooks and Waters (2009b) who created a Facebook group, inviting sixth formers and undergraduates to participate in their research, and also took part in other existing Facebook groups in order to attract participants.

In terms of participant recruitment, the use of email, on the spot recruitment, snowballing and Facebook were effective as the target sample size of participants from the research population was achieved. During the course of the interviews it became clear that students were very keen to talk about their Erasmus experience. De Nicola (ND) found that one effect of the 'post-Erasmus syndrome' was that past Erasmus students were willing to talk about their experience as it kept the Erasmus experience alive. This was also discovered to be the case by Murphy-Lejeune (2002), who stated that 'no encouragement was necessary' to get students to talk about their experiences as they saw the interview as an opportunity to divulge a lived experience (p.44). This also appeared to be the case in this study as students were often very keen to share their experiences.

3.4 Ethical considerations

As asserted by Dowling (2010), 'all research methods necessarily involve ethical considerations' (p.27). Research ethics have been defined as being about 'the conduct of researchers and their responsibilities and obligations to those involved in the research, including sponsors, the general public and most importantly, the subjects of the research' (O'Connell-Davidson and Layder 1994: 55). According to Hay (2010), there are three

categories of important arguments why geographers should behave ethically when conducting research. Firstly, ethical behaviour protects the rights of individuals, communities and environments involved in, or affected by, research. Secondly, ethical behaviour helps assure a favourable climate for the continued conduct of scientific enquiry and thirdly, growing public demands for accountability and the sentiment means that institutions such as universities must protect themselves legally. Hay (2010) argued that for these reasons, there is currently a greater emphasis on acting ethically than ever before.

Negotiating ethical considerations can be difficult as every research project is different and therefore invokes different ethical challenges. Hay and Israeel (2006: 142) argued that what is required is a commitment to theoretically informed, self critical conduct, revolving around awareness of how to identify and resolve ethical dilemmas when they arise (quoted in Dowling, 2010: 30). It is the responsibility of the researcher to be sensitive to concerns regarding harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality and every effort should be made as not to cause distress or harm to respondents (Hay, 2003). These ethical considerations must be taken into account throughout the research process from the recruitment of participants to the dissemination of results.

3.4.1 Risk and harm

Ethical standards require that researchers do not put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm as a result of their participation whilst at the same time ensuring that the researcher is not exposed to harm themselves. Harm can be defined as both physical and psychological. Dowling (2010) stated that social scientists are unlikely to expose people to physical harm but they may however expose them to potential 'psycho-social' harm by raising issues that may be upsetting to the participant. Structures must be put in place to ensure this potential harm is managed, for example, by providing counselling. No upsetting topics were discussed in this research so psychological harm was not seen to be a significant issue. The role of emotions still had to be taken into account, as Widdowfield (2000) stated, 'emotions have an important bearing on both how and what we know. Not only can emotions affect the research process in terms of what is studied or not studied, by whom and in what way, but they may also influence researchers' interpretations and readings of a situation' (Widdowfield, 2000: 199). Despite this, Widdowfield (2000) argued that the role of emotions experienced by both the researcher

and participants and the effects this may have on the research process and results has been relatively neglected.

As discussed by Martin and Flowerdew (2005) it is often assumed that physical geographers are exposed to more risks of physical harm than human geographers, however, as argued by Lee (1995) the potential dangers of working or travelling alone and conducting interviews in unfamiliar settings can be just as great. In order to protect the researcher from potential harm, all interviews were conducted in a safe, neutral space. The researcher also informed someone else of the interview location, only conducted face-to-face interviews in daylight hours, carried a mobile phone, and conformed to university health and safety regulations at all times.

3.4.2 Confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal

Confidentiality and anonymity are important ethical considerations when conducting interviews (Longhurst, 2003; 2010). Confidentiality in particular presents what has been termed a 'thorny' issue to researchers (Valentine, 2003). Permission was sought from all participants to record interviews and assurances given regarding the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. As discussed by Dowling (2010), there are numerous ways to ensure the anonymity of informants, many of which have been used in this research. Authors of the placement reports were made anonymous as well as other individuals mentioned in the reports and no information is given that could easily identify the interviewees. Transcripts were stored in a safe place with only the researcher having access to the files that were password protected. As recommended by Hay (2003), assurances were made not to reveal the identity of participants during the course of the research process and in the dissemination of results. It is important to make interviewees aware of these provisions prior to the research being conducted (Longhurst, 2003). Interview participants were also made aware prior to the interview that they remained free to withdraw from the research at any time and could end the interview without explanation if they wished. In the case of Skype interviews withdrawal was facilitated as an end call option was available at all times. No interviewees choose to withdraw from the research at any point.

3.4.3 Informed consent and voluntary participation

As discussed by Dowling (2010), informed consent for participation in interviews is not just a case of participants agreeing to be interviewed, as they must be made aware of exactly what they are consenting to. All participants were made aware of the purpose of the research study and what would be expected from them before the interview began. In face-to-face interviews, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form. In Skype interviews, verbal consent was obtained. Madge (2010) argued that in terms of informed consent, the principles of onsite research should also apply in the online environment. To ensure this was achieved the researcher informed participants about all relevant information at the start of the Skype interviews, including the purpose of the research, the fact the interview would be recorded and that quotes would be used. This information was prepared in advance to ensure that all Skype interviewees received the same information. Interviewees were then asked if they agreed to give their informed consent to take part verbally. Time was also allowed at the beginning of both face-to-face and Skype interviews for the interviewees to ask any questions they may have relating to the research before the interview recording began. It was therefore assured that full informed consent was received for all interviews.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary which was made clear in emails passed on from gatekeepers. This was important as students needed to be made aware that participation in the research was not linked to their university and was in no way part of the assessment of their placement year. If individuals wished to participate they contacted the researcher directly which ensured that all participation was entirely voluntary.

3.4.4 Reflexivity and positionality

Within geography the past few decades have brought about great change in terms of how the relationship between the researcher and researched is perceived and negotiated. Within the discipline it was long believed that researchers should strive for neutrality so as not to 'taint' the research with his or her individuality (Moser, 2008). For example, Guelke's (1974) 'idealist human geography' approach viewed the researcher as an empty vessel that simply observed and recorded the ideas of his research subjects (quoted in Moser, 2008). Feminists, post-modern and poststructural critics of the scientific method in geography challenged these claims of objectivity and neutrality made by researchers

(McDowell, 1992). As asserted by England (1994), 'part of the feminist project has been to dismantle the smokescreen surrounding the canons of neopositivist research-impartiality and objectivist neutrality-which supposedly prevent the researcher from contaminating the data' (England, 1994: 81). Feminists argued that all knowledge is 'embedded, situated, specific and hence partial with an inevitable bias' (Mohammad, 2001: 103). Objectivity and neutrality were argued to be myths by feminists who argued that claims to these myths served only to make invisible the biases and subjectivity of the information that is collected and coded as knowledge (Mohammad, 2001). Critics such as Haraway (1988) argued that claims to be able to observe from a distance and to see everything from nowhere is a 'god-trick' as no observers can be neutral and therefore no research can be truly unbiased.

McDowell (1992) argued that these challenges have led to an increase in interest in what we do as human geographers as well as how we do it, leading to a shift within the social sciences towards a reflexive notion of knowledge. England (1994) defines reflexivity as 'self critical sympathetic introspection and the self conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher' (p.82) and similarly, Dowling describes it as 'self-conscious scrutiny of yourself and the social nature of the research' (2010: 37). This notion takes into account that any form or type of knowledge depends greatly on the makers and producers of the knowledge itself. Whilst previous research that claimed objectivity and neutrality advocated the belief that any researcher could conduct the same project with the same results there is now awareness that researchers' positions, personality, biographies and interpretations in fact make this impossible. As noted by Moser (2008), the past two decades have brought a growing recognition that we never shed our identities or biographies to become neutral observers. Whilst we cannot change our positionality, as human geographers we must acknowledge and declare our own positionality in order to assess the impact these factors may have on the research itself (Dowling, 2010). As argued by McDowell (1992), 'we must recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participant, and write this into our research practice' (p.409).

How a researcher is positioned in society by sexual identity, age, social and economic status, gender, ethnicity, education, history, politics and experiences may inhibit or enable particular fieldwork methods and interpretations (Hastrup 1992; Schoenberger, 1992; England 1994). Herod (1993), for example, argued that interviews 'cannot be conceived as

taking place in a gender vacuum' (p.306) and that the gender of the researcher and the participant must be taken into account as it can affect the power relations during an interview (McDowell, 1992; Schoenberger, 1992). The researcher's positionality can also determine the level of trust and types of power relations that develop between the researcher and participants which can go on to create advantages and disadvantages in the research process (Mullings, 1999). Mullings (1999) stated that recognizing and naming uncertainties created through identities and power relations is an important step towards not only establishing rigor in the research process, but also towards displacing the indomitable authority of the author.

Closely related to the issue of positionality is the researcher's position as an 'insider' or an 'outsider' to the research population. The benefits and drawbacks of both positions have been debated. Dowling (2010) described an insider as someone who is similar to his or her informants whereas an outsider is different. Dowling (2010) suggests that as a researcher you are never simply either an insider or outsider as we have overlapping racial, socio-economic, gender, ethnic and other characteristics, as do informants. There are therefore many points of similarity or dissimilarity that may be present between the researcher and informant (Dowling, 2010: 36).

In this study, the positionality of the researcher in terms of age, gender and background were taken into account. As a research student of similar age to the participants, the same nationality (in most cases) and also with similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds this situated the researcher as an 'insider' in many ways to the research population. The researcher had also previously spent time studying abroad although not as an undergraduate student, or through the Erasmus programme. The researcher studied abroad during secondary education, for a period of one year, in Lusaka, Zambia. This information was only revealed when requested by ten of the interviewees. In terms of the interviews with students from Loughborough University, the researcher and participant had also studied at the same university and in a few cases in the same academic year. The researcher could therefore be seen as an insider in many ways; however, it is important to note that the researcher did not know any of the interviewees or share any mutual friends.

Winchester (1996) argued that 'power relations influence both the access to target groups and the structure and conduct of the interview' (p.122). It is believed that the researcher's position as an 'insider' was a benefit as power relations were not an issue with the researcher and participants being very much equal. This allowed the researcher to access the target group, and interviewees appeared comfortable talking to the researcher about their experiences. Being an insider can also allow trust to develop between the researcher and participants, while being an outsider can create problems in establishing trust (Mullings, 1999). It has also been argued that as an insider the information collected and the interpretation of the data completed is more valid than of an outsider (Dowling, 2010). As an insider, participants are possibly more likely to talk to the researcher if they feel they have something in common or that they have a shared experience in some way with the researcher. This may also lead to participants speaking more freely about their experiences and may also allow a better rapport to develop between the participant and researcher than if the researcher was an outsider.

Flowerdew and Martin (2005) stated that 'sharing the same background or a similar identity to your informant can have a positive effect, facilitating the development of a rapport between interviewer and interviewee thus producing a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy and mutual respect and understanding' (p.113). This appeared to be the case in this research as students were keen to help the researcher with many commenting that they know how hard it can be to find willing participants from their own experiences of conducting research for their studies. Students from Loughborough were very keen to take part in the research, which is evident in the fact that although Loughborough had the lowest outgoing Erasmus work placement level of all eight universities included, it was the university from which the highest number of interviewees were recruited. The researcher's position as a current Loughborough postgraduate student therefore appeared to play an influential role in students' decisions to take part in the study.

It is not only research positionality which can affect research findings but also researcher personality. Moser (2008) highlighted that despite the increase in interest of the issue of positionality the related issue of researcher personality has not been a consideration despite its profound ability to shape both the research process and product. Moser found that whilst conducting fieldwork in Indonesia her positionality as a white, female,

Canadian, middle class graduate student were quickly diminished as aspects of her personality became the main factor used by locals to judge her. Aspects of personality such as the way in which Moser conducted herself and her social skills controlled access to certain groups and the level to which participants opened up during the research process. Moser therefore found that her personality affected not only the research process but also the information gathered whilst in the field and ultimately had a great impact on the research as a whole. Whilst Moser (2008) does not deny the importance of positionality the issue of researcher personality is outlined as an area that has not yet been fully explored in existing literature focusing on research methods in geography.

As discussed by Tembo (2003), occupying certain positions and being aware of them may encourage researchers to take up projects that will place them at an advantage as an 'insider'. In a sense, this was the case with this research study as the researcher had personal experience of studying abroad which had initially encouraged and influenced the researcher to conduct the research. Without the personal experience of studying abroad, the researcher may have had no knowledge or interest in the area of research and therefore the position of being an insider created the study initially.

Although reflexivity and positionality have become important issues within geography in recent years it has been suggested that calls for this type of reflexivity may be ambitious (Rose, 1997). Rose argued that researchers cannot be fully aware of, or articulate, their own self-positioning. Rose (1997) discussed the difficulties in being reflexive in practice and argued that certain types of reflexivity are in fact impossible to achieve. Smith (2001) and Shurmer-Smith (2001) shared a similar view (quoted in Limb and Dwyer, 2001) arguing that too much self reflection may make the final written text of a research project both exclusionary and self-justified or self-centred. In Bourdieu's (2003) discussion of 'participant objectivation' this is described as 'the objectivation of the subject of objectivation, of the analysis subject – in short, of the researcher herself' (p.282) with which he too expressed concern for an excess of reflectivity. Winchester and Rofe (2010) stated that Bourdieu (2003) emphasized the crisis of representation, which they describe as 'the conundrum of celebrating the subjective nature of the social world while striving to ground this very subjectivity in objectivity' (p.16).

3.4.5 Online research ethics

As noted by Mann and Stewart (2000), online research practice is in its infancy which means researchers will be confronted by quandaries at almost every stage in the research process. As described by Madge (2010), the debate surrounding online research ethics is a 'work in progress' and the ethical challenges are not simple. A number of ethical concerns had to be considered in relation to using online methods in this research.

Hewson et al (2003) argued that data made deliberately and voluntarily available in the public internet domain (including the World Wide Web) should be accessible to a researcher, providing anonymity is ensured (2003: 53). In terms of using student reports/commentaries obtained online, reports were only used if they had been made publically available on university webpages or where students had personally provided access to their report. All reports were made anonymous.

In relation to using online interviews, identity verification can be problematic (Madge and O'Conner, 2002). This was overcome in this research as interviewees were initially contacted via a university email account, thus allowing the researcher to confirm the participant was a registered student at the university. Students who chose to contact the researcher via Facebook also received communication via their university ensuring their identity was confirmed.

The use of Facebook invoked ethical considerations. Although many Facebook users have public profiles that anyone can view, this does not necessarily mean they are willing to allow information posted on Facebook to be used in a research project. Gaining an individual's permission to use photos, discussion board comments, wall posts, conversation threads and status updates is therefore essential. Facebook was used in the research outlined here essentially to contact possible participants. However, many students had written on public walls and group discussions about their Erasmus experience, which was of interest to the study. This information was not intended by the students to be used in research and therefore the decision was made not to use this information in this way. Instead these students were contacted and asked to take part in an interview so they could control the information given to the researcher. Another potential problem that should be kept in mind is that if Facebook is used for the

recruitment of participants, only individuals who have access to the Internet and who are also Facebook users will be included and therefore certain groups will be automatically excluded. Individuals who have chosen not to open a Facebook account and people in certain countries, such as Pakistan, Vietnam and North Korea where Facebook has been blocked intermittently will not be accessible using Facebook. This could potentially exclude certain groups and may challenge the validity of the research findings in some cases.

Hall (2009) highlighted that online social networks were a source of potential future problems for ethnographers in relation to remaining separate from and exiting the field. It is argued that because of sites such as Facebook this may no longer be so easily achieved as friendships could be formed via social networking sites. Hall (2009) made strict guidelines over what participants could see if they were made friends over Facebook. She described how 'by adding both participants as "friends" on the website, but disabling the ability for them to see extensive information about me, people I know, or for my "friends" to see them, this ruled out the possibility of them being exposed as a participant, or to find out detailed personal things about me. Therefore this was felt to be the most ethically sound decision possible' (Hall, 2009: 268). This problem was also faced in this study. As the researcher clearly had a Facebook account, as it was used to message students, a problem arose as to whether the researcher should become 'friends' with the participants. Without accepting a friend request and with the correct privacy settings in place the researcher appeared as only a name and photograph. If 'friends' status had been accepted then the relationship would have been changed as both parties could view each other's Facebook lives. This may include family photos, status updates, personal information and other information that may have affected the relationship. For this reason no 'friend' requests were made or granted by the researcher. On reflection, it would be advised that when using Facebook to contact potential participants, a profile used solely for this purpose should be used.

Hay (2003) argued that 'ethical research is carried out by thoughtful, informed and reflexive geographers who act honourably because it is the 'right' thing to do, not because someone is making them do it' (p.37). As suggested by Valentine (2001), ethics are not a politically correct add-on but should always be at the heart of any research design. Ethical

considerations are essential to ensure a successful research project and have thus been taken into account from the design stage right through to the dissemination of results.

3.5 Conclusion

As asserted by England (1994), research is a process, not just a product and therefore the process of actually 'doing' the research is important to evaluate and reflect critically upon. This chapter has outlined and evaluated the methods employed in this study in order to assess the research process. The methods employed have been detailed and the advantages and disadvantages associated with and encountered when using these methods have been discussed. The research population for this study has been described giving attention to how the targeted sample of participants was contacted and recruited. Ethical considerations have also been explored that were important to consider in this research.

The Erasmus work placement mobility of UK students is explored using 40 semi-structured interviews, textual analysis of 40 student reports, and secondary data. Although quantitative statistics are used to establish the background context for the research, the primary data collected is qualitative. The students' own experiences and perceptions are prioritised, which produces rich empirical data that make a valuable contribution to the student mobility literature. The following chapters (4, 5, 6 and 7) present the findings resulting from the methods employed in this study.

Chapter 4: Research context

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the context to student work placements, student mobility in Europe and Erasmus work placements and justifies why the UK is a topical and interesting case study for this research. It is based on the analysis of secondary data relating to European mobility programmes that was completed prior to the collection of qualitative data (see chapter 3). This chapter thus establishes the context of Erasmus work placements in a European and UK context.

The chapter is organised into four main parts. The first discusses student work placements in industry, including the increased prominence and importance of placements within a UK context. The national nature of such placements is highlighted here as the majority of UK student placements are undertaken within the UK. The second part of this chapter examines the history of student mobility in Europe. The Erasmus programme is also assessed here outlining the aims of the programme and the various stages Erasmus has been through since its introduction in 1987. The third part of this chapter explores work placement mobility in Europe and gives particular attention to the introduction of student work placements into the Erasmus programme. Finally, in the fourth part of this chapter, the UK case study is outlined and justified. Overall, chapter 4 considers the historical and current position of student work placement mobility in Europe in order to situate this study within a relevant research context.

4.2 Student work placements

Although international work placement mobility is yet to receive substantial academic attention, student work placements more generally have been the focus of research for some time. As discussed in chapter 1, such research has focused on students completing work placements within the same country they study in. An understanding of these 'home based' work placements is important for this study as it provides the context for the increased importance and prominence of work placements in the UK.

Work placements are an established academic and business practice and refer to periods spent working within an organisation by students undertaking educational courses (Ellis and Moon, 1998). The incorporation of work placements during the course of undergraduate studies is far from a new phenomenon. These programmes have long since been a part of the UK's HE system with the pre-1992 polytechnic sector in particular being well known for this vocational approach. Since the 1950s, work placements in various forms and duration have been introduced across a range of subject areas in many UK universities (Little and Harvey, 2006). In 2004/05, placement students accounted for over seven per cent of the UK undergraduate population (HEFCE, 2009).

Traditionally, work placements have been incorporated into particular courses where work experience is an important part of statutory training requirements, such as teacher training and nursing courses. Work placements have since been incorporated into a wider range of subject areas in a large number of HEIs, but, certain disciplines (such as engineering and business) continue to be more likely to offer work placements during undergraduate studies than others (for example art and design, see Bowes & Harvey, 1999 and Blackwell and Harvey, 1999). The duration, type and completion requirements of undergraduate work placements also vary widely. Work placements are often for a period of a year that takes place between two periods of study creating a 'sandwich' degree programme. Shorter work placements are also often available which take place in shorter blocks throughout an undergraduate programme. Harvey et al (1998) distinguished between these two types of placement as 'thick-sandwich courses', which have a single continuous block of work experience, and 'thin-sandwich courses' which involve a series of short work experiences. Even shorter 'work based unit' placements have recently become popular, usually lasting between six to ten weeks in duration (Little and Harvey, 2006).

Despite the fact that work placements have long since been a prominent part of HE there has been growing interest in these programmes over recent years. Student work placements have become the focus of much attention as educators and students have become keenly aware of their importance in the overall education of students (Toncar and Cudmore, 2000). The relationship between education and business has thus become recognised as a very significant linkage (Ellis and Moon, 1998). This is partly due to the fact that over the past 30 years concerns have been raised that traditional educational

programmes fail to address the needs of both learners and industry (Neill and Mulholland, 2003). This issue has been addressed by the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) Initiative (established in 1988), which has suggested that students in HE should gain the competencies and aptitudes required by enterprise. A central element of reforms initiated by the EHE was to encourage the incorporation of work experience and placements into courses for undergraduate students to enable them to experience real life work settings.

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), chaired by Lord Dearing in 1997, has also played an important role in increasing the attention and significance given to work placements for students in UK HE. The Dearing report heavily promoted the benefits of vocational degree programmes that combine academia and work experience, suggesting that all undergraduates should have the opportunity to undertake a period of work experience. The Dearing report was greatly informed by a research project entitled 'The Graduates' Work study' (Harvey et al, 1997). This study examined employer and employee perceptions of the skills and abilities needed by graduates in a changing workplace and found that strategic managers, recruitment personnel and recent graduates regarded course-linked work experience as an important, if not crucial, element in their undergraduate experience. Students were found to be very aware of the benefits of work placements that were believed to be a positive attribute contributing to success in their early careers after graduation. Harvey et al (1997) therefore concluded that:

'If there were a single recommendation to come from the research, it would be to encourage all undergraduate programmes to offer students an option of a year-long placement and employers to be less reluctant to provide placement opportunities' (p.2).

Work placements for UK undergraduate students have therefore increased in importance over recent years. Subsequently, student work placements have received substantial amounts of attention from researchers who have aimed to examine this experience from a number of perspectives. Much of this research has been discussed in chapter 2 and although a small number of studies have focused on placements in an international context, this remains an under researched area. In order to contextualise Erasmus work placement mobility, European student mobility must firstly be discussed.

4.3 European student mobility

Academic mobility in Europe is a historically rooted phenomenon (Adia et al, 1994). The birth of European universities in the Middle Ages gave rise to academic mobility where it became common for scholars to travel within Europe in search of knowledge and experience that mobility could provide (De Ridder Symoens, 2003; Musselin, 2004). For this reason, it has been argued that academic and student mobility are 'as old as universities themselves' (Dhondt, 2008: 48). During the Middle Ages and early modern period, academic and student mobility in Europe most often took place in the form of peregrination academica, which consisted of a tour of several French, Dutch and Italian universities and usually lasted one or two years in duration (Dhondt, 2008). At the end of the eighteenth century this tradition came to an end, as universities became state institutions and the use of Latin as a common language diminished. Academic and student mobility in this period was subsequently reduced.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, academic mobility mainly occurred between western European universities until eastern Europe established itself as a major region of origin in the late nineteenth century. At this time, academic and student mobility once again began to rise in popularity until the economic recession of the 1930s that caused a large decrease in the mobility of students and academics (Dhondt, 2008). After fluctuations over the centuries, academic and student mobility has increased substantially since the end of World War II and student mobility in particular has become an important issue in Europe since the 1980s. Student mobility has been encouraged and facilitated in the region for political, economic, social and cultural reasons. These rationales are interlinked and have varied in importance at different points in time.

4.3.1 Rationales for student mobility in Europe

Following the Second World War motivations to encourage student mobility in Europe were essentially political (Adia et al, 1994). Political rationales, which developed in the 1950s, encouraged student mobility as it was expected that it would help to prevent the resurgence of global conflict, lead to greater integration and promote international cooperation and mutual understanding. However, at this time conditions were not favourable for developing student mobility in Europe. Adia et al (1994) argued that the

absence of a common language and the scarcity of information created substantial barriers to mobility. It was at this time that work began in Europe to stimulate and facilitate student mobility by breaking down these barriers. In order to do this the Council of Europe passed a series of conventions on the recognition and equivalence of diplomas, periods of study and qualifications. For example, the 'European convention on the equivalence of diplomas leading to admission to universities' (1953) and the 'European convention on the academic recognition of University qualifications' (1959) both aimed to encourage the recognition of qualifications across Europe and subsequently to facilitate student access to European HE systems. It was not until 1976 that student exchange and mobility were specifically facilitated by the European Communities with the introduction of the Joint Study Programme (JSP). Although this programme was only a pilot initiative, it was the first of its kind to channel community resources to support multi-lateral student and staff exchange.

It is widely accepted that 'higher education can contribute to the construction of a more powerful and united Europe' (Figel, 2006: 415). The development of student mobility has therefore been identified as a powerful instrument of European construction (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). It has been claimed that the crucial challenges for the future of Europe will be first tackled in centres of learning, which is why discussions on HE are often a 'microcosm of the larger European debate' (Figel, 2006: 415). Developing cooperation between education systems in Europe is therefore perceived to be essential for developing cooperation, mobility and integration more generally. The belief that student mobility can contribute towards European integration is one of the main reasons why international student mobility has considerably gained currency as a major policy in Europe during recent decades (Kelo et al, 2006; Teichler, 2006). Within EU policies relating to education, student mobility has taken up an important role as it is claimed to 'bring life to the European project, through creating European minded students, European cooperation, development and exchange' (Ørsted, 2008: 5). As discussed by Figel (2007), 'human potential' is seen as the number one factor for wealth and prospects for development in Europe and the mobility of students is viewed as an essential strategy for enhancing human potential in Europe by increasing the skills of young Europeans. It is also deemed to

be necessary to increase the efficiency of resource allocation in an integrated Europe, with a view to generate economic growth and welfare gains (Biffi, 2004).

Economic rationales have also played a role in the encouragement of student mobility in Europe as this form of mobility has been seen as an important element to economic integration and cooperation. There is an increased awareness that student mobility can promote the development of a European labour market as this mobility is perceived to predispose individuals to cross borders during their professional career more easily. In this sense, student mobility can serve the purpose of economic cooperation as it contributes towards the training of European-minded professionals (Pabatsiba, 2005). As outlined in chapter 2, this idea has been supported by many researchers who have identified a correlation between student mobility and the labour market mobility of individuals (for example, Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Oosterbeek and Webbink, 2006 and Parey and Waldinger, 2006). The European Commission stated that student mobility can be used as a form of 'human resources' training to encourage the development of European graduates with previous experience of intra-Community co-operation that will contribute towards economic co-operation in the future (Papatsiba, 2005a). It is important to note that the relationship between European student mobility and labour market mobility is contested as researchers have suggested that this correlation is influenced by many different factors and is therefore difficult to confirm (see chapter 2).

In addition to political and economic rationales, social and cultural considerations have also played an important and influential role in the encouragement of student mobility in Europe. As stated by Adia et al (1994), 'the prospect for an integrated Europe as a basis for genuine European citizenship and identity has long been the key motivation behind action to stimulate student mobility' (p.85). It has widely been assumed that 'with this increasing freedom of movement should come a growing European consciousness instilled through greater awareness of others as a result of exposure to new cultures and societies' (Pabatsiba, 2005: 1). It has also often been advocated that student mobility can foster the understanding of a diversity of cultures and thus promote social cohesion in Europe (Biffi et al, 2004). The mobility of students is therefore viewed as an essential part of fostering a European identity, citizenship and consciousness that is perceived to contribute towards

cultural and social integration. Along these lines, Ørsted (2008) argued that mobility programmes can be seen as an attempt to create governable subjects who will act according to the knowledge, morals and truths produced by the EU. It is, however, important to note here that the concept of a so-called 'European identity' or 'consciousness' is itself contested (Lehning, 2001; Strath, 2002), as is the degree to which student mobility can contribute towards its development (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Papatsiba, 2005b; Fligstein, 2008; Sigalas, 2009). As many commentators have argued, excessive optimism about this European construction and the development of a European identity through student mobility is not advised (see, for example, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

Student mobility in Europe is therefore an important part of the EU's strategies for political, economic, social and cultural integration, although the success of such integration has been debated. The single largest programme developed at a supranational level in Europe aimed to facilitate student mobility is Erasmus. Erasmus has become the European Union's flagship mobility programme in the field of education and training. From the outset, financial support for temporary student mobility within Europe has been the most visible component of the Erasmus programme (Bracht et al, 2006).

4.3.2 The Erasmus programme

The Erasmus programme is an educational programme that encourages the mobility of students and teachers and cooperation between universities across Europe. The main objective of Erasmus when it was introduced in 1987 was 'to achieve a significant increase in the number of students [...] spending an integrated period of study in another Member State (Council of the European Communities, 1987). After nearly ten years of pilot programmes, including JSP, the original Erasmus Programme was announced in 1986 and received varying reactions between the then twelve Member States. In general, states that already had substantial exchange programmes of their own were broadly hostile whereas the remaining countries were more in favour (Europa, WWW). Several larger countries opposed the original Erasmus programme on legal grounds insisting that education fell outside the scope of the treaties (Figel, 2006). Figel (2006) stated that perhaps the times were not ripe as educational systems were perceived as core features of national sovereignty. Despite this initial opposition, a compromise was finally reached with a majority of the Member States and the programme was finally adopted in 1987. Overall

responsibility for implementing and funding the Erasmus programme lies with the European Commission (Directorate-General Education and Culture).

Since its introduction, the Erasmus Programme has gone through various stages and transitions. Initially, Erasmus ran as an autonomous programme with more than half of its funds being allocated to student mobility grants. The remaining funds were allocated to actions supporting teaching staff exchange, curricular innovations and other activities. In the programme's first ten years it became widely viewed as the flagship for the European Union's educational programmes. Despite criticisms regarding issues such as lack of funding, Erasmus was seen as having helped student mobility rise from an exception to one of the normal options for students in its first decade of existence (Teichler, 2001).

In 1995, Erasmus became part of the Socrates programme that brought together the majority of the European Union's educational support programmes. Erasmus aimed to implement one of Socrates' main objectives, to encourage the European mobility of students and teachers. From 1995 to December 1999, more than 460,000 students received an Erasmus scholarship through the Socrates programme. Despite this, many negative features became associated with Socrates such as: weakness of design, complications and differing interpretations of the programme, numerous action bodies/coordination centres and related problems regarding the allocation of tasks. Due to these problems, in December 1999 Socrates came to an end and was replaced with the Socrates II programme in January 2000. Socrates II aimed to address the shortcomings of the original programme and therefore focused on efficiency with individual programmes based on a decentralised and more effective management system. Again, promoting the mobility of students was a key objective within this second phase that was achieved through the Erasmus element of the programme. During this phase Erasmus underwent changes in managerial and administration procedures and although student mobility remained the core activity of Erasmus, other activities, such as teacher mobility, played a stronger role (Teichler, 2001).

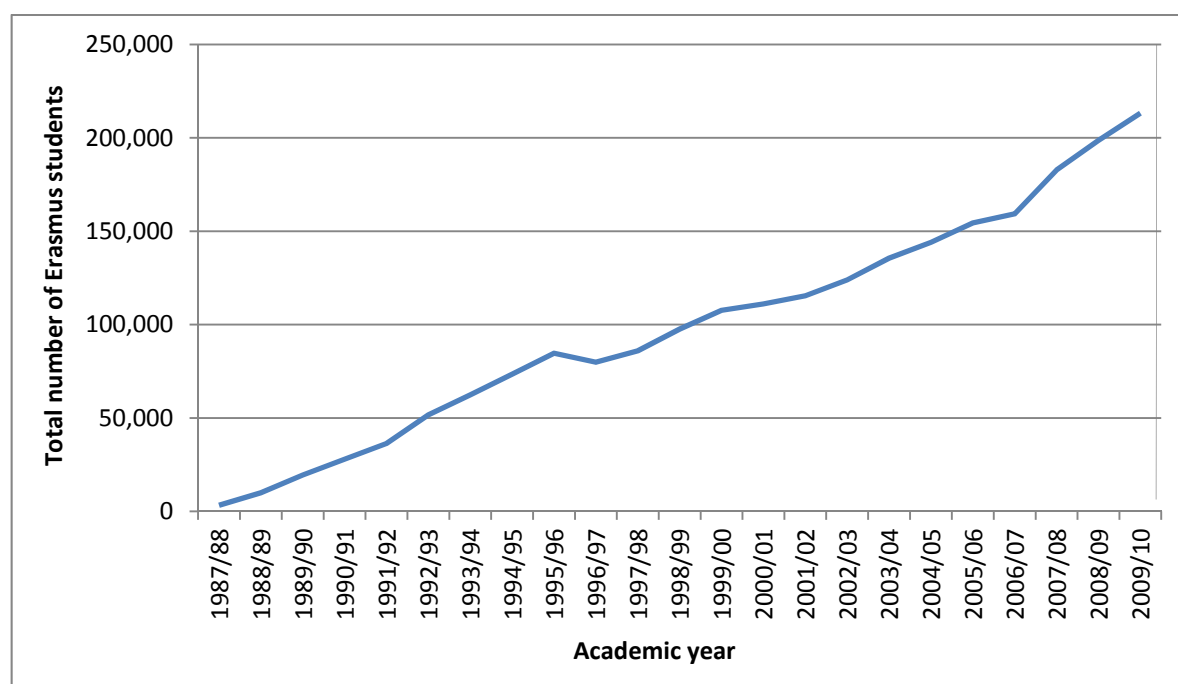
Erasmus ran as a sub programme of Socrates II until 2006 where the most recent transition saw Erasmus become supported under the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (2007-13). This scheme aims to enable individuals, at all stages of their lives, to pursue stimulating

learning opportunities across Europe (Europa, WWW). The Lifelong Learning programme aims to ensure greater coherence between education and training actions and to support more effectively the implementation of lifelong learning (Pépin, 2007). The programme encompasses many previously autonomously run programmes that now form four sub-programmes with a focus on different stages of education and training:

- **Comenius** - for schools
- **Erasmus** - for HE
- **Leonardo da Vinci** - for vocational education and training
- **Grundtvig** - for adult education

Erasmus has expanded and diversified its actions since its introduction and today consists of many different activities including: student and teacher exchanges, joint development of study programmes (curriculum development), international intensive programmes, thematic networks between departments and faculties across Europe, language courses (EILC) and the European credit transfer system (ECTS). The annual budget for the Erasmus programme is now in excess of €415million (2009/10). Nine out of every ten European HE establishments (more than 4,000) are currently involved in Erasmus that has established co-operation between universities in 32 countries. Few, if any, programmes launched by the European Union have had a similar Europe-wide reach (Europa, WWW). Currently an estimated 4% of European students receive an Erasmus grant at some stage of their studies with over two million students having participated since it started in 1987. As can be seen in Figure 7, participation in Erasmus has grown considerably since its introduction.

Figure 7: Erasmus participation 1987/88 – 2009/10 (Data Source: European Commission, 2011)



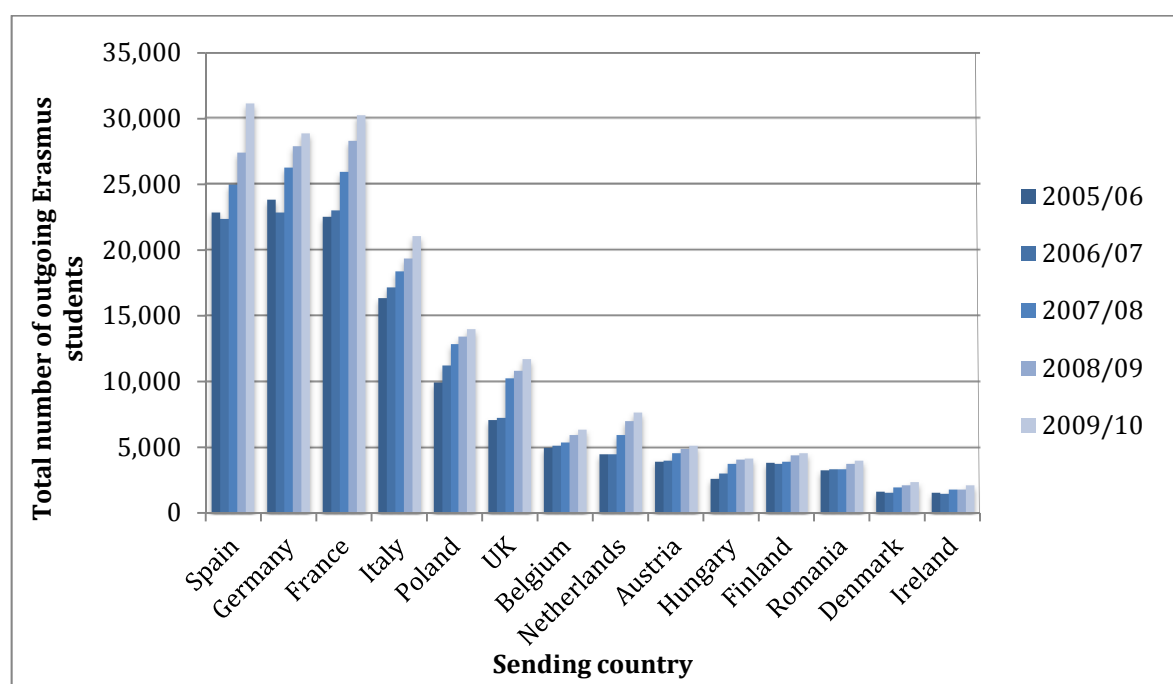
Despite this growth in participation, the programme is yet to reach its original target to enable a minimum of 10% of all HE students in Europe to study for a period of time in another European country. In fact, in the vast majority of participating countries, Erasmus mobility actually corresponds to less than 1% of the respective student population (Eurostat, WWW). Exceptions to this include Liechtenstein (6.43 %), Austria (1.77 %), the Czech Republic (1.54 %) and Spain (1.41 %). The relative success of the Erasmus programme must therefore be assessed with this in mind. The objectives within the Erasmus programme relating to student mobility are as follows:

- 'To enable students to benefit educationally, linguistically and culturally from the experience of learning in other European countries.
- To promote co-operation between institutions and to enrich the educational environment of host institutions.
- To contribute to the development of a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced young people as future professionals' (Europa, WWW)

As shown in figure 7, overall Erasmus participation has steadily increased since the programme's introduction; however, significant variations in terms of Erasmus

participation exist between participating countries. Figure 8 shows these differences in terms of Erasmus participation between the top 14 sending countries over the past five years. Many factors have been suggested to account for these variations such as country size, location and isolation, cultural attitudes, language and a range of other factors previously discussed in chapter 2.

Figure 8: Outgoing Erasmus mobility for top 14 sending countries (2006/06 - 2009/10)
(Data source: European Commission, 2011)



The most rapid rise in overall Erasmus participation occurred in 2007/08 (figure 7). A major change that occurred at this time was the transfer of work placements for students, which were previously administered by the Leonardo da Vinci programme, into Erasmus. The introduction of work placements has increased overall Erasmus mobility substantially; however, the impact on individual countries' levels of outgoing mobility has varied (figure 8).

4.4 Work placement mobility in Europe

As stated in chapter 1, work placements abroad are not a new phenomenon. International work placements have been occurring for some time and represent a substantial number of students. This was evident in a HEFCE study (2004) in which 1/3 of all mobile UK

students surveyed went abroad for a work placement. As highlighted in chapter 2, this form of student mobility is yet to receive adequate academic attention.

Powell (1979) was an early advocate of the importance of international experience during the course of studies. The work of Powell confirms that international work experience has long since been occurring, especially within courses such as business, management and marketing, albeit on a smaller scale than today. Powell (1979) noted that changes within HE in the 1970s led to an increased awareness of the value and relevance of international experience within the study course. In the year prior to Powell's work (1978), 174 British students took up work placements in a total of twelve different countries. Powell claimed that the increase of the sandwich mode of learning was a timely development providing an integral period of activity undertaken outside the educational establishment. Powell then suggested that it is a logical step to think of developing this experience in another country.

Examples of programmes that have previously facilitated international work placements are PETRA (1st phase 1987-92; 2nd phase 1992-95), the English Language Assistantships (ELA's) and the Leonardo da Vinci programme that are run by the European Commission and account for various types of professional and vocational mobility. The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) also provides international work experience opportunities specifically designed for science, engineering and applied arts undergraduates. These programmes have, however, been relatively small scale. For example, 217 UK students (less than 0.0094% of total student population) undertook IAESTE work placements in different countries around the world in 2007 (Europe Unit, 2008).

It has been a dedicated focus of European policy to bring the two sectors of education and the so-called practical world together to learn from each other for some time, which has often involved work placements (March, 2007). From 1986 until 1995, the COMETT programme (COMmunity action programme in Education and Training in Technology) performed this function that was then replaced with the Leonardo da Vinci programme. These programmes aimed to establish permanent networks to gap bridges between universities and enterprises that often included supporting student work placements. Work placements in industry were transferred from the Leonardo da Vinci programme into

Erasmus in 2007 for many reasons. Firstly, the aim was to streamline all HE activities into one programme that was expected to increase efficiency and improve administration. Another reason for this reorganisation was the perception that the Leonardo da Vinci programme was underperforming in terms of participation rates. Particularly in countries such as the UK, the Leonardo allocation was not being met and this was perceived to be a wasted opportunity. Leonardo da Vinci was seen to be over complicated and processes of application were viewed as difficult and confusing. As more universities took part in Erasmus than Leonardo, the idea was that by mainstreaming placements within Erasmus more HEIs would begin to participate in student placements. The overall aim was that the introduction of placements into the Erasmus programme would increase participation that was previously lacking (reasons established in correspondence with British Council).

In 2006, the European Commission highlighted, in its Communication 'Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation', that universities have to recognise 'that their relationship with the business community is of strategic importance and forms part of their commitment to serving the public interest' (p.6). A key element within this agenda set out in 2006 was that universities should develop structured partnerships with the world of enterprise in order to 'become significant players in the economy, able to respond better and faster to the demands of the market and to develop partnerships which harness scientific and technological knowledge' (p.6). The communication suggested that enterprises could help universities to reshape curricula, governance structures and contribute to funding. On this basis, the Commission launched the University-Business Forum as a European platform for dialogue between the two worlds that held its first meeting in February 2008.

The University-Business forum was set up to address the perceived problem that the world of HE is still too detached from the world of work and that not enough graduates have the right mix of knowledge and skills that employers are looking for. The introduction of the forum was therefore clearly influenced by neoliberal ideas that education's role is to produce employable graduates (see chapter 2). It was also claimed that poor knowledge transfer between HE and business restricted Europe's potential for innovation. The employability challenge has thus been the key issue for the Forum. Enterprises within the forum have reported a mismatch between the competences of graduates as they emerge

from universities and the qualifications that they seek as employers. Another of the key issues discussed by the forum is mobility across borders and between business and academia. The forum stated that in spite of a number of success stories with student placements, industry-academia mobility between the two sectors was far too low.

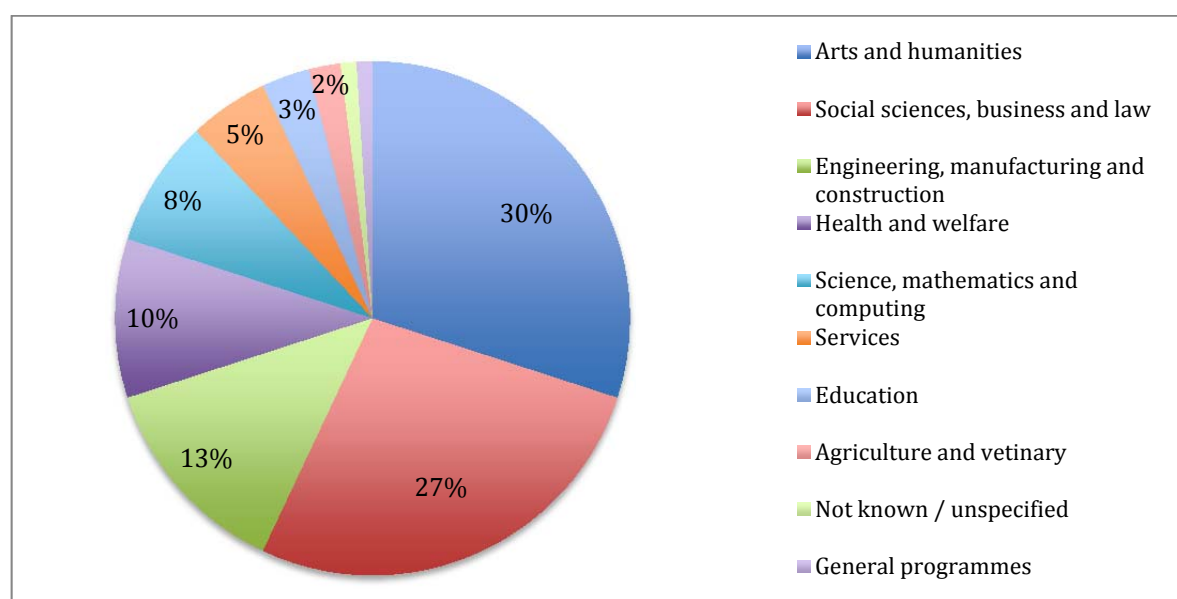
The European Commission (2007) asserted that in a true knowledge society universities can no longer act as an entirely independent academic force and that they must tune a proportion of their activity into the needs of students whose employability is at stake, and towards the needs of society at large. This reflects the neoliberal view of education as a means of training for the workplace rather than for the public good. The Commission argued that cooperation with the world of work is no longer an optional activity for HEIs. It has become a necessity. Rising concerns over graduate employability, in part due to the massification of HE, has meant that educators are required to gain intimate knowledge of the work places which students may go on to work within. Academic qualifications alone are not enough to ensure employment as students, and the institutions in which these students learn in, now need to create graduates with the skills and requirements of the labour market. The European Commission stated that 'co-operation between higher education and businesses is widely recognised to have benefits for both sides. Universities make sure their graduates are well prepared for the labour market. Companies satisfy their demand for highly qualified graduates with the right mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes' (Europa, WWW). Cooperation between these two spheres is therefore seen to be beneficial to many stakeholders and is at the centre of many strategies of modernisation for HE.

As argued by Vriens et al (2010), in a global economy it is becoming more and more important to introduce students to an international working environment during their education as 'in a context of increasing global economic connectivity and interdependence, gaining practical work experience in an international environment is becoming more and more important' (p.1). International work placements have therefore become progressively more important and awareness of their benefits has risen in recent years. Thanks to the Erasmus programme, a large number of students, from a wide variety of disciplines, now have the option to take part in a work placement in another European

country with encouragement and support on hand to make the experience easier, namely through organisational and financial assistance.

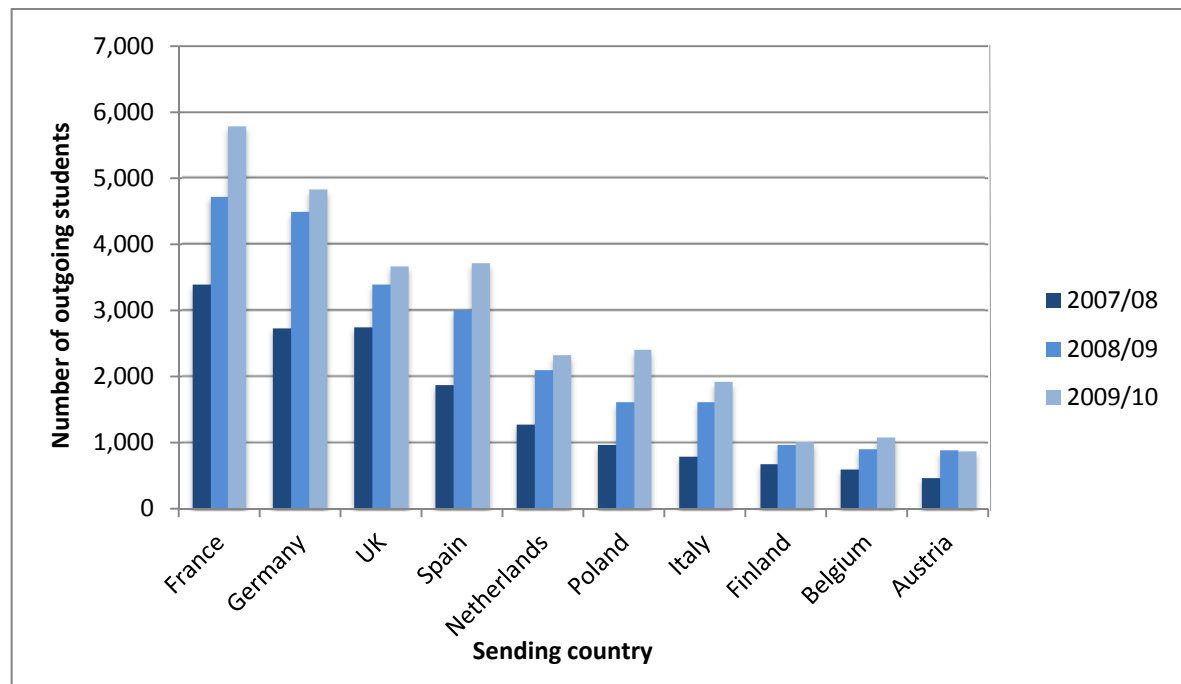
Since their introduction in 2007, work placements have become the fastest growing action within the Erasmus Programme. In 2009/10, 35,561 students went on company placements abroad, which represent an annual increase from 2008/09 of over 17%. The average duration of Erasmus placements was 4.2 months in 2009/10, which is generally lower than for study periods. In line with study grants, the average monthly Erasmus grants for company placements was €386 in the same year. Participation in Erasmus placements has varied substantially according to students' areas of studies. In 2009/10, students of the arts and humanities made up the biggest share, followed by students of the social sciences, business and law. Students studying engineering, manufacturing and construction are least likely to take part in the programme (figure 9).

Figure 9: Erasmus work placement participation according to area of studies for all participating countries in the academic year 2009/10 (Data source: European Commission, 2011)



Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy have consistently been the top destination countries for Erasmus work placements. In terms of sending countries, the introduction of Erasmus work placements has been more successful in terms of outgoing numbers in certain countries than others (figure 10).

Figure 10: Outgoing Erasmus work placement mobility 2007/08 - 2009/10 (Source: European Commission, 2011)



In general, countries that previously performed well in terms of study abroad have gone on to perform well for work placements; however, there have been some surprises including the participation in countries such as the UK. As shown in figure 10, the UK has performed well in terms of Erasmus work placement mobility even when compared to countries such as Germany, Spain and France, who send over three times as many students abroad to study than the UK. Erasmus placements have therefore proven to be popular amongst UK students.

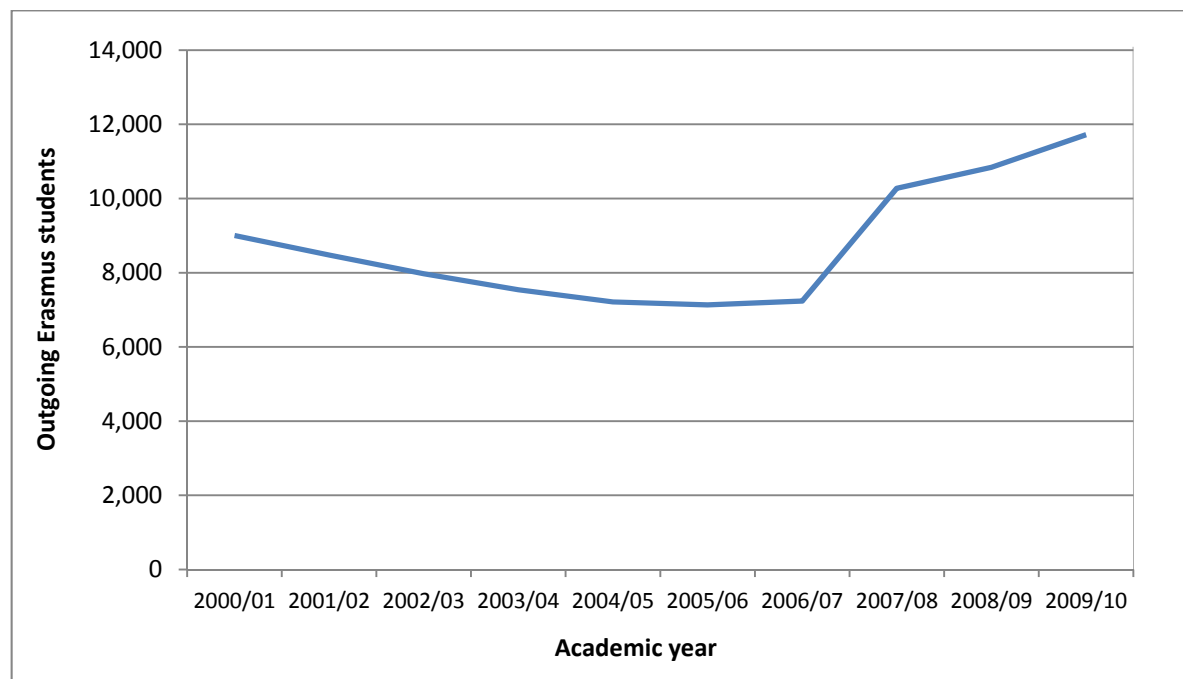
4.5 The UK case study

Both the European Commission and British council treat the UK as a single unit (including England, Scotland and Wales) when assessing Erasmus participation. For this reason, this research uses the UK as its case study area. It must, however, be noted that all eight universities included in the study are English universities (see chapter 3). The UK has been one of the main recipients of international HE students over recent decades but UK students have tended to be relatively reluctant to study abroad, especially within Europe (Findlay et al, 2006). Although the UK has higher rates of outward mobility than other Anglophone countries, such as the United States and Australia, it sends considerably fewer

students abroad for studies than other EU countries (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al, 2006). The UK is subsequently amongst the unique countries in Europe with an imbalance of incoming compared to outgoing students, receiving on average 86% more students than it sends (Carbonell, 2010). As discussed by King et al (2010), the UK comes second to the USA in the global list of 'receiving countries' of international students, whereas it ranks 22nd as a sending country. This means that foreign students account for 15% of the student population in UK HEIs, but UK students abroad are only about 1.6% of the total population of students in HE (King et al, 2010).

The low levels of outgoing mobility from the UK has led to much criticism with UK universities being described as 'money hungry' and 'greedy' as it has been suggested that they attempt to attract high fee paying international students at the expense of encouraging the outward mobility of students from within the UK (Baker, 2010). The UK also displayed a general decline in Erasmus participation from 2000/01 to 2006/07 (figure 11). During this time the majority of other participating European countries saw an increase in participation.

Figure 11: The UK's outgoing Erasmus mobility 2000/01 - 2009/10 (Data source: European Commission, 2011)



The declining Erasmus participation in the UK from 2000 to 2006, in comparison to other European countries, led to fears that UK students would be less competitive and left at a disadvantage in the European labour market. In 2006, Julian Nicholds, Vice-President for Education at the National Union of students, suggested that not experiencing a period of time overseas represented a 'lost opportunity' for UK students. He expressed concerns that UK students would be disadvantaged due to low participation rates (Fielden, 2007). Many political and educational commentators also showed concern over the UK's outgoing mobility. For example, Findlay et al (2006) argued that it is important that UK students gain international skills to improve their human capital and to allow the country to increase its graduates' stock of social and cultural capital. This is deemed necessary in order to maintain the UK economy's global competitiveness in an era when the structures of Empire no longer ensure the social reproduction of an internationally oriented and interculturally aware population (Findlay et al, 2006). The mobility of UK students was therefore perceived to be essential not only to ensure individual students' success post-study, but also to ensure the success of the UK's economy.

These concerns stimulated research conducted by Findlay et al (2006) that explored the UK's low levels of international mobility, especially to Europe. Findlay et al (2006) argued that the UK's decreasing mobility to Europe is more than compensated for by rising flows to other world destinations, especially North America and Australia. In this sense, UK students were not necessarily reluctant to study abroad but preferred to study outside of Europe. For this reason UK students were labelled as 'Ever reluctant Europeans'. Findlay et al (2006) also found that language students were overwhelmingly oriented towards study abroad in Europe, whereas non-language students would prefer a variety of other, mainly English-speaking, destination countries. This preference, along with the decreasing number of students registered on language courses in the UK, can also help explain the changing geographies of UK student mobility away from Europe.

Concerns for UK students going abroad also led to research by Lunn (2008), with the Royal Geographical Society, funded by the British government's Department for International Development. This research sought to assess how global perspectives are integrated into undergraduate studies in the UK. In this research global perspectives were seen as important as it was stated that 'the economic, social and cultural interests of the nation

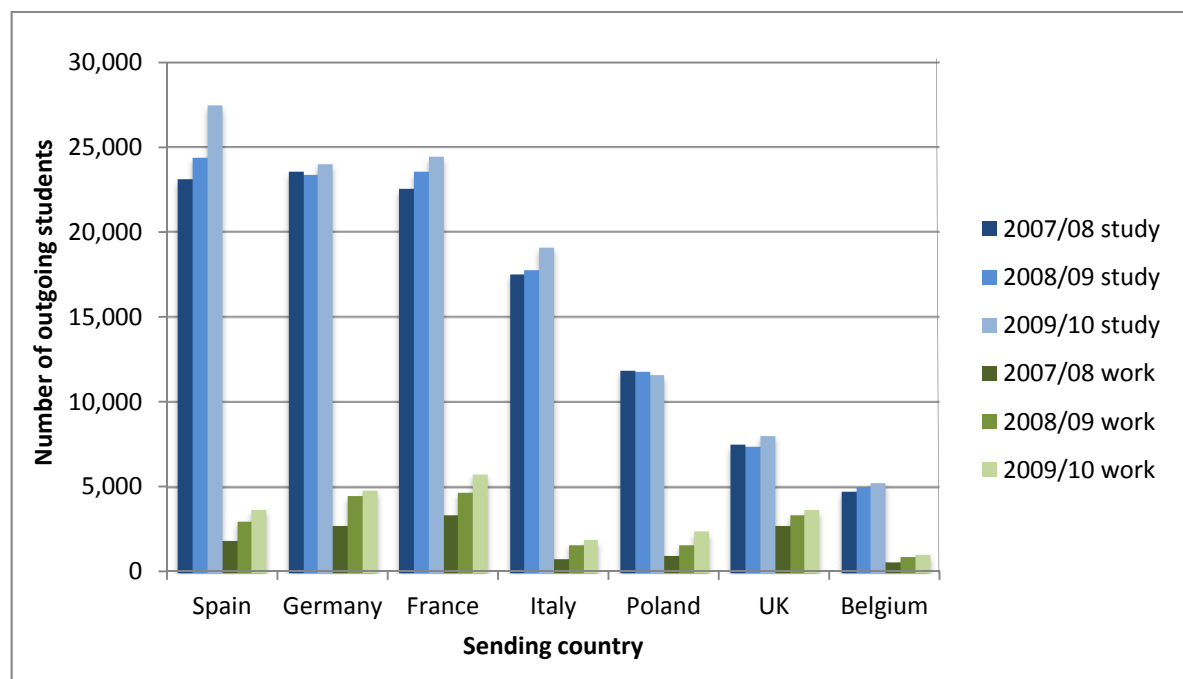
demand that graduates have sound knowledge of global issues, the skills for working in an international context, and the values of a “global citizen” (Lunn, 2008: 231). For this reason it was deemed necessary to assess how the UK was performing in terms of creating such graduates. Here it was found that there were a variety of opportunities for students to develop global perspectives but that the extent to which global perspectives were embedded in departmental and institutional practice depended greatly on individual enthusiasm and discretion. The conclusion was that a coordinated strategy was required to increase global perspectives of UK graduates. Work placements abroad were identified in this report as one of the many activities that could contribute towards developing these global perspectives.

HEFCE (2004) found a preference amongst UK students for work placements rather than study abroad and went on to suggest that existing mobility schemes are imbalanced with student and employer needs. HEFCE (2004) asserted that international work placements needed to be further explored and developed to address this imbalance. Findlay et al (2006) similarly argued that exchange-based student mobility schemes such as Erasmus, developed in the political and economic contexts of 1980s Europe, no longer suffice in the UK. They asserted that ‘the global context within which UK students and HEIs make their decisions about student mobility has changed dramatically and the time is now right to reconsider the UK’s approach to international student mobility. This will involve matching the new type of overseas opportunities which students are looking for with the changing global economic needs and educational experiences which the UK must provide to its brightest young cohorts to maintain its position in a rapidly changing world’ (Findlay et al, 2006: 313). The suggestion here was that new opportunities were needed if the UK was to increase its outgoing student mobility. One of the forms of mobility that they found to be preferred amongst UK students was work placement mobility. The preference amongst UK students for work placements abroad identified by HEFCE (2004) and Findlay et al (2006) has since been confirmed by the popularity of Erasmus work placements amongst UK students.

As can be seen from figure 11, since 2006/07 the UK’s outgoing Erasmus student mobility has increased significantly. It is at this point that work placements were introduced to the Erasmus programme. The popularity of Erasmus work placements in the UK has

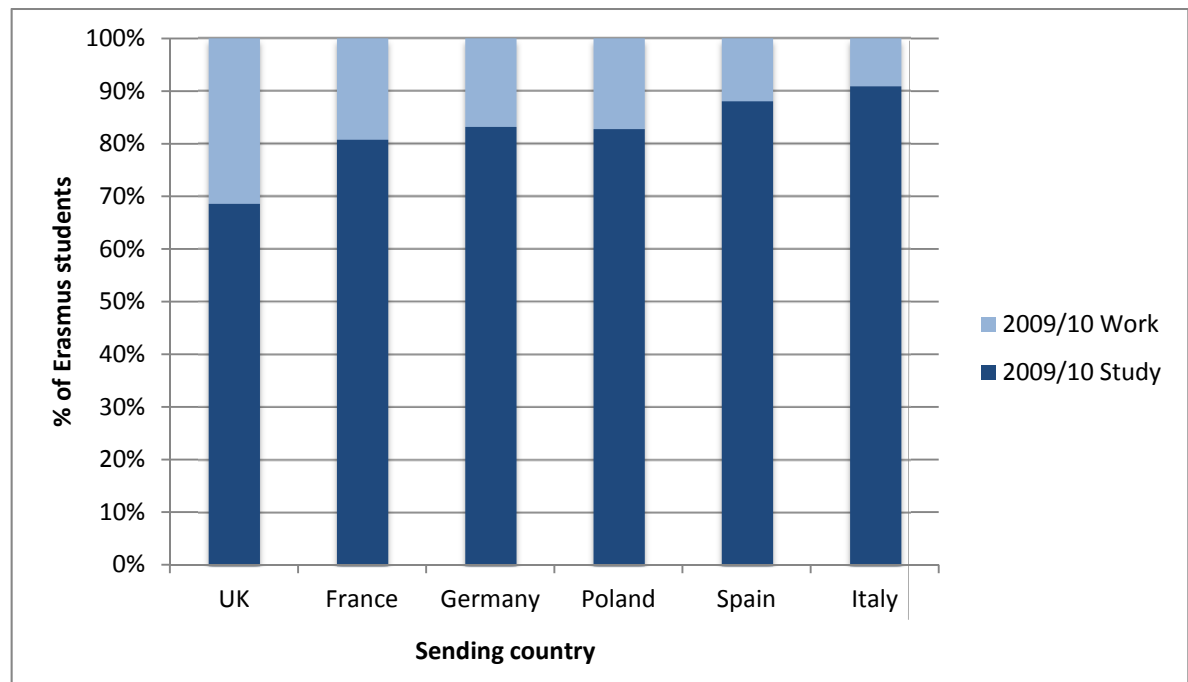
contradicted claims that UK students are ‘reluctant Europeans’ as where work placement opportunities have been put in place UK students have not showed this reluctance. As shown in figure 12, the UK has not only overturned its own patterns of decline in terms of Erasmus participation but has also performed well in terms of outgoing Erasmus work placement mobility in comparison to other European countries. When one compares these countries’ performances in terms of study abroad, the UK appears to be an interesting case, as it does not perform nearly as well for study abroad as it does for work placements.

Figure 12: Erasmus participation for studies and work 2007/08 - 2009/10 (Data source: European Commission, 2011)



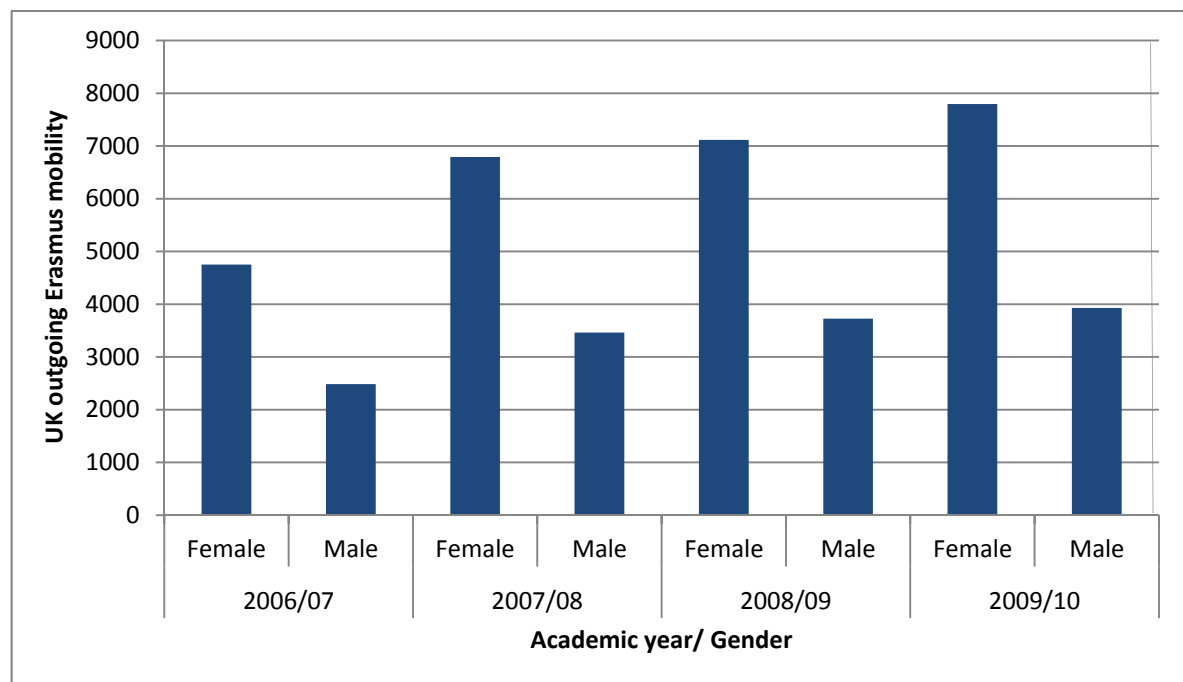
The UK has performed well in terms of work placement mobility compared to its performance for study abroad through the Erasmus programme. The UK competes well with countries such as Spain, France and Germany in terms of work placement mobility, but in terms of study abroad these countries send over three times as many students abroad than the UK (figure 12). The UK subsequently sends a greater proportion of their mobile Erasmus students abroad for work placements than any other participating country in Europe (figure 13). This confirms the popularity of work placements over study abroad in the UK as where both options are available, a greater proportion of mobile UK students opt to do a work placement than in any other participating country.

Figure 13: Percentage of Erasmus students who study and work abroad for top 6 sending countries (Data source: European Commission, 2010)



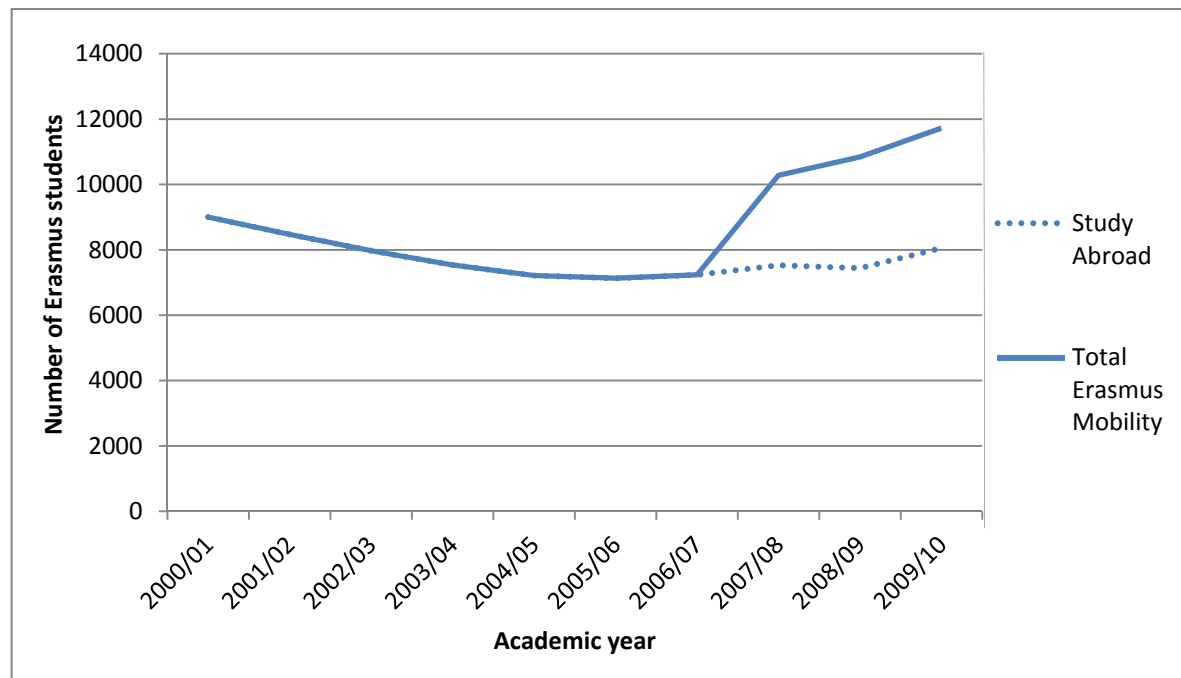
The UK's performance for work placements has therefore been surprising. The popularity of Erasmus work placements allowed the UK to increase its overall outgoing student mobility by a third and to double its share of European mobility in the first year Erasmus placements were introduced, thus having a substantial effect on the UK's overall Erasmus student mobility. It is important to note, that as discussed in chapter 3, UK participation in Erasmus work placements varies according to subject area and also by institution. In 2009/10, 66% of work placements came from twelve institutions, each of which sent more than 100 students and ten others sent between 51 and 100 students (Carbonell, 2011). There is also a significant gender imbalance in terms of UK Erasmus participation as more females participate in the programme than males (figure 14). As discussed in chapter 3, although more females participate in HE generally, the Erasmus figures are higher than the share of female students in the total student population.

Figure 14: UK Erasmus participation by gender (2006/07 - 2009/10) (Data source: British Council, 2011)



Since the introduction of work placements into the Erasmus programme the number of UK students studying abroad has remained relatively consistent with previous years (Figure 15). It appears therefore that additional students have been attracted to work placements rather than students who would have previously studied abroad now deciding to take part in a work placement. The introduction of work placements has therefore not reduced mobility for studies from the UK, but instead expanded and diversified the type of outgoing mobility. This suggests that UK students have certain motivations for participating in work placement mobility that were not necessarily being met by study abroad opportunities. It therefore appears that UK students are driven to become mobile for a work placement for different reasons than study abroad. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the focus on employability in the UK HE system has become increasingly prominent and therefore this may explain the popularity of Erasmus work placements amongst UK students. The neoliberal idea of education for employability, instead of learning for its own sake, may therefore play an important role in the work placement mobility of UK students. Findings in relation to this link are discussed further in chapter 5.

Figure 15: UK outgoing Erasmus study and work placement mobility 2001/02 - 2009/10
(Data source: British Council, 2011)



The destination countries of UK students taking part in work placements somewhat match those of mobility for studies, with the top four destination countries (France, Spain, Germany and Italy) being the same for both study abroad and work placements abroad through Erasmus. As stated in chapter 3, and displayed in Appendix A, participants in this study reflect the overall destination choices of UK students.

The popularity of Erasmus work placements amongst UK students has been discussed here in comparison to low levels of study abroad participation. However, in order truly to assess whether Erasmus work placements have been a success in the UK, it is essential to analyse UK students' participation in European work placement mobility prior to 2007. As highlighted in chapter 1, student work placement mobility programmes existed prior to 2007 and it is important to assess UK students' participation in these programmes in order to analyse whether participation has increased since the transfer into Erasmus.

Under the Erasmus programme, UK students have two work placement options available to them; they can either complete a work placement in industry or in a school as a language assistant. A breakdown of participation in these two options under the Erasmus programme is shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Breakdown of UK students' Erasmus work placement participation (industry and language assistantships) (Data source: British Council)

Year	Total Erasmus	Industry		Language assistants	
	work placements	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
2007/08	2,726	1,113	41	1,613	59
2008/09	3,406	1,854	54	1,552	46
2009/10	3,670	1,981	54	1,689	46

It is important to note that the figures presented in figure 16 are extremely problematic. These figures were obtained from the British Council, who stated that the figures are an estimate because there is no specific Language Assistant field on the British Council database. All work placements, both in industry and in schools as assistants, are treated as one activity by the British Council and therefore the estimate of how many students do each of type of placement was reached by the Council selecting those students with a most suitable subject and category profile. The British Council noted that if there were an error, it is likely to be an under rather than over representation of the true number of students completing placements in industry as not all language assistants receive an Erasmus grant. The number of placements in industry may therefore be slightly higher than presented here. The data must therefore be treated with caution, as the proportion of students completing work placements in industry and completing language assistantships is an estimate only.

The main programmes that facilitated these two types of work placements prior to 2007 were the language assistantship scheme administered by the British Council and the Leonardo da Vinci programme administered by the European Commission. Establishing the effects on the participation in language assistantships since the introduction of Erasmus placements is difficult as not all of the language assistantships for the years following 2007 received an Erasmus grant. Again, because Erasmus statistics do not distinguish between

language assistantships and placements in industry, the number of who did receive an Erasmus grant is unknown. In discussions with the British Council, however, it has been established that the since the introduction of language assistantships into the Erasmus work placement programme, participation has remained relatively stable.

Prior to 2007, students enrolled in UK universities could also take part in a European project based work placement in industry through the Leonardo da Vinci scheme. Participation in student work placements under the Leonardo da Vinci programme was relatively erratic with no real pattern of growth apparent. This is one of the reasons why the action was transferred into the Erasmus programme. Overall, 20,002 Erasmus student placements were completed in 2007/2008. This compares to approximately 14,400 placements in the previous year when such placements were administered by Leonardo da Vinci and thus represents a strong 38.9 % increase (Europa, WWW). The number of UK students completing a placement in industry through the Erasmus programme is substantially higher and more consistent than when these placements were part of the Leonardo programme, with 1,548 students participating in 2007/08, 1,969 in 2008/09 and 1,981 in 2009/10. The transfer of placements from Leonardo to Erasmus has therefore increased the number of students completing an international work placement in industry both at the European and UK level.

The overall increase in Erasmus participation in the UK can thus be attributed to a genuine rise in UK student mobility for the purpose of work placements and is not simply due to an amalgamation of previous programmes. We must, however, also keep in mind that students prior to 2007 may also have been organising their own placements abroad that may now being accounted for under the Erasmus statistics. However, the structural reforms made by the European Commission under the Life Long Learning umbrella appear to have been successful in terms of increasing work placement mobility from the UK. This increase contributes to making the UK a fascinating case study for this study.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the research context for this study by analysing secondary data from a variety of sources. Student work placements in industry have been discussed as well as student mobility within Europe. Support provided by the Erasmus programme for both studies and work placements has also been outlined. This chapter has highlighted work placement mobility as an overlooked yet important form of student mobility in Europe. Although students have been engaging in both student mobility and nationally based work placements for some time, the introduction of the Erasmus work placement programme has increased the prominence of work placement mobility substantially within Europe.

This chapter has also outlined and justified the UK case study as the focus of this research. In comparison to other participating Erasmus countries, the UK performs much better in terms of outgoing mobility for work placements than for study abroad. The UK subsequently sends a greater proportion of their Erasmus students abroad for placements than any other country. The popularity of Erasmus work placements somewhat challenges the idea of UK students as reluctant to engage in mobility in Europe, as in terms of work placement mobility, they have not shown this reluctance. In June 2011, the British Council reported that the growth rate of UK students applying to study in the EU through the Erasmus programme has overtaken the European average. UK participation rates in Erasmus had increased by 8% on the previous year, compared to the European average of 7.4%. It was, however, also acknowledged by the British Council that despite the record growth, UK participants still lag behind other EU countries such as Spain and France. As highlighted in this chapter, the introduction of Erasmus work placements has had a dramatic effect on the outgoing Erasmus mobility of UK students, but there remains room for improvement. The UK is therefore an ideal case study for this research.

The following three chapters discuss findings from the qualitative primary data collected in this research. Chapter 5 analyses the motivations of students to participate in the programme, chapter 6 examines the experiences of students whilst abroad and chapter 7 discusses the perceived outcomes of this mobility from the students' perspectives. Throughout these three chapters, links between the drivers, experiences and effects of Erasmus work placements are explored.

Chapter 5: The drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students. As identified in chapter 2, there has been a considerable amount of academic attention devoted to exploring the drivers to student mobility; however, this literature has tended to focus solely on study abroad. This chapter contributes towards this body of literature by exploring the factors that motivate students to take part in a work placement abroad. Krzaklewska (2008) argued that there are few in-depth studies on the motivations of Erasmus students and in many cases the drivers are offered as an introduction and then not explored any further. In contrast, this chapter provides an in-depth, detailed account of the drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility. As will be discussed in this chapter, the drivers to work placement mobility are in many cases very different to study abroad and therefore this approach offers a valuable contribution towards a full understanding of the drivers to outgoing UK student mobility.

Five main drivers to mobility have been identified in this research: employability, failure to secure a placement in the UK, language, finance and a range of personal and biographical factors. This chapter discusses these five factors in turn to reveal the complex, interlinked influences that encourage students to undertake an Erasmus work placement. It will also be outlined how the drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility differ depending on type of degree studied, requirements built into the degree programme and gender. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the role UK HEIs play in encouraging, and in some cases discouraging, outgoing mobility for Erasmus work placements.

5.2 Employability

The desire to increase employability plays a significant role in driving the work placement mobility of UK students, although the importance of this factor does vary. The desire to enhance employability has previously also been identified to be a driver to student mobility for studies (for example Papatsiba, 2005a); overall, however, research has tended to suggest that employability is a less influential driver than factors such as language, the

opportunity to live abroad, meet new people and gain life experience (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al, 2006; Vossensteyn et al, 2010). In contrast to these findings, this study argues that employability is a main driver to work placement mobility and in some cases students participated in the programme purely to increase their employability.

Participants often viewed the Erasmus work placement programme as a strategy to gain an advantage in what they perceived to be a congested UK graduate labour market. Completing a placement abroad was viewed as a way of 'standing out' from competitors in the job market, subsequently increasing their chances of securing a graduate level job. For example, one student stated 'I thought this would really benefit me in the future, give me an edge over the others, and give me better career prospects' (R-14). Students often spoke about their concerns, and in some cases fears, relating to finding employment within the UK after graduating and there was a feeling amongst the students that they needed something extra in order to be successful in the job market. Although many of the students also had the option to study abroad, or to complete a work placement in the UK (figure 6), the option to work abroad was viewed by the students as more beneficial in terms of the expected employability gains. One student commented 'I thought going abroad over staying in the UK would look better on my CV definitely and getting more experience of doing something a bit different' (I-2). All of the students interviewed, and the majority of the reports analysed, mentioned the expected gains in terms of future employability as a motivation to taking part in the programme. The importance of this factor did, however, vary and, as will be discussed later, employability was generally a more important motivation for males than for females in this study.

In contrast to the findings of this research, Brooks and Waters (2009b) examined degree mobile UK students and found that the desire to stand out in the labour market was not a main driver to mobility. Brooks and Waters (2009b) asserted that students were instead often driven to study abroad in order to gain 'a foot into the labour market' in their chosen country of study. Waters and Brooks (2010a) later stated that UK students are not overtly motivated by 'strategic' career linked concerns and instead they seek excitement and adventure and often use the study abroad opportunity to delay the onset of a career. In this study however, the majority of students expressed a desire to return to work in the UK after graduation with very few suggesting that they aimed to gain a foot into the labour

market of the country they completed their placement in. It is possible that these results reveal a key difference in the drivers to mobility between credit mobile and degree mobile students from the UK. It appears that degree mobile students study abroad as part of a long-term migration strategy in order to gain access to a foreign labour market, whereas the credit mobile students in this study instead wanted to enhance their general employability and improve their prospects on return to the UK.

Prior to their placements, the majority of students in this study wanted to return to work in the UK following graduation. Despite this, the students did express awareness that they would require skills to work in a multicultural environment due to the global nature of business. One interviewee commented 'with business how it is I knew it would be good to be able to show I can work with all sorts of different people, from different places and that I'm open to cooperation and can deal with that' (I-30). As highlighted in chapter 2, processes of globalisation have led to changing requirements of graduates, who now need to be competent working in a multicultural, global workforce. As discussed by Elkin et al (2005) the globalisation of the business economy has encouraged the development of a market for internationally orientated and qualified graduates. The students in this study appeared to be very aware of this requirement and viewed the Erasmus work placement programme as an effective way of gaining such skills and becoming what Hunter et al (2006) termed 'global-ready graduates' (Hunter et al, 2006).

5.2.1 Credential inflation and the 'scarcity' of placements abroad

It became apparent during the interviews that there was a clear awareness, and in many cases concern, surrounding the idea of credential inflation (Collins, 2002; Van de Werfhorst, 2005). The students did not believe that their undergraduate degree alone would position them well enough in the search for graduate work. Students often made reference to the fact that 'everyone has a degree these days' (I-28) and that 'everyone gets a 2:1' (I-40) suggesting that this meant they had to do more in order to stand out. The Erasmus work placement was seen as a useful tool to 'boost' their CVs, giving them a much-needed distinction from other graduates. This supports the suggestion, made by commentators such as Brown and Hesketh (2004) and Tomlinson (2008), that students believe that simply having a degree is no longer enough to ensure success after graduation. One student referred to the option of working abroad as a way of

‘personalising your degree’ as the placement offered the opportunity to make their degree unique stating that ‘it’s the only way to ensure that nobody else will have the same degree as you’ (I-5). An Erasmus work placement was therefore seen as a way to make the students stand out from other graduates, the majority of whom would not have gained work experience abroad.

The desire of students in this study to gain something extra in addition to their degree to help them find a graduate job is also linked to the economic recession that the students would be graduating into in 2009/10 and 2010/11. Students spoke about how they were aware that the timing of their graduation would make it difficult to secure a job and that competition would be high in the graduate labour market:

‘It’s part of the employability thing, you can’t escape what’s going on in the media and you hear about it all the time and there’s like a big drive to make students aware of the situation to do their utmost. You have to prove to employers that you’ve got more and you’ve gained different skills and you can adapt so it did really motivate me to think “well if I do a work placement I’ll have that valuable experience”’ (I-28).

‘It’s just so competitive, especially at the moment. I mean business in itself is competitive and yes possibly I have an advantage by speaking languages but it’s just so competitive. I needed a leg up, that’s what I thought the placement would give me, a leg up’ (I-39).

For the group of students in this study, the timing of their graduation in relation to the economic recession therefore added to their concerns regarding employability and acted as an additional driver to mobility.

Teichler and Janson (2007) and Vossensteyn et al (2010) have previously argued that as the number of students studying abroad has increased, the relative labour market advantage of the experience has declined. Vossensteyn et al (2010) asserted that this decline deters students from participating in mobility programmes, as the costs of participation may not outweigh the expected benefits in the labour market. This did not appear to be a problem in terms of Erasmus work placement mobility due to the infancy of the programme and the

relatively low number of students participating. Many students referred to the fact that they were amongst a limited number of students participating in the programme, which served as a motivating factor to take part as they felt this made the experience scarcer and therefore more valuable in terms of employability:

‘I mean just the numbers I gave you earlier considering that 50 people are doing marketing and five of us were left doing international marketing and went to work abroad, it shows how most people, I don’t know why, just don’t do it, it’s just not that popular... so I think it will make me more employable because all the others didn’t go abroad and I did’ (I-17).

‘Everyone needs a masters or something extra and now a lot of people have had a term studying abroad. It’s not that unique anymore, it’s just not that unique, so I think the more you can differentiate yourself then the better’ (I-26).

In these students’ view, which was shared by many, the work placement offers something scarce, which was often deemed more unique than a period spent studying abroad. This belief had in many cases encouraged students to turn down the opportunity to study abroad in favour of working abroad, particularly in the case of language students. The perceived ‘scarceness’ of the work placement abroad had therefore attracted students as it was deemed a unique experience that would enhance their employability. Waters (2009) similarly found that students from East Asia, when faced with the effects of credential inflation, pursued international education and postgraduate qualifications to maintain the relative scarcity of their qualifications in order to gain advantage in the labour market.

5.2.2 Gender differences in the importance of employability

As discussed by Brooks and Waters (2011a), very little has been written about gender in relation to international students and where gender has been taken into account, the focus has been on Japanese students in the US (Ono and Piper, 2004) and in the UK (Habu, 2000) and on East Asian students in Canada (Park, 2010). Brooks and Waters (2011a) suggested that such research has offered a ‘useful corrective to ‘gender-blind’ studies of migration’ (p.67) but argued that in particular there has been very little said on the issue of gender in relation to UK international students. Gender differences in the mobility of academics have, however, begun to receive increased attention as outlined in chapter 2

(Ackers, 2000; Ackers and Gill, 2008; Leemann, 2010; Jöns, 2011). In terms of drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility, this research has found that males and females are motivated to participate for different reasons, with the aim to increase employability being more significant for males than for females. The timing of the decision to go abroad also appears to be different for males and females.

In general, the females in this study tended to emphasise language/cultural and personal factors as the main drivers to their mobility, whereas males were more likely to emphasise employability related drivers. Female participants did often talk about the expectation that the experience would benefit their future employability but tended to view this as a bonus rather than the main reason they participated. Likewise, many males in the study also expressed a desire to experience a new culture and gain language skills, but in the majority of cases this was stated as secondary to the advantages they expected to gain in terms of employability. As one male student stated, 'I thought maybe companies would see I'm willing to travel and go to other places so if there's another guy who did a placement in the UK but I went further afield, it shows that I'm willing to travel, so I would like stand out' (I-6). In contrast to this, the females in the study tended to emphasise language learning, personal and cultural factors as the main driver to mobility with the desire to increase employability being a secondary influence.

Exploring gender differences in the reasons why students participate in the Erasmus work placement programme is complex. This is due to differences in the degree types studied by males and females in the sample and the requirements within these courses. Females in this sample were most likely to be studying languages or some aspect of language studies and have a time abroad or a work placement as a compulsory part of their degree programme, whereas males were more likely to be studying a non-language course and have either a compulsory placement, or more often no requirement, to complete either a placement or period abroad built into their course (see figures 5 and 6). More males had therefore made the decision to take part as an extra, optional element of their degree, whereas females tended to take part because of their course requirements. It was therefore difficult to assess whether differences between males and females in the study were due to course type and requirements or due to gender differences. It was, however, found that male language students also tended to emphasise employability over language,

personal and cultural reasons. Likewise, female non-language students also emphasised language and cultural motivations. We can therefore conclude that in this sample, employability was a more substantial driver to the mobility of males than of females, irrespective of language skills. It is important to note that there were exceptions to this, where females emphasised employability and males emphasised language and cultural drivers. Overall, however, this pattern held true irrespective of degree type confirming that this difference was in fact linked to gender. This points to differences in socialisation shaping the traits and values of students according to gender.

Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2006) also reported to have identified gender differences in the reasons why students participate in mobility programmes; however, their findings differ to those found in this study. As discussed further in chapter 3, Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2006) asserted that females were more likely to be motivated to study abroad to learn about different cultures, practice a foreign language and enhance future employment opportunities, whereas males wanted to have fun and meet new people. In contrast, this research has found that it was in fact males who were more likely to emphasise employability as a driver to their mobility, while females were found to place more emphasis on language and cultural drivers. A report produced by NUS (2010) stated that in terms of drivers to mobility, females rated the chance to become more confident and self-reliant higher than males and were also more likely to be motivated to improve language skills. This research has also found that females were more likely to be motivated to improve language skills.

Employability has therefore been identified as being a significant driver to work placement mobility, although the importance of this factor does vary. This supports previous research suggesting that a desire to become more employable can act as a driver to participation in the Erasmus programme (Papatsiba, 2005a) and contradicts research claiming that employability is a secondary driver to factors such as language and the opportunity to travel (Vossensteyn et al, 2010). The findings of this research, in comparison to previous studies focusing on study abroad, suggest that work placement mobility is driven by strategic, employability related motivations as in the case of a large number of students in this study employability was the main, and in some cases the only, driver to their mobility. The work placement mobility of UK students therefore corresponds with the assumption

that students are driven to become mobile to increase their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) in order to enhance their future career chances.

The importance of employability to the students in this study reflects the changing nature of HE in the UK as, due to processes of neoliberalisation, the focus on training for employability, rather than for the public good, has become prominent (see chapter 2). These neoliberal ideas appeared to have infiltrated into both the HEIs and students in this study who were very focused on the matter of employability following graduation. These findings support the suggestion made by Furukawa (2008) that the narratives of students who study abroad are informed by neoliberalism, which drives young people to become skilled, flexible, and responsible workers. This may in fact mean that the UK is an exception, as due to processes of neoliberalisation, the focus on employability is greater than in other European countries. This, in part, explains why Erasmus work placements have been so popular amongst UK students and must also be kept in mind when assessing the wider applicability of the research results.

5.3 Failure to secure a work placement in the UK

It has been suggested that the availability of student work placements based in the UK has declined due to the economic downturn (Taggart, 2009). This issue was discussed in more detail in chapter 2 as it has been argued that students maybe have to look for placement opportunities internationally as a result of this decline in placement availability. This research has found evidence to support this suggestion as a number of students stated that they only started looking for placements abroad because of problems finding what they deemed to be a reputable placement in the UK:

'It was very difficult for people to get jobs in England anyway and a lot of my friends really struggled. Like I had quite a few interviews too and they didn't want me either. A lot of companies had cut down a lot on students this year.... I think if I had got one already in London I probably wouldn't have looked abroad. I was looking in London for a few months first and couldn't get one' (I-5).

'The competition to get a placement job was tough so that's why I broadened my horizons then and why I was looking abroad at that point as there weren't any here

because of the difficulties of getting a placement... I might not have looked abroad but I did get a placement abroad and here in the end and still went with going abroad' (I-35).

These students had looked abroad for work placements in order to avoid having to 'opt out' of compulsory placement years, which they saw as a failure, or having to accept a placement in the UK that they did not deem appropriate or beneficial for their employability. These students often expressed the belief that they would never have considered working abroad until they struggled to find a placement in the UK but spoke about realising the benefits of going abroad once they had started exploring this option.

Brooks and Waters (2009b) found that degree mobility from the UK is often seen as a 'second chance at success' when prestigious university places in the UK are not secured. Similarly, Findlay et al (2010) found that failure to gain a place at their desired UK university can be a trigger to student mobility. In this research, it appears that placements abroad are also seen as a 'second chance at success' when reputable placements in the UK are not secured. Mobility is therefore being utilised by students in order to escape perceived failure in the UK. This highlights the importance of the UK's inclusion within programmes such as Erasmus, as in times of financial crisis, and the resulting decrease in student placements, students are utilising access to European labour markets in order to escape failure in the UK. Without this option, many students may have missed out on the opportunity to complete a work placement, which they believed would have negatively affected their prospects following graduation.

5.4 Language

Language has previously been identified as a main driver to student mobility for studies (see for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006) as it is widely believed that the only way to really learn the language of a foreign country is to go and live there (Coleman, 1997). The participants in this study possessed very different levels of language skills prior to their Erasmus placement with around half of the participants having some aspect of language learning included in their university studies (see figure 5). Work placement mobility was in some cases seen as an opportunity to learn

a language from scratch, for others it was a chance to improve existing language skills and for some, the placement was actually found to be a way of avoiding language learning whilst abroad. As highlighted in section 5.2.2, language was more of an important driver to the females in this study than males, irrespective of existing language skills.

5.4.1 Immersion in the host language

For students studying languages, the opportunity to practice and improve their language skills was unsurprisingly a major driver to their mobility, thus supporting findings by authors such as Findlay et al (2006) that language can play an important role in encouraging student mobility. Students in this study viewed the workplace as a good location to improve their language skills as it was seen as an opportunity to be 'immersed' into the host language. The workplace was in many cases perceived to be a superior environment than studying abroad in a university, with many students voicing the opinion that an Erasmus study abroad period is one where English is commonly used. Students often wanted to avoid this and therefore chose to work abroad as opposed to studying abroad. Working abroad was therefore viewed as a form of 'deeper immersion' (I-25) where language gains were expected to be higher than with study abroad. One language student commented, 'I knew especially with working in a German office that I wouldn't really have a choice to speak the language for at least 38 hours a week so that was the main reason I chose it' (I-16); and another stated, 'it was the idea of working in a German speaking environment, being in that environment all day; I knew it would force me to speak it and I couldn't avoid it' (I-25). For these students the work place was expected to be a place where they would not be able to avoid using the host language that they believed would improve their language competencies:

'I think with working there's more of an emphasis on me doing something more proactive rather than just sitting and learning. It involves me using my skills and sort of forcing myself to improve' (I-34).

'I chose to work because that would have been the way to speak most German, like when you're working 40 hours a week with German people, talking to German people, living with German people. It was total immersion and that's what I wanted from my time there. That's why I chose to do a work placement not study' (I-28).

It became clear that a number of students did not see studying abroad as an effective way to improve their language skills, and these student argued that having a job in the host country and avoiding contact with other Erasmus students and English people was important. This was the reason why most language students chose not to study abroad or decided to combine a period of study and work abroad. As shown in the following quote, students often chose to work abroad as they felt it would allow them to avoid grouping with other Erasmus students, as they perceived this to be a problem with traditional study abroad in terms of language learning. In particular, female language students regularly stated that they wanted to avoid using English during their time abroad:

‘I didn’t want to go to uni because I thought if I went to uni I would just hang around with other Erasmus students and be more likely to speak English rather than German. I thought it would be better to be forced into it you know, like full immersion. I had heard people who had gone to uni and they said they just spoken English the whole time and they hadn’t improved their language at all’ (I-23)

A number of students went to great lengths to avoid using English and spending time with English people through their choice of placements. One student even swapped her two semesters abroad around so they would not be in the same country as her course mates at any time. This student commented:

‘That way I knew nobody would be in the country so I would have to do it on my own.... I just knew I really wanted to get myself into a group of Spanish friends and spend more time immersed in Spanish. But most people I knew who went in the town they were in, there were other people from the university whether they were on the same course or in the same hall and they spent a lot of their year abroad together as a result and I didn’t want to do that (I-22).

Ife (2000) argued that students do not know how to fully exploit the language learning opportunities of studying abroad. As demonstrated in the previous quote, this was not true of the language students in this study. Students often spoke about wanting to immerse themselves completely in the host language with many aiming to live, work and socialise with people from the host country. In this research, it therefore seemed that in the case of the language students in particular, students were very aware of the best ways to improve

their language skills and shared the view that simply being there is not enough to improve. Many students did appear to be aware of how actively to exploit the language learning opportunities of being abroad, which contrasts greatly with the suggestions made by Ife (2000) in the context of study abroad. A significant number of students, particularly language students, were successful in obtaining this experience of 'immersion' into the language and avoiding using English (discussed further in chapter 6).

5.4.2 Avoiding the host language

Erasmus work placements give students the option to work in companies that use English as their business language. Interestingly, a number of non-language students and students with limited language skills stated that they chose to work abroad as they felt this option would allow them to avoid using the host language. Students often wanted to have an experience abroad but spoke about language as a barrier to studying abroad as they perceived the university environment of taking lectures in a foreign language and socialising with foreign students as problematic. This supports the suggestion made by researchers such as Findlay et al (2006) that language is a main barrier to UK student mobility. The option to work in an English-speaking environment, however, overcame the language barrier for a significant number of students in this study:

'I don't speak French so it had to be English speaking so that's what sold it to me as well. That I could be abroad but language wouldn't be a problem or a barrier' (I-10).

'I wouldn't have considered studying abroad because of the language barrier really which is probably quite naïve but I just didn't know how it would work' (I-29).

Students often expressed the view that a lack of language skills may also lead to social problems if they had chosen to study abroad, as one student stated, 'I thought maybe it would be difficult to make friends at a university because if your German is at a different level they might not talk to you as much and you're going in mid way through the degree too so people would already have friends too' (I-7). This student went on to explain that they felt in a work place that used English they would be able to make friends without language being a barrier. In this sense, the students felt being in a working environment would be easier in terms of language and for building social relationships.

It appears therefore that Erasmus work placements can overcome the language barrier, which is considered to be a major barrier to study abroad, particularly for UK students despite the fact that many European universities now offer courses in English (Admit, 2000b; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al, 2006; Vossensteyn et al, 2010). The work placement option therefore widens participation to 'non-traditional' Erasmus students (non-language students) who would otherwise not have participated in the traditional Erasmus programme due to a lack of language skills.

5.4.3 Language and employability

Language was unsurprisingly a more important driver to mobility for language students and those with some element of languages built into their course than for non-language students. Non-language students in general, however, were aware of the benefits of having language skills. Many referred to having read articles and received advice that languages are a positive attribute to have in the graduate employment market and therefore for many, having a second language was seen as a way to assure standing out in the graduate labour market. A small number of students with no previous language experience were therefore willing to take on the task of learning a language later in their degree course for this reason. One student stated 'It shows initiative and independence especially if you're not a linguist, taking yourself abroad and doing that is quite an impressive thing to do really and you're going to be working which is good but it's in a totally different environment' (I-15). For these students, language was a driver to their mobility but this was linked to the wider motivation to enhance their employability.

Male students who stated that language was a driver to their mobility almost exclusively reported that this was because of the expected employability gains associated with learning a second language. One male student, for example, stated: 'that's what I wanted to get out of it really, to have a second language on my CV. Yeah these days I think that's important and I remember reading something saying companies like to have languages, something different to all the others' (I-7). Similarly, another male student stated, 'I wanted to get another language really, the whole reason the university support it is because they know that's good for your CV and will help us a lot in getting a job (I-3). Although a number of males in the study did therefore want to improve or gain language skills, this was mainly because of the benefits languages were perceived to give in terms of

employability. The females in this study, who were more likely to state that they wanted to learn the language for their own enjoyment and interest, less frequently mentioned this link between language skills and employability.

The awareness amongst both language and non-language students in this sample that languages are a desirable attribute in the graduate labour market points towards an increased appreciation of language learning amongst UK students. UK students have long since been regarded as reluctant to learn European languages with language being a main barrier to their mobility as students (Findlay et al, 2006). Many of the students in this study, however, argued that languages were becoming more important due to the global nature of the business world and competition in the graduate labour market. As a result of the congested graduate labour market, UK students may therefore be becoming more aware of the importance of learning languages. This again reflects awareness amongst the students in this study that they require skills in order to compete in a globalised business economy and multicultural workforce.

Language therefore played a complex role in motivating and facilitating the mobility of the students in this study. For some it was seen as an opportunity to immerse themselves in the language and for others as a strategy to avoid having to use the host language at all. The option for students to choose their own placement, and therefore the level of language skills required, had made both of these options possible and subsequently widened participation to 'non-traditional' Erasmus students who do not study languages. As students had different goals in terms of language learning and were able to choose the level to which they used the host language whilst abroad, this inevitably led to different outcomes in terms of language gains. These outcomes are discussed in chapter 7.

5.5 Financial factors

Financial concerns are widely considered to be a major barrier to study abroad (Findlay et al, 2006; Tang et al, 2008; Bauwens et al, 2008; Otero, 2008; Vossensteyn et al, 2010; Brooks and Becket, 2011). One of the main differences between Erasmus study abroad and work placements is that the work placement gives students the opportunity to earn a salary in addition to the allocated grant. Not all student work placements offer payment

but the majority of the students in this study did receive a salary. The option to earn a salary was a driver to the mobility of some of the students in this study and often allowed students to overcome the financial barrier associated with study abroad. Fee waivers alongside rising tuition fees and the Erasmus grant have also been found to play a role in encouraging the mobility of students in this study.

5.5.1 Overcoming the financial barrier to study abroad

A number of students in this study claimed that without the option of earning a salary, mobility during the course of their undergraduate studies would not have been possible for financial reasons:

‘For me I wouldn’t have been able to study abroad for the year. I don’t get any support from my parents or anything so if I had had to go study for a year in Germany I don’t think I would have been able to do that so I was just looking for a job (I-13).

‘I couldn’t have afforded to study abroad, but with the placement I could earn money so I knew I could cope’ (I-34).

These students were not able to participate in a period of study abroad due to financial constraints but because of the option to earn a salary they were able to participate in the work placement programme. The possibility of earning money was therefore a significant driver for a number of students and was often an influencing factor in choosing to work abroad as opposed to study abroad:

‘I wanted to work and earn some money and try to save a bit to help me out when I graduate. Also I just wanted to start living I guess. Being a student you don’t have a lot of money and disposable income so it was the opportunity to get paid and have income to spend how you want on what you want, that’s why I chose the work placement’ (I-7).

‘Also I could earn money too. Instead of paying more money to study somewhere else I could actually earn money, that swayed me too... It seemed obvious you can either earn money or you don’t so I did’ (I-39).

Many commentators have suggested that students who participate in mobility programmes tend to be those from higher socio-economic groups due to the financial barriers associated with study abroad (for example, Schnitzer and Zempel-Gino, 2002; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Messer and Wolter, 2005; HEFCE, 2009). This research has discovered that Erasmus work placements can overcome the financial barrier associated with studying abroad and, therefore, have the potential to attract students from lower socio-economic groups who are not financially supported by their families. Erasmus work placements thus have the potential to overcome both language and financial barriers to study abroad for UK students and widen participation to the programme. This has long since been a goal of the European Commission.

5.5.2 Fee waivers and rising tuition fees

A small number of students also spoke about the Erasmus fee waiver as an incentive to participate in the programme. When students complete a placement during their degree it is common practice for UK universities to charge half tuition fees for the placement year; however, when students complete a placement under the Erasmus programme these fees are waived so the student does not personally incur this cost. This was an attractive option for a number of students as it often meant £1,700 less student fees/debt than if they completed a placement outside of Erasmus. As one interviewee commented, ‘the fees were paid by Erasmus too which I thought would be good, it would have been added onto my loan otherwise which I always thought was unfair but I managed to avoid that through Erasmus’ (I-15). This is a particularly interesting issue as with the rise in tuition fees in the UK over the coming years, half tuition for a year will equate to up to £4,500. In this situation, the Erasmus fee waiver may in fact become more influential.

Clark (2006) suggested that students may have been driven to study abroad due to the introduction of ‘top up’ fees in the UK. Recent work by Brooks and Waters (2011b) has also discussed how rising tuition fees in the UK may be encouraging degree mobility to European countries where tuition fees are less expensive. Findings from this research suggest that it is also feasible to argue that the rise in tuition fees is encouraging UK students to complete work placements abroad. This influence is likely to increase in the coming years as fees rise further. In this sense, Erasmus work placement mobility can be seen as a money saving exercise where students can earn money to support themselves,

possibly save some funds to help during their final year and after graduation and also save significantly on tuition fees. The programme may therefore attract students with limited funds and those who are concerned about the rise in student tuition fees/debt. Research within the UK has demonstrated that students from lower socio-economic groups are more debt-averse than their more privileged counterparts (for example, Callender and Jackson, 2005). The Erasmus work placement programme may attract this group of students due to the possibility of reducing the costs of tuition when completing a work placement. An issue that must, however, be kept in mind is whether students are actually made aware of the Erasmus grant and fee waivers (discussed further in section 5.7).

5.5.3 The influence of the Erasmus grant

In terms of finance, as well as the opportunity to earn a salary, the presence of the Erasmus grants also played a role in driving the mobility of a relatively small number of students. For these students, who claimed they could not otherwise have completed a placement abroad due to financial constraints, the presence of the Erasmus grant had greatly influenced their decision to complete a placement abroad. Despite this, for the majority of students in this study, the availability of an Erasmus grant did not appear to be an influencing factor. A significant number of students were not aware they would be entitled to the Erasmus grant until they had already decided to go abroad to complete their placement, and a small number of students did not find out they were eligible until they had already started their placements (reasons for this are discussed in 5.7). Students did, however, often view the Erasmus grant as a 'bonus' or a 'boost' making the decision often easier or more comfortable financially. When asked whether they would have still completed a placement abroad without the Erasmus grant, the vast majority of interviewees replied that they would. When asked how they would have funded their time abroad they stated that either their salary was enough to support themselves, they would have asked for additional support from family or simply stated that finance was not an issue to them.

In a number of cases, however, students did state that the grant had allowed them to apply for lower paid, or unpaid, placements, as they were aware the Erasmus grant would supplement their income. One student stated 'It was because of the funding yeah, because if I didn't have that I wouldn't have had any way to pay for all of it... we weren't getting

paid' when asked whether this meant without the grant they would have had to look for a paid job they replied 'yeah definitely' (I-6). Another student noted, 'not knowing that money was here (Erasmus grant) I might have chickened out because some of the placements I applied for were unpaid so thinking I might not get any money I probably wouldn't have gone for it' (I-25). Students receiving little or no pay therefore often stated that if they were not getting the Erasmus grant they would have had to look for a higher paid job. Although it became clear that the Erasmus grant often helped to supplement low wages, it appeared that without this supplement the majority of students would have found other sources of income as opposed to not taking part:

'I would have still gone, I would have had to get my parents to help me out a bit more or something though' (I-2).

'I would have done it anyway but the grant made it a bit more doable. I wouldn't have been able to do it without my parents support, I wouldn't have been able to afford it myself so I would have had to ask parents or somewhere else' (I-8).

Surprisingly, a significant number of students claimed they were not aware of the Erasmus grant prior to making the decision to complete a placement abroad and in some cases students did not learn about the available grant until they had actually started their placements. These students usually discovered they were eligible for Erasmus through other work placement students, who were aware of the grant, and then had to apply for the Erasmus grant late. The grant was subsequently received much later than if the right procedures had been in place. For these students, the Erasmus grant played no role in encouraging them to participate, as they were not aware that the Erasmus work placement programme existed when they made their decision to undertake an international work placement in Europe:

'They never told me that I could get Erasmus money... because there was so many interns from the UK they told me so that's when I contacted my department and asked them and they said oh yeah indeed. If I didn't know other interns there I don't think I would have got the Erasmus grant... they knew I was going abroad and nobody told me about it. I got absolutely no information at all' (I-19).

‘It was actually from the person I was replacing, he said make sure you sort out your Erasmus and he gave me some information about it but I had heard of it before but I assumed it was only applicable for studying abroad I didn’t realise you could get it as well for a placement then I looked into it and found I could’ (I-35).

Although the Erasmus grant did not appear to play a major role in influencing the majority of students’ decisions to complete a work placement abroad, there was evidence to suggest that the presence of the Erasmus grant had influenced students to complete their placement within Europe as opposed to non-European destinations:

‘If there was funding for elsewhere I could have gone to Australia or somewhere so the funding did make me want to go to Europe’ (I-6).

‘I was happy with a European destination; it meant I would get Erasmus... I didn’t feel the need to look anywhere else’ (I-18).

‘I would have loved to go to Australia but it was so expensive and you get no funding if you go there, the same with America, well I don’t think you do anyway. So I thought well if I get Erasmus money to go to Spain I would do that instead, that seemed to make more sense’ (I-40).

It appears therefore that the Erasmus programme has the potential to encourage students to become mobile within Europe as opposed to travelling to non-EU destinations to complete their placements. This is important to keep in mind as this mobility often led students to look for employment abroad, often in their placement host country, after graduation (discussed further in chapter 7). By retaining these students within Europe to complete their placements, this mobility may therefore be successful in contributing to the development of a ‘European labour market’ and wider processes of Europeanisation previously discussed in chapter 2. It is important to note, however, that it was not only the Erasmus grant, which encouraged students to complete their placement within Europe, as interviewees also mentioned factors such as safety, short distance to home and the quality of placements as drivers for doing their placement in a European host country.

5.6 Personal and biographical factors

A range of personal factors can encourage students to become mobile during their studies, but these factors are difficult to generalise about (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Findlay et al, 2006). Many students in this study discussed personal drivers to their mobility, and it also became clear that students' biographies and previous mobility experiences played an important role in encouraging their mobility.

5.6.1 Personal drivers

Personal drivers were difficult to evaluate as they were often related to individual life situations that had, in part, encouraged students to complete a placement abroad. As stated earlier in this chapter, these factors did appear to be of more importance to females in this study than for males as female students were more likely to emphasise personal factors as the most important drivers to their mobility. The following quotes demonstrate just how personal the decision to take part in the Erasmus programme can be:

'I have a twin and it was like the first time we had done something apart, we came to university together and do the same course and when we were applying for jobs it was so competitive and we are so competitive anyway. So I deliberately decided not to tell my sister that I was applying to France. I felt really good about it just going on my own and doing something on my own. It was time we did something on our own... and just to make the break and for people to know me as me not just as a twin, that's what I wanted' (I-2).

'If I'm completely honest I split up with my boyfriend just beforehand and that was the push I needed to go put my name down and say I'm definitely going' (I-24).

The personal drivers to individual students' mobility were therefore often very unique. Other personal reasons for taking part in the programme were noted such as wanting freedom and independence and also the desire to gain personal confidence. One male student commented 'I mean just not having my mum doing my washing and checking up on me, I mean I like that but I wanted to have a bit of freedom for a year and to put myself away from all of that' (I-40) and a female student stated:

‘Well I had never been away from home. This was my second degree and I stayed with my parents for both and I’m 26 now and still at home so I just needed to go and live on my own and look after myself. Just the life experience aspect because I did think I would come back a different person’ (I-24).

Several students noted that they wanted an adventure and to ‘step outside of their comfort zone’. One student stated ‘I just wanted to do something different, see new things, have a bit of an adventure I guess’ (I-40). Similarly, Findlay et al (2010) found the desire to have an adventure encourages the degree mobility of UK students and Waters et al (2011) reported that notions of fun, enjoyment and the pursuit of happiness abroad featured strongly in the reasons why UK students decided to pursue HE abroad.

A personal driver to mobility identified for a number of females in the study was that they took part in the programme because they wanted to travel whilst they were young and before they had any responsibilities. These female students expressed a desire to travel and ‘see the world’ whilst they could as they felt they may not have the chance to do this in the future. One female student noted, ‘I would say you should just do it now before you’ve got kids and responsibilities and a proper job, enjoy it whilst you can, it’s the perfect opportunity to have some fun and get experience before all of that!’ (R-21). Similarly, another female stated ‘I wanted to travel and do something different before I graduated and settled down and everything. You can’t go swanning off when you’re like a proper grown up with kids and stuff so I thought I would take the opportunity to do it now’ (I-2). This issue was not mentioned by any of the males in the study. It appears that a number of the females in this study expected to be restricted in terms of future mobility and therefore took the opportunity to live abroad whilst they were students. This supports the growing body of literature on academic mobility that has argued that, due to prevailing traditional family patterns and gender roles, after the average age of 35 years, females tend to be more restricted in terms of international mobility than males because of family commitments and spatial ties (Ackers, 2000; Jöns, 2011).

5.6.2 The influence of ‘mobility capital’

The personal reasons that encourage student mobility are often linked to biographical factors, including previous experiences of mobility. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) argued, for

example, that a presence of 'mobility capital' encourages students to become mobile; this has been supported by many studies (for example Findlay et al, 2005, 2010; Brooks and Waters, 2009b, 2010). It has also been suggested that previous international experience can play an important role in influencing the mobility of academics (Ackers and Gill, 2008). This research has found evidence to support these arguments as a substantial number of participants had significant amounts of international travel experience and some had lived and studied outside of the UK previously:

'I'm a very international person, I come from a very international background. Like my parents are from Argentina and Sweden and I've grown up across the world in different countries and I really enjoy the international experience' (I-4).

'My parents are journalists so I was born there but I left when I was 2 and went to the US and then to Hong Kong and then London so my parents have always moved because they are journalists so I have lived all over' (I-19).

'I had been fortunate as a child to have moved around quite a bit. My parents were in the oil industry initially in Aberdeen but they have moved to Slovenia, Norway, Indonesia, Texas and Kuwait so I have always had a passion for travel and seeing the world. My mum lives in Milan now and my Dad lives in Holland' (I-30).

These quotes are representative of a significant number of students in this sample who often possessed considerable levels of 'mobility capital'. In addition to travel with family and friends, almost a quarter of students had previously taken part in an international exchange or trip whilst at school and a small number of students had taken gap years abroad before university. When asked whether they thought their previous international experience had affected their decision to take part in an Erasmus placement all of the students felt that it had made taking part in a placement abroad easier or seem less of a challenge. Students also often claimed that their previous experiences of travel had given them confidence in going abroad for a work placement:

'If you haven't been anywhere else you get used to your usual routine but because I have already done it, it just makes a difference' (I-17).

‘I think the fact that I had lived abroad it got rid of a sort of fear that other people had. Like others were really nervous about it and other interns were really nervous to begin with’ (I-30).

Similarly, previous research has identified international experiences, such as the gap year, as prominent influencing factors in the decision to pursue HE abroad (see, for example, Brooks and Waters, 2009b; Findlay et al, 2010).

Students often commented that their previous experiences abroad had taught them how to relate and communicate to people from other cultures. A student who had previously lived abroad commented, ‘It made it less of a big deal, because I can relate to anyone... I have been to so many different schools all over the place so I don’t have a problem moving, so yeah it made it easier to adapt’ (I-19). Previous experience of adapting to new environments, people and ways of life therefore made the students confident that they could successfully spend time working abroad. These findings support the suggestion made by Brooks and Waters (2010) that through activities such as family holidays and travel, students develop a form of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984) where it becomes normal to travel, which can give a person confidence when dealing with new cultures. The findings discussed here explain why students with previous experiences of mobility, and who subsequently possess ‘mobility capital’, are more likely to engage in student mobility (as identified by authors such as Maiworm and Teichler, 2002b and Findlay et al, 2006).

Previous experiences of mobility also influenced the direction of students’ mobility as in some cases they had been attracted to complete their placement in a country, or specific area within a country, which they had previously visited:

‘We had been on holiday to the south of France so many times so I knew the area quite well, so I knew where I was going and where I lived was in a town that I had visited so I knew where I was going to be living... I feel like I have an attachment to France. We have like French friends and so I wanted to go there’ (I-2).

‘I think having been to the south of France every summer for like seven years I loved the area and I knew it well and I couldn’t think of anything better so the area was a huge draw. That was a main reason for going’ (I-30).

‘I had been once before travelling around at the end of the first year and I visited Hamburg whilst I was there and I was totally in awe of the city it was amazing and I thought I really want to come here on my year abroad that was partly why I was drawn to that placement. Having seen the country before and finding somewhere you really like and also knowing the city and what it was like I sort of knew what to expect so that helped’ (I-25).

A small number of the students also described how they had chosen to complete their placement somewhere they had family or friends:

‘I’ve got a lot of family in Holland so that was less scary because I’ve been there every year of my life and I’m used to hearing the language and got lots of friends there and so that was different... I just felt so much more at ease going there because I thought I’m totally used to the customs and I know what it’s like’ (I-28).

‘I had been before and I knew one person there which I guess was a deciding factor really because my friend had been living in England, that’s how I met him, and I said one day I would go live in Paris so that was another deciding factor... It was good to have a friend I knew who lived there, just in case really’ (I-36).

These students stated that having previous experience of the host country, or people they knew located near to their placement destination, had made moving abroad easier and encouraged them to go to their chosen host country. As one student commented ‘it made it all seem less scary’ (I-40). Brooks and Waters (2010) similarly found that friends often provided links to specific countries or institutions that helped minimise mobile students’ fear of the unknown. In support of this, this study has found that friends had influenced a number of students’ decisions in terms of where to work abroad as well as the overall decision to go abroad. Cases were also identified where it was not the students’ own experience, but the experience and opinions of their family and friends that influenced their decision to complete a placement abroad, as well as their destination choice:

‘My older sister spent a year in Spain and six months in France when she was at university and I went to visit her and I just loved Spain and loved the experience she had it just seemed so idyllic and I think even in northern Ireland we are encouraged

to spend some time abroad and I wanted to take a gap year before uni but decided not to so I thought I definitely wanted to go away then' (I-21)

'When my sister was at university she did textiles at Brighton and she went to Italy for a placement and she had a great time and I went to visit her there and it kind of made me think I wanted that as part of my course so I always knew I wanted to do it on my course' (I-37)

'My mum worked abroad when she was younger so she was obviously very supportive of me going abroad because she had done it before' (I-36)

The opinions and experiences of individuals surrounding the students had therefore often influenced their decision to complete a placement abroad and in some cases, had also affected their destination choices. One student, for example, commented 'my dad loves Germany and he always talks about it so I wanted to go and see what it was like' (I-1). This reflects findings by Brooks (2003), who argued that families have a strong influence on young people's conceptualisation of the HE sector and that friends and peers can play an important role in informing students' decisions about what constitutes a 'feasible' choice in relation to HE. In the context of this research, the views and experiences of the students' family and friends had contributed to their decision to work abroad. Students often viewed the option as being more feasible when they personally knew somebody who had already been through a similar experience. As discussed by Brooks and Waters (2010), it is important to note that international contacts are not equally distributed, and those from privileged backgrounds are more likely to have networks of dispersed friends. Previous experiences of mobility are also more likely to have been experienced by privileged students, which, in part, explain the higher levels of student mobility amongst privileged groups. However, in addition to finding evidence to support the suggestion that previous international experience or 'mobility capital' can encourage student mobility, this study has found that an absence of mobility and international experience can also encourage students to take part in a placement abroad. In a small number of cases, students described how they were motivated to complete a work placement abroad due to a lack of mobility capital:

‘I wanted to experience another culture and I had never really been outside of the UK very much before so it’s just nice to get to experience something new for a change’ (I-1)

‘It wasn’t like I had travelled a lot and that’s why really, it’s just that it was a good opportunity to make up for that really so I grabbed it’ (I-8).

Where individuals had not had international travel opportunities they often felt they had missed out and used the Erasmus opportunity to make up for this lack of mobility. Both a presence of, and to a lesser extent a lack of, mobility capital have therefore been found to encourage students’ participation in the Erasmus work placement programme.

5.6.3 Erasmus as an opportunity to go ‘home’

A driver to mobility, which is linked to biographical influences, is that a number of students used the Erasmus programme as an opportunity to return to a country where they had previously lived or where they had strong family ties. Recent literature has made reference to the assumption that many students who study in the UK but are not UK nationals may use the Erasmus programme to return to their home country for a period of time during their studies (Findlay et al, 2010); however, this is a neglected area of research that deserves further attention. Six students in this study (15%) fell under this category as two students had one parent with the nationality of their destination country, one student was of French nationality but had not lived in France and three students returned home to the country they lived in before starting their university career. Similarly, Brooks and Waters (2010) found that in their sample of degree mobile students from the UK, some had one or more parent who had been born overseas and retained strong links to that country and King (2003) also noted that a third of his sample of mobile students had an international family background with at least one parent of non-UK nationality.

Five of the six students had planned or seriously considered going ‘home’ for a year during their degree either to study or to work before they started university. For the students who had lived in their placement destination country prior to university, the decision to return was not necessarily to spend time with family and friends as interestingly only one of the students returned to the area of the country they had previously lived. The other students commented that they only saw their family slightly more often during their

placement year than when they were in the UK. Instead of being an opportunity to live near family and friends, it was instead seen as an opportunity to ‘touch base’ with their home country. All three students who completed their placement in the country in which they lived before their degree in the UK, planned to return, or had already returned, to their home country to work after graduation. These students therefore felt that gaining work experience in that country, instead of the UK, would be more beneficial for their employability. The students had therefore returned ‘home’ in order to gain experience within the labour market that they wanted to work in after graduation.

For the three students who had parents from the host country, the placement was seen as an opportunity to see where their family came from and in two cases, to improve their language skills in order to speak to their family members in the language. One student commented ‘as soon as I knew I could work in France I thought it was great because I am 20 and I have never lived in my country and I wanted to know how it was... well I’m half French actually so learning French was my duty so I can speak to my family in French’ (I-19). These three students saw the Erasmus opportunity as a chance to explore their family roots and gain knowledge of their own nationality. It should, however, be noted that for these three students this was seen as a benefit of completing a placement abroad rather than the main reason for participating. All three stated that if they had not been able to complete a placement in their chosen country they would have completed one elsewhere in Europe and therefore still completed a placement abroad.

5.7 Information availability and encouragement

An important factor to consider when exploring why students decide to take part in an Erasmus work placement is the level and source of information and encouragement provided by the students’ home HEIs. The amount and type of information made available to students prior to their work placement, and the extent to which students are encouraged to participate, has been found to differ greatly. The source of information and encouragement also varies substantially. As the interviewees in this study were recruited from a range of universities and departments, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the information and encouragement provided according to university type or discipline. Differences have, however, been identified based on course type and the

compulsory requirements built into degree courses. Whilst some students were well informed and encouraged to complete an Erasmus work placement, others received no information or encouragement.

5.7.1 Information and encouragement provided by HEIs

Insufficient academic attention has been paid to the role UK HEIs play in encouraging outgoing student mobility for programmes such as Erasmus, but research that has begun to explore this issue has indicated that it is an important area to address. For example, Findlay et al (2006) found that despite the fact that most HEI's make some reference to the desirability of international mobility in their mission and policy statements, only a third of the HEIs who responded to their questionnaire had a specific strategic plan for student mobility, and even fewer had specific numerical targets for mobility. Furthermore, the European Commission's Expert Forum on Mobility commented that promoters of mobility often lack adequate knowledge and incentives to encourage mobility. During interviews for this research, students were asked where and how they received information about Erasmus work placements and whether they were encouraged to take part. The responses revealed significant differences between the information and encouragement provided by HEIs to different groups of students.

All of the language students in this study, who also all had a compulsory period abroad built into their course, received information from their department and Erasmus coordinators regarding Erasmus work placements. These students rarely had to seek out any information as it was provided from the beginning of their degree programme. As a time abroad was compulsory, less encouragement to participate was needed as students had already made the decision to go abroad. For the most part, these students spoke about receiving a great deal of information in order to decide which study abroad option to choose but not being persuaded to choose one option over the other. These students felt greatly supported in the decision to complete a placement abroad and expressed the view that sufficient information was given to them to support their decision:

'Right at the beginning we had all the information given to us, these are your options, this is the sort of thing people have done in the past' (I-28).

‘I could go to any of my lecturers and say I’m worried about this or I don’t think I’m going to be able to get the language quickly’ (I-16).

Students with a compulsory placement within their degree programme were generally given information regarding work placements by placement officers within their departments, or from their university careers service. Some were informed of the option to work abroad; however, in a significant number of cases, students only received information about work placements in the UK and had to seek out additional information when they made the decision to go abroad. The majority of these students did feel the information was there when they looked for it, but for the most part these students did not receive a great deal of encouragement to complete their placement abroad. As one student commented, ‘they just wanted us to get a placement. It’s all about statistics to them. It’s the same as staying in London to them’ (I-30). Many students who had a compulsory placement built into their degree course shared this view. There are exceptions to this as a small number of students with compulsory placements did state that they were encouraged to look abroad for placements and were well informed that this was an option.

Students with a compulsory element to their degree, either to spend time abroad or to complete a placement, often expressed the view that the courses’ compulsory requirements had made the information more readily available. One student with a compulsory time abroad built into their degree course stated, ‘because it’s a compulsory part of the course and every year people go so it’s pretty well structured I don’t know what it would be like if it wasn’t compulsory’ (I-25). Likewise, another student commented ‘really, with language courses, right from the word go your second year is about preparing for the next year, like they’ve already had the meeting for this year’s group who are going away and it’s like week 2!’ (I-28). The situation is, however, often very different for students with no compulsory placement or time abroad built into their degree course. These students often spoke about receiving no information regarding working abroad or the availability of the Erasmus grant. As one student stated, ‘I wouldn’t claim any responsibility to the dept. There was zero Erasmus initiative in the dept. They didn’t know, they were clueless! (I-29). Similar to these findings, the ESN survey (2008) discovered that students were often dissatisfied with the provision of information at their home HEI

(Bauwens et al, 2008). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in some cases this meant students were unaware of the Erasmus programme until they had actually started their placement abroad. These students were often directed to their universities' international/study abroad centre in order to find information about working abroad once they had specifically asked for it. These students therefore had to make the decision to work abroad independently and then seek out the information needed.

The majority of these students claimed that when they tried to get information it was available either from an international centre or careers service. For example, one student commented 'I found that really easy as well because my university has a department in the international unit and they give us all the information we need and the forms and talk us through everything if you need any help so that was good' (I-34). Although students were therefore not always made aware of the option to work abroad, when they did look for information and support it was in most cases available within the university. This supports findings by Vossensteyn et al (2010) who found that although 53% of respondents in their survey stated that more information would have convinced them to participate in Erasmus, only 16% of the students who actually participated claimed they had encountered problems in terms of information availability. It appears, therefore, that when students look for information it is in most cases easily accessible, but the students who do not know about the programme, and therefore do not seek out information, often receive no information at all.

Students studying degrees with no compulsory placement or period abroad often felt that because they were one of the only few students completing a placement abroad, they received less information and encouragement as it was not expected that they would take part in the programme. A student with no compulsory time abroad or placement in their degree programme commented, 'I suppose because it was an unusual thing to go abroad for a placement so they weren't promoting it as much. It's not common in my department' (I-14). Another student similarly noted 'they didn't think anyone would go, because people just don't, so I just don't think they bothered to tell us to be honest' (I-40). As also argued by Fielden et al (2007), it appears that the benefits of student mobility are not always adequately portrayed to students.

Interestingly, in a small, but significant number of cases, students had actually been discouraged from completing a work placement abroad:

‘Well the meeting in the second year actually put me off working abroad. They asked everyone who was interested to put their hands up and there were quite a few then they said “well only about 5% of you will”... they said it was much harder to go abroad and that we wouldn’t get as much out of... They just made it sounds quite hard and scary’ (I-5).

‘They were quite resistant to encourage us to do them, they said it’s on your own back and you have to set them up. I think they have had problems before with them falling through and because it’s an obligatory part of the course that was quite a disaster... Most of the department didn’t want to be involved’ (I-22).

These students had been discouraged to take part in an Erasmus work placement with the suggestion that the placement would be harder and more likely to be a challenge. This suggests that departments may not always be comfortable with encouraging students to take part in such a programme, as they do not feel sufficiently equipped to support such an activity. Particularly when a period abroad or a placement is compulsory, there appears to be a fear that if the work placement fails, their degree would subsequently suffer. This discouragement was in most cases identified by non-language students suggesting that language departments are more likely to acknowledge the benefits of such an activity and be more equipped to support students who take part. Steinberg (2002) similarly identified that college faculty and staff in the US were often uneasy about experiential components of study abroad such as internships.

5.7.2 ‘Mobility champions’

‘Mobility champions’ are individual members of staff within HEIs who champion student mobility and encourage students to participate in mobility programmes (Aida, 1994). Students in this study often spoke about a member of staff who encouraged them to participate by ‘championing’ mobility as a positive activity to undertake. For example, one student commented, ‘my language teacher she was very good because she had experience with different students that went abroad so she had a lot of information and really helped me’ (I-9). Similarly another student stated ‘they were very encouraging; one lecturer

particularly was really keen to get people out there' (I-24) and another noted 'I hadn't really thought about it until (lecturers name) mentioned it to me. He said I should really think about it because it would be so good for me and was really helpful with it all, I remember how pleased he was when I said I was going to go' (I-40).

Individuals were therefore present within HEIs who played a major role in encouraging students to take part in the programme. There were also cases identified where lecturers had individually approached students, who they thought would benefit from the experience, and also where they had helped students find placements through their own connections. One student who was approached in such a way stated, 'my lecturer rang me over the summer and told me there was an opportunity available that he had found and within a month I was gone' (I-6). This supports the argument made by Kontio (2008) that creating a positive attitude amongst personnel within HEIs is essential for encouraging students to participate in international activities. It also became clear that it was not only HEI staff that acted as 'mobility champions' but also previous Erasmus students. Many students reported that they had received information from previous Erasmus students, which had influenced their decision to complete a placement abroad and also eased the worries and concerns of students prior to their placement:

'That's how I found out about it from a girl who did it and she said don't worry it's out there go and find out about it because it's really helpful so definitely yes talking to different students who went helps a lot' (I-9).

'I think before you don't really know what to expect and having someone say well this is what happened to me then at least you go with some idea about what might happen' (I-25).

As these quotes show, students found receiving information and advice from students who had also taken part in the programme very helpful. For language students, with a compulsory period abroad, 'champions' had also often encouraged them to work rather than study abroad. For example, one student stated, 'at first I was set on studying abroad but then I spoke to a girl who had a brilliant time doing a placement and she said it was better for your languages and you integrate better if you work and then she said she got

paid so I thought that was really good' (I-25). Previous Erasmus students therefore influenced the type of mobility students participated in.

The process of receiving information from previous students was in some cases organised and facilitated by academic departments. This had, however, only occurred with language students in this study. Students claimed these meetings and information sharing sessions had been very beneficial, with one student commenting, 'they organised the day when the previous year who had come back from placement presented to us what they had been doing and that really set our imaginations off and worked well' (I-18) and another stating, 'they brought someone in who had done all the different options so someone who did the language assistantship, someone who studied and someone who worked to come talk to us, I thought was good' (I-31). Furthermore, language departments also often held seminars or lectures prior to the placement to help students prepare for their time abroad. A language student described such events as very positive, commenting, 'they used to give us lectures, they did one lecture on how to stay safe in Germany... it was good just like little things like emergency numbers or doctors how they work in Germany all that kind of stuff' (I-16). Students reflected very positively about such activities, suggesting this could be a beneficial area to develop in other departments to support students prior to their period abroad.

'Mobility champions' therefore played a key role in encouraging students to take part in the Erasmus work placement programme and also helped students to prepare for their placement. In a small number of cases, previous placement students also helped once the students had arrived in the host country. This occurred when there was an overlap between the previous placement student finishing and the new student taking over. A hand over period was in some cases organised by the company. One of the few students who experienced a hand over period stated, 'the interns from last year met me and my flatmate and gave us a lot of tips and advice. They were all very helpful and open. They helped us, the new interns, a lot, and the move was made much easier with their help' (I-16). This 'hand over period' appeared to be very beneficial for students; however, this was unfortunately rare amongst the interviewees.

The role HEIs play in driving student mobility has been neglected in the existing student mobility literature, and, in particular, the issue of information availability has been somewhat overlooked. This research has revealed some important differences between the ways in which students are encouraged, and in some cases discouraged, to participate in mobility programmes and between the type of information made available to them prior to their placement. The main finding points to a lack of standardisation across institutions and departments within institutions. With the exception of language students, it was common for Erasmus work placement students to have to seek out information themselves as no direct information or encouragement was given. Although the majority of students found the information they needed when they searched for it, this suggests that most non-language students are not being made aware of the Erasmus work placement programme unless they have the initiative to seek out information. This was supported by numerous comments made by students that their friends were surprised, and in some cases jealous, when they found out about the Erasmus work placement grant. When students were asked how their university could improve in terms of Erasmus support, most responded that promotion and awareness should be increased as they felt only a small proportion of students were actually aware of the option to work abroad. These findings support the suggestion made by the ESN that students were not satisfied with the provision of information at their home and host university (Bauwens et al, 2008).

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students. Employability, failure to secure a work placement in the UK, language, financial factors and a range of personal/biographical factors have been found to encourage this form of mobility, and it became clear that these are often interlinked and rarely act in isolation. UK HEIs also play an important role in encouraging, and in some cases discouraging, work placement mobility.

The findings discussed in this chapter make several contributions to existing knowledge surrounding the drivers to student mobility. Firstly, the drivers to work placement mobility differ to study abroad when compared to the existing literature. In terms of study abroad, it has been argued that employability is a less important driver than factors such as

language learning and gaining life experience (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al, 2006; Vossensteyn et al, 2010). In contrast to these findings, this research has found that in terms of work placement mobility, employability is often the main driver to mobility, particularly in the case of male students. Brookes and Becket (2011) and Findlay et al (2006) identified a preference amongst UK students for work placements abroad as opposed to study abroad. This research has revealed the reasons why UK students prefer working abroad options as they see the placement as a chance to increase their employability. In the case of language students, it has also been found that they prefer work abroad options because they are viewed as an opportunity to become immersed in the host language and culture which they do not always expect to get from a period of study abroad. Non-language students, however, often cherished the opportunity to speak English during their work placement abroad and thus to circumvent the language barrier.

Secondly, important gender differences in the drivers to mobility have been identified. Male students in this study tend to emphasise employability as the main driver to their mobility, whereas females emphasise language/cultural and personal drivers. These gender differences were present irrespective of previous language skills and degree programme studied.

Thirdly, this research has found that Erasmus work placements are overcoming the language and financial barriers associated with study abroad and subsequently have the potential to widen participation to 'non-traditional' Erasmus students (non-language students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds). Language and finance are widely considered to be the main barriers to student mobility from the UK (Findlay et al, 2006); however, evidence from this research suggests that the work placement option has overcome these barriers for a significant number of students. The Erasmus work placement programme therefore has great potential to assist the European Commission in its goal to widen participation in the Erasmus programme.

Fourthly, this research has revealed the individual and personal reasons as to why students chose to take part in the Erasmus programme. Existing literature, particularly focusing on Erasmus mobility, has tended to take a quantitative approach to assessing the drivers to mobility. In contrast, the qualitative approach adopted in this research has revealed the

complex and often very personal reasons why students take part in international student mobility, thus making a valuable contribution to the existing literature. This research has also found evidence to support Brooks and Waters's (2009a) suggestion that perceived failure in the UK encourages the outgoing mobility of UK students. This may have been exacerbated in recent years by a decrease in availability of student placements in the UK due to the economic recession.

Finally, this study has revealed the inconsistent nature of information availability and encouragement provided to students by their HEI prior to their Erasmus placement. In some cases, students are well informed and encouraged, while others receive no information and are unaware of the Erasmus grant until they begin their placement. This is to some extent due to degree course requirements; however, improvements are needed in this area to ensure all students are made aware of the Erasmus work placement action.

Chapter 6: The Erasmus work placement experience

6.1 Introduction

As highlighted in chapter 2, the lived experiences of mobile students have been identified as a substantial gap in existing student mobility literature (Engle and Engle, 2003; Figlewicz and Williams, 2005; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009). In particular, the experiences of outgoing mobile students from the UK have been unclear (Brooks and Waters, 2011a), although research in this area has begun to increase in recent years. The experiences of mobile work placement students have been especially neglected and the Erasmus work placement programme is yet to receive any form of assessment in terms of the student experience. Researching the lives of mobile students is complex as studying or working abroad can be a very individual and personal experience. Killick (ND), for example, noted that there are significant differences in the learning experience across students who live together and attend the same course at the same university. The experience of mobility can therefore be very difficult to generalise about.

This chapter discusses the Erasmus work placement experience in three main parts. The first part outlines organisational aspects such as how students searched for and secured their jobs and living arrangements, and the numerous factors that influenced these choices. The second part examines students' activities and interactions during their work placement abroad, including their workplace experience, the social groups students became involved with, the levels of interactions with locals and activities undertaken by students, such as travelling within Europe. As a number of students in this study had also studied abroad, this section concludes by comparing work placement with study abroad experiences. The third part of this chapter highlights frequent challenges and problems faced by the students and the support provided by students' home HEIs. How students coped financially during their time abroad is also discussed here.

6.2 Organisation

The first part of this chapter discusses the organisation of Erasmus work placements from the students' perspective. How students found and chose their work placements and

accommodation is explored as well as the varying levels of support students received whilst organising these elements of the experience.

6.2.1 The work placements

The students in this study completed very different placements in a range of companies in numerous host countries. This section discusses how students searched for and secured these placements and assesses the jobs undertaken by the 40 interviewees. The numerous factors that influenced the students' choices of placement are also discussed, including company size and reputation, industry specific influences and the business language used.

6.2.1.1 Finding a placement

The students in this study approached the process of searching for and securing a work placement in three main ways, which was greatly dependent on the level of support given to them by their HEI. The three approaches (in order of frequency) were:

- Found job with some level of assistance from university department
- Independently found placement
- Job found by university department on behalf of students (little or no input from the student required)

The relationship between the level of support provided and the discipline studied by students in different institutions is difficult to assess due to the variety of disciplines and institutions included in this study. Differences in terms of support in finding a placement have, however, been identified according to course type and compulsory requirements of the degree course. This is again difficult to generalise about as in some cases students within the same department, studying the same course reported very different perceptions about the level of support they received at this stage. One student also reported that they received a great deal of support finding their six month placement in France by the French placement tutor but when looking for their six month placement in Italy received no support. The varying levels of support provided will now be discussed; however, this complexity must be kept in mind.

A number of students received support not only in terms of finding a placement but also during the application and interview process. These tended to be students who had a

compulsory period abroad or a placement included in their course. Students were often sent email alerts informing them of available placements by their department and areas in the department were also allocated to the advertisement of placements both in the UK and abroad. Students often reported to have received support in the job application procedure and assistance creating a CV and filling in relevant forms. One student commented, 'they were very helpful. I got the contact from them, without them I would never have known they had a free position' (I-15) and another noted, 'they were brilliant, they got in touch with them and made sure they were reputable, they gave us support in writing our CV's and how to go about applying, they gave us references so we could apply properly and they supported us a lot' (I-39). For these students the support was extremely beneficial, making the process of finding and applying for a job easier.

Where university departments had advertised placements within companies they had links to, this had, however, created problems for a number of students. Students often felt this approach had led to a great deal of competition for the limited amount of placements found by the department with course mates having to compete with each other for jobs. One interviewee commented, 'I think they had less jobs than students wanting them so there was definitely competition between us lot' (I-7). Similarly another student noted, 'because the university has a limited amount of contacts there was some competition for places... especially those that paid more, that was a big factor actually, people wanted the ones that paid' (I-3). Some companies recruit placement students exclusively from one UK university or department each year which led to increased competition, as one student stated, 'you're fully aware everyone applied for the same ones especially with the university ones and its direct competition because some companies were only taking applicants from this university' (I-25).

Students often found the experience of competing for placements with course mates difficult and subsequently avoided applying for the placements linked to their department to avoid this competition. A number of students commented that there were not a sufficient number of suitable placements available for the number of students on their course also looking for a placement, 'they gave us companies to apply to but there weren't enough for everyone who wanted to do it' (I-21). In a number of cases, students therefore looked outside of the placements linked to their department in order to gain access to a

wider selection of placements. For example, one student commented, 'I looked outside of the Aston links because I hoped there would be less competition outside of the uni. And I thought it would be easier if I wasn't competing with people I didn't actually know and who aren't your friends because that was tough' (I-7). Competition for placements was more evident amongst students studying courses with a compulsory placement or compulsory time abroad included as there was increased pressure to find a job in a relatively short time frame and a large number of students were looking for similar placements at the same time.

Interestingly, a number of students who had support available to them from their department turned down the help provided. This was not always due to competition amongst course mates, as students often wanted the experience of finding their placement independently as they felt this would be a positive learning experience. In other instances, students turned down departmental support and contacts in favour of finding their own placement as they did not think the placements offered or advertised by their department were suitable or offered a high enough salary. One student, for example, commented, 'the uni didn't find many placements in our area of interest for our course at all they are more linked to mechanical engineering placements actually' (I-14) and another stated, 'they have all sorts of placements that they carry on each year but the ones in Spain are really badly paid and I was lucky enough to find one myself that was much better paid' (R-12). The links and support provided were therefore not always deemed sufficient and students subsequently looked for placements independently.

Other students had little or no support provided in terms of finding a suitable work placement and therefore had no choice but to find their placements independently. These tended to be non-language students with no compulsory placement built into their degree course. The Internet was used by a large number of students to find their placements independently. Some students used job advertising websites to find and apply for their placements as one student commented, 'you just went on a website and filled in a basic form online why you wanted to work abroad, what you could offer that sort of thing. It was quite straightforward' (I-10). Other students used the Internet to search for suitable companies, which they then contacted directly to ask about a possible placement vacancy. One student reported, 'I just Googled advertising agencies in Paris and emailed my CV

basically' (I-36) and another stated, 'my tactic was to get in touch with as many translation companies in the Netherlands as possible and ask them if they wanted a trainee' (R-27).

A small number of the students found their placements independently through the use of existing contacts. One student, for example, completed a placement within the same company they had worked for during school (I-28). This student claimed they would not have secured the job without their previous experience and contacts at the company. Similarly, a student (I-38) found a coaching placement with an ice skating team through networks they had built up since childhood through skating themselves. This placement again was not officially advertised but was created specifically for the student by a contact. Another student (I-11) went to work in their family business for a year under the Erasmus programme. This student did look for other placements but due to lack of availability they opted to work in the family business instead. Students therefore often utilised their existing contacts and networks in order to find a placement abroad. This suggests that students who have personal or family links with businesses and industry contacts may be more successful in the search for work placements abroad. This may lead to inequalities in the type of students who manage to secure a placement abroad with those with few contacts potentially being excluded due to difficulties finding placements.

Despite the lack of support provided to a significant number of students in this study, only a small number of interviewees who were required to find their placement independently said they were disappointed with the support they were given at this stage. The majority of students instead spoke positively about having to find their placement independently, viewing the process as a challenge and a learning experience that they subsequently benefitted from.

The least common way students found their placements was for their department to find the job for them or to be put forward to a company for certain roles by their department. One student stated, 'my university they actually provide the jobs for us... Basically we had to send our CV's in Spanish and French and then we applied for companies the uni has links with through them' (I-27). This means that students have little input into the choice of placement they complete as one student commented, 'we didn't know about the placement until we actually got there that was all sorted for us' (I-24). This often made the

process of finding a placement easier for students; however, as will be discussed further later in this chapter, a small number of students in this study were assigned placements that they did not enjoy or find beneficial. For some students this situation also created a great deal of stress. One student described this process as being like 'student Tetris' which they found difficult as they were waiting for the university to decide which placement they would be given (I-33).

As described in chapter 3, one method of recruiting interviewees utilised in this study was on-the-spot recruitment at study abroad events where Erasmus students gathered to share their experiences of their year abroad. During these events a significant number of students approached the researcher to say that they had wanted to complete an Erasmus work placement but they could not find a suitable placement and subsequently opted to study abroad instead. This supports the findings of Ellis and Moon (1999) who suggested that a barrier to participation in work placements is that demand for placements often outstrips supply. These students often spoke about their regret that they had to study abroad as their first choice would have been to work. This was particularly prevalent in the event attended within a department that had a compulsory placement in the UK or abroad for all students registered. Many students claimed that competition amongst course mates had led them to give up on the placement option. This suggests that a lack of available placements, and support in finding placements, may be limiting the potential number of participants in the Erasmus work placement programme. This supports the suggestion made by authors such as Fielden et al (2007) and Bauwens et al (2008) that a lack of support provided by HEIs can create a barrier to student mobility.

As this section has discussed, students in this study found their work placements in a variety of ways that was often determined by the level and type of support provided by their department. Figure 17 summarises examples of good practice discovered in this study in the process of supporting students finding a placement.

Figure 17: Examples of good practice in supporting students finding work placements
(Data source: Own semi-structured interviews)

Examples of good practice	Benefits from students' perspective
Email alerts of suitable work placements sent to students including links and details about how to apply for jobs. Online portals or notice boards including work placement opportunities also used to advertise placements.	<p>Can direct students to jobs they may otherwise not independently find – ‘without them I would never have known they had a free position’ (I-15)</p> <p>This process assures students that the placements emailed to them are accredited by the university.</p> <p>Make students aware of the types of jobs available. It also reduces the time students are required to spend searching for placements.</p> <p>Concentrates students' minds on the task of finding a placement – ‘I kept getting their email alerts, it made me think, ok I need to actually find a job now’ (I-40)</p>
Providing seminars giving students advice how to search for and apply for placement opportunities	<p>Relatively rare but where it did occur students spoke of it as very beneficial. Gives students ideas where to look for and how best to apply for jobs.</p>
Providing support in producing a CV and filling in application forms. One to one or drop in sessions.	<p>Often students had no previous experience in preparing a CV - ‘I had never done a CV before so I needed help and they were great’ (I-39)</p> <p>Often language students were required to prepare a CV or application form in the host language and needed support to ensure this was done correctly to make a good first impression</p>
Support preparing for face-to-face and telephone interviews.	<p>Often this is the students first experience of interviews so support can be essential - ‘It was a telephone interview and I was really nervous, my coordinator had a practice with me which helped a lot’ (I-31)</p>
Making students aware where to go if they need support or advice	<p>This can ensure students know where to go if they need advice which often made students feel supported in the search for a placement</p>

6.2.1.2 Choosing a placement

The students in this study completed a variety of work placements in a range of companies within Europe (see Appendix C for full list of job roles). The majority of students completed their placements within advanced producer services or high tech companies (definitions outlined by Lüthi et al, 2010). Only one student in the sample completed a placement within a university, which is assumed to be because students tend to see the work placement as an opportunity to gain experience outside of the university setting. The companies and job roles selected by the students were chosen for a variety of reasons including company size and reputation, business language of the company and industry specific factors.

One of the most important factors students considered when choosing their placement was the business language used by the host company and the language competences required to fulfil the job role. The vast majority of language students wanted to be immersed into a work environment where they could use the host language (as discussed in chapter 5). These students therefore looked for placements within companies where the host language would be used. For example, one student commented, 'I didn't want to work in an English speaking environment in France because that would kind of defeat the point of it' (I-38). These students were therefore more likely to look for jobs in smaller companies that used the host language.

In contrast to this, students who wanted to avoid using the host language at work, due to their limited linguistic skills, often looked for placements within large, international companies where English would be the business language used. One such student commented, 'I was looking for international or global companies; I wanted to work for a company with English as the business language for my own security. To feel safe and have the back up that if something goes wrong I've always got a way of communication' (I-9). The business language used within host companies and language skills required were often the first consideration for students when selecting a work placement.

Well-recognised, internationally known companies were found to attract a number of work placement students, very much in the same way that prestigious universities attract students from the UK (Brooks and Waters, 2009; Findlay and King, 2010). The reason for

this is that students believe a well-known company will improve their CV and impress future potential employers. One interviewee commented, 'because it was working for Shell as well, most people know Shell so it was a good company to choose' (I-16) and another student stated, 'because I'm doing aeronautical engineering I wanted to work for Airbus because it's a major European manufacturer and so it was going to be the best placement so that was really good' (I-19). For these students, the company reputation attracted them to the placement. In a number of cases, students also chose to do their placement in a large organisation as they believed there would be the opportunity of a permanent job after graduation. For example, one student stated 'because it's so big I thought well if I wanted to go back its massive so there will be opportunities' (I-31).

In contrast to this, a lower number of students specifically chose a small company to complete their placement in and therefore company reputation and recognition were less important factors. The reason for this was because students felt the experience of working in a smaller company would offer them more responsibility and variety:

'Most of the jobs that were advertised I felt they were pushing us towards working for bigger companies but in my mind I wanted a smaller agency because, for example where I worked there were about eight of us so it's just amazing because I got to do a bit of everything and bits of all different jobs... and I know that's not always the case in bigger companies... I thought going to a smaller company would be better because of the whole communication thing and you get more responsibilities in a smaller company I think. People know your name! (I-17).

'In a larger organisation you're not as important so you can be overlooked but in a small company you've got a lot of responsibility and that's what I wanted' (I-36).

The size of the host company did in fact greatly impact on the students' working experiences, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In general, students working in the high tech sector were more likely to have been searching for a specific job role such as an engineering or design role. For these students, the choice of industry was very important. Other students spoke about initially being quite specific about the type of placement they wanted to complete, but they struggled to gain

their desired role. Many students commented that they then 'couldn't afford to be picky' about what they wanted as there were 'too many students and not enough jobs' (I-40). The company size and reputation for these students became less of a concern, as they simply wanted to find a placement.

A small but significant number of students chose a specific placement location due to the connection to, or location of, a particular industry. These students' decisions were therefore discipline or industry specific as they sought out the optimum location within Europe in which to complete their placement:

'In Oslo and Norway they have got a really good national health system so they don't have any restraints in terms of how much money they can spend on a prosthesis. So I was able to work with components and prosthetic limbs that I would never have been able to use in the UK, and that appealed to me a lot' (I-8).

'I wanted to go into a small sector which is research of electronic systems so being able to go abroad there was quite few opportunities for me which weren't in the UK. In Germany it's a more prominent industry' (I-18).

'My decision was based on where synchronised skating was most popular' (I-37).

Other locational factors also played a role in students' choice of placements. Only two students completed their placement in what could be classified as a rural location. I-3 worked at a tourist site in a rural village and I-39 worked in a publisher's office that was based in a village and had two employees. A number of students also completed placements in companies where the offices were located in business parks outside the city. The majority of students, however, completed their placements within, or just outside of cities. In a small number of cases this was a deliberate decision as students believed that working in a city would be better for their future employability. A student who worked in Paris, for example, noted 'It looks so much better on your CV to have Paris than anywhere else in France' (I-36). This view was echoed by a small number of students who felt that gaining experience in a recognisable city, or a city that is important in their particular industry, would be beneficial for their employability. Other students simply wanted the experience of living in a city. For example, one student commented, 'I just looked in the big

cities of Germany. I wanted the experience of a big city. It's something I do really enjoy anyway, like the fast paced life' (I-7) and another stated, 'I wanted to be in the thick of it all, I had always lived in a small village so I thought it was my opportunity to see whether I could be a city boy, and I did love it' (I-40).

Locational factors, such as weather and amenities, also played a role in attracting students to complete their placements in certain destinations. For example, one student stated 'I knew it would be warm, near Barcelona, near Skiing and so it was the best location' (I-19). Similarly, another student commented, 'I could sunbath in the sunshine, It's near Marbella with all the glitz and glamour and it just really attracted me' (I-21). Another interviewee who completed a placement in the South of France stated 'I knew the weather would be amazing and I saw it online and it had the wow factor' (I-29). This student also noted 'It was almost purely location really why I went at all, I think it was the weather which I know sounds terrible. I knew I could ski in the winter and go to the beach in the summer' (I-29).

Although a number of students were therefore attracted to a certain location, for the vast majority of students in this sample the job role was more important than the location. As one student commented, 'it didn't matter where the job was to me, it was about the job and how it could benefit me' (I-12). Similarly another student stated 'it was about the type of job not where it was' (I-14) and an interviewee noted 'I didn't mind where the offices were' (I-22). One of the students who completed their placement in a rural area commented 'I didn't choose a country or area. I just applied for any job that might have me and the ones that said yes I went there' (I-39). The choice of location within the host country was therefore not a major consideration for the majority of students, as they simply wanted to find a suitable and available placement. The process of searching for, securing, and selecting a work placement was therefore approached in many different ways by the students in this study.

6.2.2 Student accommodation and living arrangements

Another important consideration in the organisation of Erasmus work placements is accommodation. Accommodation was found to be an important aspect of the student experience that often greatly affected the enjoyment of the placement period overall. This supports Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) suggestion that choosing a place to live represents one

of the main forms of taking root and is therefore an important part of the student mobility experience. As discussed by Dervin (2007), Erasmus study abroad students have an unusual position in host countries because accommodation is regularly provided in specially designated areas of campuses and living areas. This is, however, not the case for Erasmus work placement students, as they are most often not entitled to a place in university accommodation. How students found their accommodation and the living arrangements of students during their stay abroad are explored here, giving attention to differences in the types of accommodation chosen by different groups of students.

6.2.2.1 Finding accommodation

The process of finding accommodation was often found to be problematic. None of the interviewees received help from their home HEI to find accommodation and only a small number of students received help from their host company. The majority of students were therefore required to find their accommodation independently. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) similarly found that students who were working abroad were less likely to receive support in finding accommodation than Erasmus study students and language assistants.

Students who found their accommodation independently used a variety of methods and sources including websites advertising available accommodation, social networking sites such as Facebook, advertising boards within the host company and the use of existing contacts. These students regularly faced a number of problems, often due to the fact that they were not located in the host country at the time of attempting to find accommodation. A student who completed their placement in Germany commented, 'I tried to sort it before I went over on websites and things but generally they won't talk to you unless you go to meet them before' (I-7). Similarly another student stated 'I contacted loads of people and they said come and visit and I couldn't just pop over for that, so that was really difficult' (I-9). Students were therefore unable to meet with people who were offering accommodation and there was a reluctance to guarantee a place to the students without meeting them first. As one student commented 'I applied and they were like "yeah come round and see the flat next week". And I was like, I can't, I need to move straight in. So that was quite difficult' (I-23). Due to these problems, a small number of students decided to find temporary accommodation for when they first arrived in the host country, such as a hotel or hostel, and then look for more long-term options in person. One student

commented, for example, 'It was obviously more difficult because I wasn't in the country so I couldn't really view any houses. It got to the point where I had booked a hotel for when I first got there so I could look for somewhere to live then' (I-34).

Students often reported to have faced great competition whilst searching for somewhere to live due to a high demand for student accommodation. This was particularly common amongst students who wanted to live in shared accommodation with locals. This experience was negative for many students who often found it impossible to find space in shared accommodation. A student who searched for accommodation with locals commented, 'It's so competitive to get accommodation in Brussels. I started looking really early and did look for a while because I knew it would benefit me a lot to live with locals but it was almost impossible... so I just ended up on my own' (I-20). Another student noted, 'It's very competitive in Heidelberg to find a room you have to go for interviews with people you have to be good enough to live with and it's a totally different culture of student accommodation than in the UK so that was difficult' (I-9).

As a result of the challenges discussed here, a number of students, particularly females, expressed that they had wanted to live with people from the host society but failed to do so. These students then had to explore other options with the majority then going on to live with other English people or live alone. As one student who tried to find accommodation with French people and failed commented, 'English people were just easier to find' (I-19). This failure was often a great disappointment to students:

'When I first found out I was moving over I wanted to live with German people because I thought that would help me improve my German... but it didn't work out like that. It worked out too difficult to find a German house with German flat mates' (I-16).

'I tried to find a flat share with French people, that was my first choice because I thought that would be the best way to immerse myself in French culture and everything but I didn't manage to find anywhere and I ended up in like a student residence... There wasn't much of an atmosphere in there' (I-38).

Less than a quarter of interviewees received help from their host company in organising their accommodation. Some host companies offered pre-arranged accommodation with the placement, sometimes as part of the salary, but this was in all cases either living alone or with other English students. Students, particularly females, who were offered such accommodation were often disappointed with this arrangement claiming they would have preferred to live with locals. For example, one student commented, 'I would rather live with people but that was just the deal and rather than pay for a flat I would just go for it... but I think I would have rather lived with German people' (I-33). In contrast to this, other students, particularly those with no language skills, were happy with the arrangements made by companies that kept English interns together. For example, one student stated 'It was sorted through the company so they keep you all together... my biggest concern was like will I have any friends there especially because I can't speak the language so you've always got them then there's not really a concern anymore' (I-35). For these students, the accommodation offered was a benefit as it ensured they would have English friends.

In a small number of cases, the company provided interns with a room in a hotel for a short period of time at the beginning of their placement so they could arrange accommodation once they were in the host country. Although this allowed the students to search for a place to live in person, this arrangement did however encourage students to live with other English interns they lived with in the hotel. This reflects the findings of Kristensen (2004), Dervin (2007) and Collins (2008) who identified that the organisation of student exchanges can often encourage students to 'hide' in a group of international students. Due to the limited time to find accommodation, these students often felt pushed or encouraged to live with English people even if it was not their original plan. As one student commented, 'there's limited time and pressure to find somewhere you don't have time to sort it out really. Ideally I would have lived with someone French but the way it was set up kind of forced me to live with English people which is a bad flaw' (I-10) and another student noted, 'when I went out I thought it would be great to live with a French person but when you get there and you live in a hotel for a month with British people and its sort of like being in university halls you have a great time, so I lived with them' (I-30). The students in this study therefore found their accommodation in numerous different ways and subsequently organised different types of living arrangements.

6.2.2.2 Living arrangements

The students in this sample lived in one of four types of living arrangement (figure 18).

Figure 18: Living arrangements of interviewees (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Living arrangement	Total n	Total %
With other English people	13	33
With locals	12	30
Alone	9	23
International environment with a variety of nationalities	6	15
Total	40	100

These four different types of accommodation were also identified by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) as being the main options available to mobile students in Paris and Dublin. Unfortunately not all of the reports analysed stated the living arrangements of the students therefore could not be included. As shown in figure 18, living with English people or with locals from the host society were the most popular options of the students interviewed. This did however vary according to whether students were language students or non-language students (figure 19).

Figure 19: Living arrangement of interviewees by course type (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Degree type	Language students		Non-language students	
Living arrangement	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
English	3	15	10	50
Locals	9	45	3	15
Alone	5	25	4	20
International	3	15	3	15
Total	20	100	20	100

Language students were more likely to live with people from the host society than non-language students, who were most likely to live with other English students. This difference would perhaps be expected, as those with language skills would be more comfortable living with people using the host language.

The popularity of each accommodation option also varied greatly between males and females (figure 20). 48% of Females chose to live with local people whereas only 11% of males chose this option. 42% of males chose to live with English people whereas only 24% of females chose this option. As discussed in chapter 5, females were more likely to complete a placement abroad due to language and cultural drivers than males, who were more likely to be driven by employability reasons. This is reflected in their living arrangements, as females were more likely to immerse themselves in the language and culture in their home environment than males.

Figure 20: Living arrangements of interviewees by gender (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Living arrangement	Female		Male	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
English	5	24	8	42
Locals	10	48	2	11
Alone	4	19	5	26
International	2	10	4	21
Total	21	100	19	100

This difference between males and females would perhaps be expected as females in the sample were more likely to be studying languages than males and, as shown in figure 19, language students were much more likely to live with locals than non-language students. However, this gender difference is still apparent when only students who were studying some element of languages are taken into account. One fifth of male language students chose to live with locals whereas over a half of female language students chose this option. Male language students were more likely to choose to live alone or within an international environment. Interestingly, this gender difference is also prominent amongst non-language

students. A third of the female non-language students chose to live with locals and less than one tenth of male non-language students chose this option. Almost four fifths of male non-language students chose to live with either English people or alone whereas only around half of females chose these options. In terms of gender, females are therefore much more likely to live with local people than males irrespective of language skills.

When asked whether they were happy with their choice of living arrangements a large number of students claimed they had wanted to live with locals but due to problems finding accommodation this was not possible. Again, there was a gender difference identified in terms of whether students were happy with their living arrangements. A large number of females, particularly language students, who did not live with locals said they would have preferred to find accommodation with locals but could not find this ideal living arrangement or their accommodation had been organised for them by the host company. Far fewer males who did not live with locals expressed a desire to live in this arrangement and the majority had been happy with their living arrangement.

This section has explored the accommodation choices of Erasmus work placement students including numerous problems faced by students when searching for accommodation. In a significant number of cases, students did not find their ideal living arrangement and therefore had to settle for other options. For some students this meant not living with locals, which was disappointing. As will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter, students' living arrangements often greatly impacted on their social lives, interactions in the host society, language learning and overall experience and are, therefore, an important factor to consider.

6.3 Activities and interactions

The second part of this chapter discusses the working experiences of students, the activities students engaged in and the interactions and social groups students were involved with whilst abroad. Differences between the study abroad experience and work placement abroad experience are also outlined.

6.3.1 The working experience

The lived experience of students completing work placements abroad has been neglected in existing research. We know very little about how students experience day-to-day life in an international working context. The students in this study had very different experiences in terms of their working life, with the majority of interviewees and reports reflecting positively on this aspect of the experience. One student, for example, stated 'it sounds sad but for me I looked forward to the Monday to Friday... the weekdays were the highlight' (I-8). A number of other students spoke very positively about their placements. One student described their job as 'being every boy's dream job' and 'an incredible experience from a professional and linguistic point of view' (R-20) and another stated 'the opportunity to do what I was doing was amazing; it was pretty much a dream. To be able to do that in the future I probably won't get the chance but it was amazing to be able to do it for a year' (I-20). Students were therefore often very happy with the working experience. Many students also commented on the relaxed atmosphere of the working environment they were exposed to:

'Like the working culture was way better, it was just amazing, it was so easy. You would go in at half 9, have breakfast, have a long lunch and go home at 5. The office had a reputation for being lax and that was purely for being in France. That fitted with me, I liked the chilled out relaxed vibe' (I-29).

'It's so funny a lot of people I talk to now I'm back about their placements in the UK they say oh I was in the office until 9pm and I'm like well as soon as it got to 6pm I was out of the door! It was very laid back as long as I got the work done' (I-21).

In contrast to these positive working experiences, a small number of students commented that they found the hours they were often required to work difficult as they struggled to adjust to working life. For example one student commented, 'I would start work at 7am and finish at 6ish so it was a long day' (I-4) and another stated 'I was literally exhausted, the days were longer than I expected' (I-40). However, the majority of students enjoyed the structure of the placement and having set working hours that were in most cases flexible. In many cases, students spoke about enjoying their weekends more than whilst studying at university as they had no outstanding work outside of office hours. As one

student commented, 'with work you leave at the end of the day and you can forget about it until the morning but at uni it's like 24/7 sort of thing, it's always there. It's just a different lifestyle' (I-36).

A small but significant number of students stated that they had not been entirely happy with their job role during their placement with the quality or quantity of the work sometimes being an issue. One student, for example, stated, 'the work placement wasn't actually as helpful as I thought it was going to be' (I-22) and another stated, 'I found a constant battle for me was trying to get enough to do at work... that was a main issue because I was so bored for a lot of the time which was unfortunate' (I-31). This student felt they were not given enough work to do and the work they were given was relatively mundane. Others claimed that the work they were given was not challenging enough, as one interviewee noted, 'to be honest I found some of the work a bit easy. Like some of the tasks I was doing I didn't find very challenging or very relevant which wasn't very useful' (I-34). These students frequently claimed that the label they carried of being an intern often meant the work they were given was not seen as important and was therefore not as challenging as they would have liked.

The size of the host company affected the working experience of students in a number of ways. Students who worked in small companies often claimed that this was positive for their working experience as they were given a great deal of responsibility and a variety of job roles due to the size of the company:

'There were only two of us including myself in the Paris branch! This meant I got to do a bit of everything including a lot of daunting telephone work. This was definitely my favourite part of the experience: as there were so few people, I got to know the job inside out. It also meant that I became really close to my colleague' (R-24).

'I did all of the artwork for all of the projects. I had quite a lot of responsibility being the only one. It was great experience in that respect' (I-36).

In contrast to this, other students who worked in small companies found this to be a negative aspect of their experience. One student who worked in a small publishing

company in Spain stated 'It was horrible. It was just me and the boss. It was ok to begin with but it was just me and her. It wasn't even a proper office it was literally just a room and there was no heating so it was freezing in the winter so I had to go and work in the library and work on my own' (I-39). Working in small companies therefore had advantages and disadvantages.

This was also found to be the case with placements in large companies. Students who worked in large companies often struggled with a lack of responsibility due to the size of the company. One student commented, 'one of the problems is that as a 'stagiaire' in France, you aren't treated as an employee and you have to prove yourself to be offered any responsibility' (R-26) and similarly another stated, 'because the company is so huge you are just nobody, you can't do important jobs because there are so many people who are better qualified than you around so I ended up with pretty crappy jobs sometimes' (I-40). The position or 'label' of being a placement student therefore often frustrated students as they felt they were not given appropriate work. In contrast to this, other students who worked in large companies enjoyed being part of a large organisation and claimed they got to see various elements of the business and a variety of roles due to the size of the company. The size of the host company therefore impacted positively and negatively on the students' working experiences.

Students in this study also faced issues specific to certain placements. Two students who completed their placements as machine operators within the same manufacturing company in Turkey faced major difficulties. These students had their placements organised by a lecturer at their university and therefore had little input into the jobs they were given. These students both claimed that the placement was inappropriate, as neither had wanted a placement involving manual labour. Both students described the placement as a 'disaster'. One of the students commented 'we didn't really enjoy the first job because it was like labour work' (I-6) and the other students stated 'I was thinking is that we were going to be doing engineering stuff not like manual labour that much so it wasn't really what I wanted' (I-14). These students also mentioned that they were not happy with the health and safety regulations of the host company as one of the students commented, 'I was always arguing with the management there that it wasn't right what we were doing. I mean they didn't even have the right health and safety like goggles and boots, we were

carrying heavy metal parts and everything. Lots of injuries happened' (I-14). This placement had however been checked and authorised by the students' university department as being suitable. A problem faced by one student was that mid-way through their placement, their host company terminated their contract:

'One day, about a month in, the woman who worked there hadn't had her contract renewed so we had to do her work as well. And my course mate was off sick so there was just me in the office and the boss, who was a rather difficult woman. She gave me all the work to do and I couldn't do it, it was too much work, it was three peoples' work and some of the stuff I hadn't learnt about yet, so she was shocked that I didn't know how to do it all and she said you've got a week to learn everything otherwise you're sacked. Which was unreasonable and I didn't manage to learn everything' (I-3).

This student faced great difficulties finding another placement in order to meet the university requirements, as a placement abroad was a compulsory element to their degree course. The student ended up working night shifts in a hotel in order to meet the requirements to pass their placement year. The failure of placements is an important issue as it created a great deal of stress and problems for the student involved and negatively affected their overall experience.

When exploring the working experiences of students whilst abroad, the question of how they coped with language in the workplace is important. Students used the host language to different extents in their working life, which, as outlined previously, was often the biggest influence on students' choice of placements. Those students who attempted to avoid using the language altogether in a working context often claimed they achieved not using the host language at all. One of these students commented 'I think at work the only time I spoke French was in the morning to say hello and how are you but it was all English really and the whole team spoke English' (I-10) another student commented 'literally I could have been working in England, I spoke English all the time' (I-40). Students who did not have language skills saw this as a positive part of their experience as they were able to gain work experience abroad without language being a problem.

This was, however, also the case for a number of language students who chose to work in large, international organisations, and subsequently did not have the opportunity to use the host language at work. One language student commented 'I didn't get to speak that much French in work... I knew it was an English speaking company before I went so I thought oh I will make the effort but it's so easy when everyone else is speaking English to just slip into it' (I-2). Language students who chose to work in English speaking companies therefore often missed out on the opportunity to practice the host language at work. These students found this situation frustrating, stating that 'my boss was saying things like she doesn't speak German and I was like I do! It was difficult because if other people speak English it's like the easy way out for me to speak English. It's just the language people speak but it made me look like I was lazy' (I-5). Language students were therefore often restricted in relation to how much they could use the host language within the work place.

A very small number of students, who did not use the host language at work, spoke about issues they faced with regards to language at work. Some colleagues were not happy when the English interns used English as opposed to the host language. For example, one student stated, 'there were five French women in my team and I think they thought it was lazy that English people had come for that time and weren't speaking French' (I-2). Students were therefore received badly by colleagues because they were not able or willing to use the host language at work. This only occurred in a small number of cases and the majority found their workmates to be supportive in relation to language. One student noted, 'they were happy to explain things to me. I thought it was going to be really strict and well me what to do and then leave but I could ask anyone for help which was nice' (I-16) and another commented, 'I was really lucky to have really friendly colleagues who were super patient and didn't mind explaining stuff to me when it was all going a bit fast' (R-31).

Students who did use the host language in a work setting often found this very challenging at the beginning of their placement period, pointing out that 'at the beginning it was really difficult, I remember being so tired. Trying to learn a new job and where you live and do it in another language was really difficult' (I-5). Another student noted, 'It was terrifying at first, the first three weeks I was nearly crying it was really difficult to switch and suddenly do everything in German' (I-9). These students found the first weeks or months of their placements particularly difficult, often claiming they had struggled to adapt to their new

working environment using the host language. This was very difficult for students; however, they did tend to reflect on this challenge as very rewarding. One student commented, 'afterwards I think well I learnt it so it was good and it was very rewarding' (I-5) and another stated, 'it's true that in the beginning it was difficult, but each day it got a little easier and I'm proud of myself for never giving up' (I-16). Although the experience of working in the host language was often difficult to begin with, students did see the challenge as a positive experience and did reap the benefits in terms of language learning (discussed further in chapter 7).

As shown here, the working experience of students varied greatly depending on a number of factors including company type and size, job role and business language used. The majority of students, despite problems that may have arisen, reflected positively on the overall working experience.

6.3.2 Social groups/interactions with locals

It is often assumed that the experience of studying abroad offers students the chance to experience a new culture and lifestyle through interacting and integrating with locals in the host community. A mounting body of literature has however acknowledged that this may not in fact be the case (for example, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Matthews and Sidhu, 2005; Coleman, 2005: 2010; Dervin, 2007; Collins, 2008; Fincher and Shaw, 2009; Brooks and Waters, 2010; Sigalas, 2010; Meier and Daniels, 2011). Such research has identified that students control how much they choose to engage with the mobility experience, with some students not fully participating in local life, having limited contact with locals and often not using or learning the host language (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). In order to assess whether this was the case with work placement students, interviewees were asked about their social lives and who they interacted with whilst completing their placement. It became clear that students experienced a range of interactions with locals with some feeling completely integrated into a group of locals and others having no interaction with locals. Students were generally involved in one of three types of social groups:

- A group made up exclusively of English students
- A group of locals from the host society
- An international/exchange student group

It is important to note that this was difficult to categorise; however, interestingly it became clear that students tended to spend their time exclusively within one of the three groups identified. Murphy-Lejeune (2002), Coleman (2010) and Meier and Daniels (2011) also identified these three types of social groups as the main types of interactions students become involved in whilst abroad.

Figure 21: Participation of interviewees in social groups (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Social groups	Total n	Total %
Host	18	45
English	14	35
International	8	20
Total	40	100

As shown in figure 21, a large proportion of the students in this study socialised with local people from the host society (45%) or exclusively with other English students (35%). The least common social group was with international/exchange students (20%). These overall percentages however disguise significant differences according to gender, language skills and living arrangements.

Figure 22: Participation of interviewees in social groups by gender (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Social group	Female		Male	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
Host	11	52	7	37
English	5	24	9	47
International	5	24	3	16
Total	21	100	19	100

As demonstrated in figure 22, females were more likely to spend time with locals than males with almost half of the males in this study socialising exclusively with other English

students. This reflects the gender differences in relation to the drivers to mobility discussed in chapter 5. Females were more likely to be driven by the chance to experience a new culture and language and it appears they were subsequently more likely to spend time with people from the host society.

Language skills did not play as great a role in influencing the social interactions of students with locals as one may expect. As shown in figure 23, students studying some aspect of languages were only slightly more likely to spend time with locals than non-language students. Language students were, however, much less likely to socialise with English groups and were more likely to socialise with international or exchange students than non-language students.

Figure 23: Participation of Interviewees in social groups by degree type (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Social group	Language		Non-language	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
Host	10	50	8	40
English	3	15	11	55
International	7	35	1	5
Total	20	100	20	100

The large proportion of non-language students who socialised with locals can be explained by assessing their placement choices. Of the eight students who were not language students but did socialise with locals, six worked in companies that only took on one or two interns from the UK. These students therefore had little access to other English students, which encouraged them to socialise with locals. This finding suggests that where non-language students choose placements in smaller companies that take on few English interns, they are more likely to socialise with locals despite their lack of language skills.

The living arrangements selected by students affected their experiences in many ways, including their social interactions. Sigalas (2009) identified that when studying abroad Erasmus students are often placed together in accommodation or introduced at meetings,

which can increase the chances of students interacting with international rather than host country students. Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2002), Papatsiba (2003) Collins (2008) Fincher and Shaw (2009) have also acknowledged that housing choices have an impact on the social integration of the students. This research has found evidence to support this suggestion as students who lived with English people tended to socialise with English groups and students who lived with locals socialised with locals (figure 24). The living arrangements selected by students therefore had a great impact on their socialisation with locals.

Figure 24: Interviewees' living arrangements by social groups (Data source: own semi-structured interviews)

Living arrangement Social group	Alone		English		Host		International	
	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %	Total n	Total %
Host	5	56	2	15	10	83	1	17
English	1	11	11	85	0	0	2	33
International	3	33	0	0	2	17	3	50
Total	9	100	13	100	12	100	6	100

Students' experiences with the three main social groups identified in this research will now be explored in more detail in order to evaluate fully the contrasting social lives of Erasmus work placement students.

6.3.2.1 Host society

Socialisation with locals from the host society is often seen as a key ingredient to a successful experience of mobility for students. It is through these interactions that students are expected to learn about the host culture, practice using the language and experience 'real' life in the host community. Research that has focused on mobile students, particularly Erasmus students, has, however, found that students often have little interaction with locals for a variety of reasons (Candery et al, 2008; Ehrenreich, 2008; Fincher and Shaw, 2009). Dervin (2007) stated that whilst conducting his research into

visiting Erasmus students in Finland, he had only met very few students who were able to step outside of what he labelled as their 'Erasmus tribes' and find their ways into 'Finnish tribes'. Dervin (2007) argued that a study focusing on the students who do manage to integrate with locals should be envisaged in order to reveal the strategies employed by such students. This research, in contrast to the aforementioned research, has found that a significant number of work placement students were able to integrate into a social group of locals and often socialised exclusively with locals in the host society. This section explores the numerous strategies employed by students in order to achieve this and their experience of this social integration, thus contributing to the gap identified by Dervin (2007). As shown in figures 23, 24 and 25, students in this research who socialised with locals were more likely to be female, language students who lived with locals, but this was not exclusive.

One of the factors that increased the likelihood of students socialising with locals was to live with locals (figure 24). The reason for this is that house/flatmates often acted as 'gatekeepers' giving the students access to other locals through introducing them to their friends and family:

'I think they're kind of like ready made friends... my flatmates introduced me to all their friends and they had a massive social circle so it was mostly just through people from the flat that I met people' (I-23).

'She (flatmate) took me under her wing really and she was like these are my friends I'm going to go do this do you want to come, and she would invite me to everything' (I-28).

Living with locals therefore gave the students access to a network of locals to socialise with whom they were often accepted by due to their already established connection with an insider to the group. Similarly, Krzaklewska and Krunip (2006) found that 'buddies', who are personal mentors provided to students when studying abroad, can act as a direct bridge to the local culture. This was extremely beneficial for students in this study as they were exposed to experiences they otherwise would not have had. One student, who established a friendship with their flatmate who was a local, commented 'by like shadowing her in her life I just had so many more new experiences than I would have had

on my own. I did some amazing things I would never have done otherwise so I was really lucky I found that place, and her' (I-28). In some cases, students who did not live with people from the host society also met one individual who then acted as an access point to a group of locals. For example one student commented, 'I met one girl at work and she invited me to loads of stuff which was really nice. She had a couple of friends that I became friends with through spending time with her' (I-33). It was therefore not only housemates who acted as gatekeepers to other locals, although in most instances this was the case.

Killick (ND) suggested that often individuals can act as 'significant others' who are unique individuals from within or beyond the host culture and can benefit the student mobility experience by teaching students a variety of lessons. Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) argued that often individuals who are close friends play an important role in student experiences whilst studying abroad. These suggestions have been confirmed in this research. Individuals from the host society were found to be especially important as they taught students about the host society from an 'insider's' perspective and gave them access to a social life with locals.

As well as developing friendships, two students in the sample also began romantic relationships with locals whilst working abroad. Waters and Brooks (2010b) also identified cases where students had established long-term relationships with locals whilst abroad which often led individuals to relocate. One of the students in this study had since relocated due to this relationship. These individuals spent time with their partner's families and friends and spoke about this as a very positive aspect of their experience and it allowed them access to socialise with locals and also experience family life in the host country:

'I met a guy at work and I started going to his parents and to visit his friends and things. When I met him I started to have my own friends. I did know quite a lot of Germans towards the end through him' (I-16).

'I met my girlfriend, now my fiancée out there... When I had my relationship it made interacting within the culture a lot easier, I can't explain how but you just met more people and saw much more, I got out a lot more in that way' (I-8).

Relationships with flatmates, partners or other individuals were often essential in allowing students to socialise within a group of locals.

A common strategy employed by the students to meet locals was to join a local club or sports team, which was often very effective. These clubs/teams served as access points to locals who students then frequently became friends with outside of the club setting. As one student noted, 'I had a lot of friends from the German football team I was playing on so I would go out with them a lot too' (I-7). Another student, who joined a youth church to meet local people, commented 'I went there and met friends that way and the church had a system called cells where people met up during the week so I joined one of them and met up with them on a Wednesday. They were all Germans' (I-25). Students also often developed other strategies to meet locals such as volunteering:

'I started volunteering as well to try and meet more Germans and there was another online kind of community called ToyTown and I met people on there. You could just put on there what people wanted so someone who wanted babysitting or gardening or jobs and other people wanted to meet for a coffee to learn English. So I met up with a few people where we would do 50/50 an hour in English and an hour in German. I met quite a lot of people with ToyTown' (I-16).

Students who did manage to spend time in a social group of locals spoke about this as a positive part of their experience as it allowed them to learn about the host culture. As one student noted, 'I could ask them about how things happen in their country and I invited them to mine and I made them English food and then they invited me to theirs and made me German classic food, so it was really nice. It taught me a lot and helped me with my German' (I-5). Similarly, another student commented, 'I got to see the proper French lifestyle, I would go to barbeques with them and like it was just different, trying pastis and stuff like that' (I-3). The benefits of interacting with locals in terms of language were also frequently mentioned:

'When I ended up in a group of only French people so learning like all the slang and stuff it was totally different because his friends were just pure French and they didn't make an effort to speak so I would understand but it helped me because I had to force myself to integrate in a way' (I-17).

Interestingly, students who socialised within a group of locals did not tend to identify their experience as an 'Erasmus experience'. Students often stated they had denied being an Erasmus student when asked, as they had wanted to distance themselves from the 'Erasmus label' (I-13). They felt this label would make them appear to be part of an Erasmus group and a temporary visitor when they actually wanted to be seen as a resident or as a worker:

'People would ask me if I was an Erasmus student and I would say no I'm working so I think that sums it up. When I met some of the other students they would say I'm here on Erasmus and I would say well I'm kind of technically here for Erasmus... I think it's mostly because finding the job and moving there, I set it all up myself and did it on my own, so I felt like Erasmus didn't really have anything to do with it really' (I-13).

'We never talked about us as being Erasmus, it was a bit of a shame thing to us because everyone knows people who go to university don't get anything done so we kind of hid it that we were Erasmus... it's just that the people who go for a semester to a different country obviously they don't do anything, there in a new country and they want to enjoy life but it was different for me. I wanted something different. It's very different (I-15).

Previous research has suggested that mobile students often have little contact with locals, particularly on a social level (for example, Stronkhorst, 2005; Dervin, 2007; Waters, 2007; Sigalas, 2010). This lack of contact has been argued to lessen the cultural and language learning for the students involved. This research, in contrast, has found that work placement students do often become involved or 'immersed' into a social group of locals, which is very beneficial for the students involved in numerous ways. This reveals an important difference between studying and working abroad, with working giving students more opportunities to work, live, meet, interact with and subsequently socialise with locals. This interaction greatly affects the students' overall experience, making the work placement experience very different from study abroad. This confirms findings by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) and Meier and Daniels (2011), who have argued that students who work abroad often have more opportunities to interact with locals.

6.3.2.2 The international/ Erasmus groups

Previous research has identified that the international student community and exchange students often group together whilst studying abroad (Kristensen, 2004; Tsoukalas, 2008; Collins, 2008). Dervin (2007) labelled this form of group a 'peg community' which has been argued to form due to the fact that the students involved share a common experience that brings them together into a 'psychosomatic resonance' with each other creating a social group that is often exclusive in character (Tsoukalas, 2008). Within these groups interactions with locals from the host society are often restricted (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002 and Sigalas, 2010). This form of social group has however been found to be relatively rare in this study as only one fifth of the students socialised within a group of international/exchange students (figure 21).

Within the international/exchange groups identified in this research English was the most commonly used language, despite the fact that the students involved could often speak the host language. A very small number of students commented that within the group they helped each other practice the host language but this was uncommon. Students felt this was an inevitable part of being in an international environment; for example, one student commented 'naturally we all spoke in English because, well, it's the world's second language isn't it' (I-5).

These groups were in some cases formed due to housing arrangements, as one student commented, 'living with the other Erasmus students in the university accommodation, we were all put together on the same floors so it was really easy to make new friends' (R-38). The phenomenon of international students living in close proximity and socialising together has been referred to as 'international ghettos' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). A number of other research studies have also identified that the living arrangements of students whilst studying abroad can have an impact on the social inscription of the students (Papatsiba 2003; Dervin, 2007; Collins, 2008). It has been found in this research that 'international ghettos' or organised housing specifically for international students is much less likely to occur amongst work placement students as few work placement students lived in university halls. Where these international groups did form with work placement students, it therefore tended to be outside of living arrangements. There were often designated spaces or places where international and exchange students meet and

these groups form. For example, one student commented, 'there was one bar that was especially for Erasmus students, there are a lot of Erasmus students there so that's a place to meet up' (I-9). Other students spoke of social networking sites such as Facebook being used by the groups to arrange meetings or event within the international/exchange group.

Previous research has suggested that students within international/exchange student groups have in some cases been excluded from the host society (for example Fincher and Shaw, 2009). The students in this study, who were part of an international group, did not claim to feel segregated or excluded from local society; instead, they enjoyed being part of an international group of students found it to be a positive part of their experience. Fincher and Shaw (2009) discovered that students often found escaping insular international student communities difficult whilst studying abroad. Again, this was not identified by any of the students in this study who were involved in an international student group, although this was noted by many students within exclusively English groups as will be discussed in the following section. It appears therefore that students do not feel trapped within the international student group; instead, they saw them as a positive environment, which they enjoyed being part of.

Students often reported that these international groups gave them the opportunity to meet a wide range of people and learn about different cultures. One student stated, 'there were all different nationalities, whilst you were over there you could really see the benefits of Erasmus' (I-20) and another commented 'the people I lived with were such good friends and we had such a great time. We were all in the same boat because we were all from different countries' (I-34). Similarly, Killick (ND) found that it was in interactions with the international student community, rather than the host culture, that new and often exciting perspectives on themselves, their own culture and the cultures of others opened up for students. In this research, students also appeared to have learnt about a variety of cultures and saw the international/exchange group as positive. Students also saw these groups as positive as they offered companionship when they struggled to integrate into a local group. For instance, one student stated 'when you're Erasmus you're in another country and you're sort of on your own so it's easier to make friends with people who are in the same boat, but I think with the French people it was harder because they already had their established friends and circles of friends and they weren't looking for more friends' (I-38).

In contrast to the students who socialised with locals, the students who were part of a group of international/exchange students did often claim to feel like they were part of an 'Erasmus group' and were often also involved with Erasmus study abroad students. These students clearly identified with being an Erasmus student and told stories about Erasmus parties, Erasmus travelling trips and shopping trips on the days the Erasmus grants were paid. Being part of an international/exchange group did however undoubtedly limit the students' interactions with locals. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) argued that 'the group effect dissuades intimidated natives from trying to meet the newcomers and hinders intercultural encounters between foreign and native students' (p.158). This was the case with the students in this study as they often socialised and spent time exclusively with individuals from within the international/exchange groups.

6.3.2.3 The English groups

When asked about their social interactions one interviewee commented 'we weren't the Erasmus group, we were the English-Erasmus group' (I-29), and another noted, 'it didn't really seem like Erasmus because when I think of Erasmus I think of Erasmus here with like French German and everything but there it was just like English!' (I-2). These quotes represent the experience of over one third of the students in this study (figure 21). It is important to note that the students themselves labelled these as groups as 'English', even though they often included students from elsewhere in the UK. For this reason, the groups are labelled as 'English' in this thesis, as this is how the students described such groups. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) labelled this type of group as 'the ethnic group' (p.184) and noted that such groups come about as if naturally as sojourners tend to associate mainly with people of their own ethnic group on the basis of common interests and culture. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) argued that there were two attitudes regarding interactions with 'the ethnic group', either to avoid them or to lean on them for affection and moral support. The majority of students in Murphy-Lejeune's (2003) study did not avoid becoming involved with their own 'ethnic group', but in contrast to this, in this study many students actively avoided interacting with the 'ethnic group' with two thirds of interviewees not becoming involved in exclusively 'English groups'.

Certain aspects of the organisation and structure of students' placements, such as company choice and accommodation, often encouraged or influenced the student

involvement in English groups. Where groups of English students had moved abroad together from the same university or had been placed with other English students either at work or in accommodation this had encouraged the development of exclusively English groups where contact with locals were minimal. Kristensen (2004: 7) also found this to be the case and argued that as many stays abroad are organised as group exchanges it can be easy for a participant to 'hide' in the group and avoid contact with natives.

The size of the host company was a major influencing factor in the amount of time students spent with other English students. A number of large companies employ hundreds of placement students from a range of European countries, which often means students are one of many English interns in one company at the same time. This situation increased the likelihood of students spending time with other English students and forming a group that is exclusively English. Dervin (2007) similarly argued that courses taken at universities whilst abroad are usually exclusively arranged for international or exchange students, which limits their interaction with locals. In the case of work placement students, in this research it has been found that when one company employs a large group of English work placement students at the same time this encourages the development of English groups. This confirms the finding that non-language students who work in companies that take on a small number of students are more likely to socialise with locals. Taken together, these findings suggest that if students are to become integrated into a local group and avoid spending time with other English students, they would benefit from choosing a company that does not take on a large number of English interns. As one student stated:

'Because it's a big company with so many interns I mean if it had been a smaller company it would have been less like that. That's probably a negative about a big company. If I was looking for an internship now I would say to look for a small company where you would meet less English people' (I-19).

In some cases, students claimed they had formed groups with other English students due to a lack of language skills. One student who could not speak the host language stated, 'there was five of us, and that made it a lot easier, especially not knowing the language it was scary. But with all of us we thought of it as work and holiday all at once' (I-6). For non-language students it was therefore important to socialise with other English people to

communicate. A lack of language skills therefore encouraged students to spend time exclusively with other English students.

New English arrivals to the host country were given automatic entry to these English groups because of their nationality, as one interviewee stated, 'everyone just stuck together and when there was someone new arriving they would automatically come into the group' (I-38). This gave students security and belonging, as they were part of a support network. This also prevented them becoming lonely or isolated and offered support away from home in times of worry or problems. Students spoke about these groups as positive as they felt they could relate to each other and talk about home, which was often comforting for the students. It became clear that students also had a lot of fun being part of these groups:

'There were about 25 of us living within five minutes of each other so there was a massive English community. It had a better social scene than at university! We went out more and did things at weekends, like to the coast, St Rafael, Riviera, beach, boozing there was always something to do. There was a really big Erasmus community... I really liked living with English guys' (I-29).

'It did have a very English vibe which probably helped quite a lot. Like every Wednesday there was happy hour in an English bar so we would all go. There was so much sort of team spirit' (I-30).

Although English people were given automatic entry to these groups, outsiders, often locals, were regularly excluded completely:

'There's probably an element of being alien which is terrible because we met a French guy at the gym and he just stared talking to us and he was nice but we would never go to that step of going outside of the gym to do something with him it was all just in the gym. But I imagine if he had been English we would have invited him out with us. I guess it's just comfort in your own kind of people... but he was French so maybe that was like a barrier. It wasn't in a nasty way or in a spoken way, it was like a subconscious thing' (I-29).

Students did appear to be aware that their involvement in English groups was limiting their access to local people, which they often regarded as negative. One student, for example, stated 'we went to English bars so total cultural hybridity or whatever you call it with like zero authenticity in terms of French life' (I-29). Likewise another student stated:

'I think it's really bad because in that group you just don't take in everything you are surrounded by. They don't try to do something different or find new stuff because it's like you're one big family out there because you do miss home and your friends so it easy to stay within a culture that you understand and it just makes you feel at ease. I would say that was a bad problem' (I-10).

Teichler (2004b) similarly reported that 18% of students claimed that it was a serious problem that they had too much contact with people from their own country whilst studying abroad. Stronkhorst (2005) and Meier and Daniels (2011) also identified that students often found establishing contacts with locals difficult whilst abroad. Students in this study did not always attempt to establish contacts with locals due to the presence of these English groups. Students often spoke about feeling trapped amongst the English groups and found it difficult to spend time outside of this social circle:

'Personally I was lucky because I played football... But because I did that it kind of looked bad on the group as if I was leaving them in a way... I said I went there on my own so I had to do stuff that I thought was best for me so that's what I did but yeah it did create some hostility' (I-10).

'Once I mentioned I was thinking of going to this local bar to meet some people from work, Spanish people from work, and literally all hell broke loose. The girls in particular were like "oh well are we not good enough for you now!" It was ridiculous but I didn't go in the end because they made such a fuss' (I-40).

The English groups were often formed very quickly as the students were away from home often in intense environments of living, working and socialising together. Conflicts often developed easily in such close knit environments as one student commented, 'It was so easy to fall out with people too because people forget you've actually only know each other for like three weeks there actually aren't any long term bonds, there were a lot of

conflicts that were so silly in the group' (I-10). Similarly, another interviewee stated, 'It did get a bit much sometimes though, like there were some rifts in the group' (I-29) and another commented, 'If there was one argument then all hell kind of broke loose because it was such a close group. In the end I managed to fall out with some people which split the group a little bit' (I-30).

A number of students did try to 'break out' from the English groups due to problems that developed within these groups. One student stated 'I got a bit sick of it. I went to France to have a French experience and it didn't feel very French to me' (I-2). This student spent eleven months within an exclusively English group and then in the final month of her placement made friends with a French girl. She described how this had shown her what she had been missing out on for the eleven months spent with the other English students and she felt very regretful that she had not spent more time with French students as the last month she claimed was 'the best bit, it was a real shame I didn't meet her earlier'. Students therefore often felt trapped within their English group and once these groups were established they were difficult to break out from. Teichler (2004b), Stronkhorst (2005) and Dervin (2007) also found that students involved in groups of Erasmus or exchange students sometimes felt trapped or that the group was limiting their chances of meeting locals. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) similarly identified that often students felt like they wanted to escape from their close knit groups and described being 'stuck in a rut' and behaving the same way as they would have done at home.

Students were often aware that the English group was not beneficial in terms of language or integration but the benefits of being part of this group, such as the chance to be part of a large group of friends, outweighed the negatives. A student who was part of a large English group commented, 'It was really good, I mean not from a language point of view but socially it worked really well because there was always people to ask to do stuff and always something going on so from that side it was really good' (I-31). This student was a language student who went abroad to improve her language skills but became part of an English group. Another student who lived with two English students commented 'neither of them could speak German, they were even worse than me. We were probably bad for each other! If there had been one of us really driving us to learn we probably would have

done it' (I-35). This student acknowledged that living with and socialising with other English students had been detrimental to their language learning, but positive in a social sense.

On reflection, a number of the students who spent the majority of their time within an English group spoke about their regret that they did not spend more time with locals. Although they enjoyed being part of their English group, they did reflect negatively about this aspect of their experience on return to the UK. As one student commented, 'it's probably like my biggest regret because I felt my German experience could have been better if I had had a German social life' (I-31) and another noted, 'I did want to meet more French people I suppose that might be one of my big regrets that I didn't make the effort to make French friends' (I-38). This often left students wondering whether they did the right thing becoming involved in an English group as one student stated, 'I do sometimes wonder whether, well, whether I made the most of the opportunity I guess' (I-40).

The students' social lives whilst completing placements abroad have been explored here. The findings of this study, in part, confirm previous research findings (such as those by Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Kristensen, 2004; Matthews and Sidhu, 2005; Waters, 2007; Candery et al, 2008; Ehrenreich, 2008; Waters and Brooks, 2010b; Meier and Daniels, 2011), which have suggested that students do not always fully engage with the local culture or people whilst studying abroad. This research also contributes additional evidence by suggesting that gender, language skills and living arrangements of students can greatly impact such engagement. A large number of students in this study (45%) actively became involved in a group of locals, which is higher than suggested by previous research that has tended to claim that this is rare during study abroad (for example Murphy Lejeune, 2002 and Dervin, 2007). Murphy-Lejeune (2002) and Meier and Daniels (2011) have argued that the reason students go abroad and the environments they are in whilst abroad affects the level of immersion into the host society and that different groups have access to different social situations because of the environment in which their life takes place. This research supports this suggestion and has found that the option to work abroad increases the level of interaction students have with locals when compared to previous studies. Similarly, Meier and Daniels (2011) found that language students completing a work placement abroad have stronger bonds with locals than those who study abroad; however, this research contributes additional evidence that this is also often

the case with non-language students. It has also been found that students' social interactions are complex, depending on many factors such as language skills, living arrangements, work environment and gender. Socialisation with locals is only possible when students actively employ strategies such as those outlined here and avoid spending time with other English students.

6.3.3 Activities and travelling

As described earlier in this chapter, students often joined sports teams or clubs in an attempt to make friends, particularly when students were keen to meet locals. For example, students in this sample joined football teams (I-1, R-13, I-7, I-35), hockey clubs (I-4, I-8, I-16), Rugby teams (I-13), running clubs (I-2), Frisbee clubs (I-36), ice-skating teams (I-37), bands (I-4) and a youth church (I-25). Students saw these activities as an important part of their experience as it allowed them to make friends and meet new people outside of work. They also gave the students something to do outside of work to maintain a good home/work balance. When asked to pass on any advice to future Erasmus students it was frequently advised that students should join such a club.

Students who were involved in an international/exchange group often spoke about activities they participated in which were specifically and exclusively designed for Erasmus students. These included Erasmus parties, weekend trips, tours of local attractions and general gatherings of Erasmus students for meals or drinks. These activities often had many attendees and were organised by Erasmus societies in nearby universities, which the work placement students had a link to, or via social networking either face-to-face or via websites such as Facebook. Students involved in either an international/exchange group or an English social group were much less likely to become involved in a club or sports team made up exclusively of locals and instead were more likely to be involved in this type of Erasmus activity.

Travelling was an important part of many students' experiences. Students often used the opportunity of living in mainland Europe to travel to other European countries, as this was easier, cheaper and more feasible than travelling from the UK. One student commented 'when you're in the continent as well it's like you do more travelling because you're actually on the continent... because we were on the same island so you just felt so much

more mobile' (I-29). Students who had the opportunity to travel spoke about this as an enjoyable and beneficial part of their experience as it meant they got to explore both their host country and other European destinations. Students therefore used their Erasmus period as not only a chance to visit their destination host country, but also to be mobile within Europe more generally. As one student commented, 'working on the Riviera you are just a two hour train ride from Italy and closer to many other places. I'll give you an example: breakfast on the Riviera, lunch in Italy, dinner in Monaco and back to Antibes for drinks!' (R-26).

Travel often greatly enhanced the student experience and was regularly described as the best part of the Erasmus experience. For example, one student noted 'one of the most poignant things from my Erasmus year was the flexibility I had to travel' (R-14) and another commented, 'it was brilliant, a great opportunity because I effectively got to travel as well as working for a year, I didn't have to do them separately' (I-35). Similarly, Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2005) found that almost all of the students they surveyed (93%) travelled around the host country whilst studying abroad. In this study, however, it has been found that students often take the opportunity to travel outside the host country also.

6.3.4 Comparison to study abroad

Eight interviewees in this research had studied abroad as well as completed a work placement. Six had completed a six-month Erasmus study period and two had taken part in other study abroad programmes. This research did not initially aim to explore the differences between study and working abroad, but this proved to be an interesting area discussed by these students. Comparisons between traditional study abroad and work placement mobility are scarce. A notable exception to this is Murphy-Lejeune (2002) who, as outlined in chapter 2, focused on French students and compared three types of student mobility including students who had both studied and worked abroad.

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) found that students claimed that the experience of working abroad outweighed the study abroad experience and that during the work placement students had more contact with locals that went on to enhance cultural discovery. Students also reported that the working experience enhanced their integration into local society, which in some cases was not present in the study abroad period. This research has

found evidence to support these claims made by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) as all of the students who had studied and worked abroad claimed that the work placement option had allowed them to spend more time with locals than whilst studying. A student who spent six months studying, followed by six months working, commented, 'In Holland (studying), most people were there to learn English though and wanted that Erasmus experience in English. Erasmus is pretty much an English experience everywhere I think and I didn't want that. Then when I went to Germany (worked) I realised how much you can integrate' (I-25). This level of interaction with locals was often claimed to be because students could avoid other Erasmus or English students easier whilst working than whilst studying:

'When I was in Lyon (studying) you get caught up in the Erasmus crowd which is what it's all about and you just speak English so working was definitely better' (I-4).

'When I was working my friends and I would go out more with Spanish people but when I was at uni we all stayed in the Erasmus community and didn't have any Spanish friends it was more like an international group... when you're working it's not a student lifestyle so I think that's probably why you like blend in with the local people a bit more... when I was working I felt a lot more involved in the community, I felt more able to mix in the community a bit more' (I-27).

This confirms the findings of Krzaklewska and Krunip (2006), who discovered that when students completed an internship or volunteer work during their study exchange, they were more satisfied with their contacts with the local culture.

The majority of students who studied and worked abroad commented that the lack of contact time and structure during their study period was a problem and they had preferred the structure the work placement provided:

'I found that being at uni you don't have much contact time because as an Erasmus student you only do like eight hours a week and I found all that spare time difficult to deal with and have nothing to do. I found the lack of structure difficult.... I thought working was much better because there was more structure and there was always something to do and I knew what was happening' (I-25).

Similarly, another student commented, 'I think when I was studying I only had eight hours of lectures a week so I wasn't really in the environment all day whereas when I was working I was involved more and I could learn the language' (I-27). Another student noted, 'working in a German speaking environment for such a long time every day means you can't avoid contact with the language, which if you're working in a school or studying for only ten hours a week is very easy' (R-28). The working experience had therefore offered students structure and a more intense language learning experience.

The students who had studied and worked abroad often commented that they would advise potential Erasmus students to complete a work placement as opposed to study due to the increased opportunities to learn the language and to spend time with locals:

'Well I would definitely recommend doing a work placement to someone who was going abroad specifically to improve their language because you just get so much more than you do going to study' (I-28).

'I would say to work, I just didn't learn anything studying, like you would get up and go to class, its pot luck what teacher you get, but I found that my French didn't advance at all and we had been put in halls of residence which were essentially full of people who weren't French (I-31).

This research was not specifically designed to evaluate the differences between studying and working abroad and therefore caution must be applied when analysing these differences. A larger sample and more specific and in-depth questions on the topic are needed to draw definitive conclusions about the differences between these two experiences, but the findings here indicate that this is an interesting area of research requiring further exploration. It appears that the experience of working abroad allows students to immerse themselves more in the language and host culture than was experienced whilst studying abroad. This also appears to be the case when the findings from this study are compared to previous research focusing on study abroad (discussed further in chapter 8). The differences between studying and working abroad are interesting and could help inform students' mobility decisions if fully understood.

6.4 Challenges and support

The final part of this chapter discusses the challenges and problems faced by Erasmus work placement students whilst abroad and assesses the level and type of support received during this time. The support provided by the Erasmus grant and other sources of finance are also analysed here.

6.4.1 Problems and difficulties faced

As discussed in chapter 2, previous research has tended to depict a positive view of the student mobility experience; however, the problems and difficulties faced by students whilst studying abroad have received some academic attention (for example, Maiworm and Teichler, 2002b; Papatsiba, 2005b; Mcleod and Wainwright, 2008). Problems faced by students completing work placements based in the UK have also been identified (for example, Webber, 2005; Little and Harvey, 2006; Gracia, 2009). The difficulties faced by mobile work placement students are, however, yet to be assessed. Although the majority of students in this study reflected very positively about their Erasmus placement experience, problems and challenges were identified both within reports and during interviews. Problems faced included discrimination, location and accommodation issues, homesickness, loneliness and language problems. It is important to assess the problems faced by mobile placement students as this information can inform the development of a more positive experience for future students.

Discrimination has previously been identified as a problem for mobile students. For example, Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2006) reported that the ESN Survey (2006) found that nearly 20% of students in their sample felt discriminated against during their stay mostly because of being foreigners and their poor language skills. In this study, however, only a small number of students interviewed claimed they felt discriminated against whilst they were abroad. Where students did experience discrimination this tended to be particular events or encounters, rather than a reflection of their overall experience in the host country, nonetheless this discrimination is an important issue to address. A small number of students claimed they were discriminated against because of their 'foreignness' within the host country. One student, for example, stated, 'in Spain from what I found if you're not Spanish they don't like you' (I-39) another commenting, 'I think it wasn't to do with me

being English but maybe that I was not French but I think that's maybe just the French attitude in general' (I-38). Another student who worked in Spain noted, 'Spanish girls just don't like UK girls because the Spanish guys like them so the Spanish girls feel really threatened by that... I think I didn't get the same respect as a Spanish person would have and I look very foreign with my blue eyes and blonde hair' (I-21). A small number of students also experienced one off events or encounters where discrimination occurred:

'Once when I was on the bus in Germany I was on the phone speaking English and this woman in front of me said to her grandchild oh these foreigners coming here and blah blah you know that sort of thing, well she just thought I couldn't speak German and I was really shocked. I had never been subject with that kind of thing before I was really shocked' (I-25).

'There was one experience when my boyfriend was visiting and the waiter was an idiot to us and had basically decided he wasn't going to be nice because we were from the UK and were English' (I-36).

These experiences were, however, relatively rare with the majority of students claiming to have experienced no discrimination whilst abroad. Most students saw their difference or 'foreignness' as positive. Students often felt that locals saw them as a 'novelty' because they were English. Instead of leading to discrimination this actually meant people were very interested and welcoming. Where differences were acknowledged between their home and host culture these were talked about and were often a source of entertainment. For example, one student commented, 'my colleagues just took the mick a little bit about English binge drinking but it was all in jest and fun. There was no time I thought I was being treated differently because I was an English student' (I-13) and another student stated, 'If something came up about the UK they could like laugh about it and it was all good hearted and good natured, I didn't think it was a problem at all' (I-25). Discrimination was therefore not a major issue for the students in this study, although it did occur in a small number of cases.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a small number of students faced difficulties in relation to language in the work place, particularly in the early stages of their placement period. The majority of students in this study did not, however, face significant difficulties in

relation to language outside of the work place environment. Students who possessed no language skills reported to have managed using only English whilst living and working abroad. This confirms that students can complete a placement in a country where they cannot speak the host language relatively easily.

Although students did not face issues because of a lack of language skills, a large number of interviewees spoke about their frustrations when attempting to use the host language and being replied to in English by locals. Students often reported that due to this they did not get the opportunity to use the host language as much as they had wanted. This in some cases occurred at work but in most cases this was encountered outside of work in social settings and also whilst using local services. Students found this experience disheartening as they saw this as a sign of failure of their language skills. Language students found this particularly problematic, 'I found it annoying when you would make the effort to speak to a Spaniard in Spanish and they would turn around and speak to you in English, that's quite offensive' (I-26).

For many students, particularly those who did not have a high level of language skills but who tried to learn basics, this often put them off trying. One such student commented, 'it kind of defeats the whole purpose of trying' (I-10) and another noted 'the way I took it was oh well my French is not that good and it made me feel bad... I felt confident and then all of a sudden they managed to destroy that in about three seconds' (I-17). Locals speaking to the students in English had therefore often been very discouraging for students who were attempting to improve their language skills. The students who experienced this often felt it was inevitable as people wanted to practice their English as one student stated 'I understand why though because they want to learn and practice English' (I-25). Similarly, another student commented 'well I would be the same here I guess if I was trying to learn French and I met a French person I would be like well let's get some practice in!' (I-40).

Previous research that has focused on study abroad has identified issues associated with accommodation such as poor quality, noise, high prices and distance from university (Teichler, 2004). Study abroad students are more likely to live in university accommodation than work placement students and therefore are likely to face different issues in relation to accommodation. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, finding accommodation was a

major problem for many students, but they also faced other challenges once they had found their accommodation. Two students lived in very rural areas and both faced difficulties because of this.

‘There were no transport connections, I had to walk three hours to the nearest village to shop. The combined age of the village was about 4000 so there wasn’t much social life for young people there. It was kind of stuck in the past I suppose although it was an amazing insight into France but I had no chance to meet people and socialise. What made that placement difficult was loneliness; I know it’s a bit of an extreme word, boredom as well I suppose’ (I-3).

The rural location had been a major problem for this student. The second student also faced issues, claiming there was a lack of young people in the village to socialise with. They too spoke about feeling isolated and lonely whilst abroad because of their rural location (I-39). Work placements in isolated or very rural locations can therefore lead to difficulties for students, but both students did acknowledge they had a rich cultural experience seeing life from a different perspective from that of a city or town. Both of these students completed two placements and their second placements were not in rural locations. Both students preferred the non-rural location and recommended that future students should not choose such rural locations to complete their placement.

A small number of students who lived with locals also faced issues due to cultural differences:

‘In Italy there was a cultural clash I suppose. When he (Italian flatmate) wanted to be in the kitchen I had to leave him on his own he would say I don’t want you to be here when I am eating I want to be in peace after a day’s work so he would send me back to my room which I didn’t think was overly fair especially when he had complained about me being in my room so he wanted me to be out then back in my room and there was a clash over that’ (I-3).

‘So I stayed with a host family with a mum and daughter which initially I really liked because I was practising Spanish so much but the little girl got really annoying and noisy. Eventually I found another apartment with a Spanish girl, but she was really

bitchy towards me. I find Spanish girls don't like foreign girls very much and she was very rude to me. So yeah I had a nightmare with accommodation' (I-21).

For these students living with locals had been problematic due to cultural differences, but these students still argued that they had learnt about the host society through this experience and also had the opportunity to practice the host language. On reflection, the students were pleased they had lived with locals despite the problems they faced.

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) revealed that a number of mobile students changed their living arrangements in the middle of their time abroad due to difficulties faced. In this study this also occurred as just over one quarter of the female language students (four) changed their living arrangements during their stay. The reason for this was the students did not feel they were getting the language and cultural integration that they aimed to achieve:

'I was happy with them but we were speaking English in the flat because they were all American so that was not my aim. One of my aims was to live with Spanish people so I tried to move out. Then I moved into a flat with two Spanish girls' (I-26).

'It just wasn't great and I never saw the other two girls I lived with. So I decided to move house after six weeks... it was the defining moment of my whole time there, I lived with four other German students and I got on with them really well and it was through them that I was able to make other friends' (I-28).

These students were therefore willing to move to ensure they were immersed in the host language and culture whilst they were abroad. This reflects the drivers of female students, who participated for language and cultural reasons and therefore wanted to ensure they achieved this in their living arrangement.

Finally, in terms of problems faced by students, a number of interviewees claimed they had been homesick or felt lonely whilst abroad. This tended to be a greater issue at the beginning of the students' placements:

'It was like personal issues of actually being alone. It's the emotions you don't know you have because you've never been in that situation before and they're hard to

deal with. I felt really homesick and I have never been homesick before. It's just knowing you're actually stuck that's hard, especially on my own' (I-10).

Personal problems such as homesickness and loneliness were found to be less of an issue for students who were part of large group of friends, particularly English groups, as these groups offered support. For example, one student who was part of an English group commented 'If we felt homesick or if we had any troubles, we could turn to each other' (I-29). Another student stated 'we were all in it together so it made us feel less alone. When I was with the group I felt like I was at home in a funny way' (I-40). A large number of students also claimed that the availability of communication technologies such as Skype and social networking sites such as Facebook made being away from home easier. One student commented, 'I spoke to my dad on Skype and brother and friends on msn and Facebook chat... Being able to speak to people was comforting' (I-1) and another stated, 'it's just good to hear a voice, Skype's good although the internet connection wasn't too good but I think you need that to hear a friendly voice and catch up. I don't think I could have done it without that' (I-10).

A number of students claimed that they were in more frequent contact with family when they were abroad than when they were studying in the UK. For example, one student stated, 'I used Skype more and kept in contact more with my family when I was in Germany than when I was actually at uni in the UK because I don't really contact them when I am here. But they were probably good support for me when I was abroad' (I-12). Another student similarly noted, 'I actually had more contact with my parents when I was in Spain than I have now' (I-22) and another stated 'I felt the need to talk to my parents more which was weird because when I'm at uni I don't speak to them for weeks but when I was there I Skyped a lot especially at the beginning' (I-23). For these students, contact with home through Skype had provided them with support they needed whilst abroad.

The majority of interviewees also claimed that the use of social networking sites allowed them to maintain friendships with other students who remained in the UK or who were also abroad. This ensured that friendships would still be in place when they returned for their final year of university. This was important to many students, as one commented, 'with the friends you leave in England if you don't see them for a year and a half you grow

apart if you don't talk and even though we were in the same situation we still needed to talk so Facebook particularly helped to keep friendships going' (I-3). For those who had friends who were also studying or working abroad, Facebook allowed them to share their experiences and support each other from a distance during this time. For example, one student stated, 'a lot of my other friends were abroad so we would say oh this is what I'm doing and what are you doing and it was really nice and we would go on Skype and I would turn the webcam round and see where they were so it was really fun' (I-28). Many students claimed these technologies had reduced homesickness and made being abroad easier. However, a number of students did still face these issues whilst abroad.

Students who were not part of an English group were more likely to experience problems such as homesickness. One student noted, 'I felt quite lonely at times, and the lack of anybody else in the same situation made the homesickness worse' (R-16) and another commented, 'the company is average sized so it didn't have loads of people my age or other interns. I think it was just feeling like there were loads of people around but I felt lonely' (I-33). A lack of other interns or people in the same situation had therefore often led to homesickness. This is a negative aspect of not being part of a group of international or English students. An event occurring in the UK whilst students were away from home also often caused homesickness. One student, for example, reported that when their sister got engaged this made them feel very homesick and another student experienced a family bereavement whilst they were not in the UK which they found difficult. Even students who had a positive overall experience were affected negatively by events happening in the UK whilst they are abroad. Periods of homesickness and loneliness were often short lived but students spoke about them as difficult periods of their placement with a small number of students claiming to have considered returning home early during these times.

Although students often faced problems whilst abroad, interestingly, during the interviews students often needed to be prompted to talk about problems faced. The students were very keen to portray a positive reflection of their experience and therefore rarely brought up problems faced unless asked. It became clear that this is because even when problems are faced students still reflect on it as a positive experience and even issues are viewed as challenges that they benefitted from. One student report noted 'all in all, my year abroad wasn't always a smooth ride: I remember various occasions when I just wanted to give up

and go home. But now it's all over, I know I definitely wouldn't have wanted it any other way' (R-31). Similarly, an interviewee stated, 'in the end even though I did come across some issues the benefits did definitely outweigh, because it will help me in my life when I come across certain things so I would definitely do it again' (I-10). This reflects the suggestion made by Papatsiba (2005a) that the study abroad period is driven by a specific rationale, which makes any situation, positive or negative, potentially educational where everything becomes a lesson learned. Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) commented that 'practically everything in the European student experience may be assessed as a benefit. In other words, even the negative or difficult aspects of the stay are eventually perceived as enriching, adding significantly to their life experience in the present and potentially beneficial in the future' (p.230). Despite the occasional difficulties, all of the students in this study therefore reflect on their overall experience as positive.

6.4.2 Support provided by home HEI

Chapter 5 outlined the different levels of information and encouragement given to students by their university departments prior to their Erasmus work placement. This study has also identified differences in terms of the support given to students whilst completing their placements. The most obvious finding to emerge in terms of support is the lack of standardisation across departments and institutions with some students receiving a great deal of support and others receiving none.

The majority of students stated that they did not require support from their department whilst abroad but if they had they knew who to contact and believed they would have been there to help. For example, one student commented, 'we knew if we had a problem we could always email them... If there was anything major wrong they would have been there' (I-25) and another stated, 'they made us really aware the personal tutors are there if you need them and you could always email them so it's definitely good support' (I-31). The majority of students therefore felt the support was available had they needed it. Where students had required support or information whilst abroad a number of students reflected positively about the support they received. One student, for example, commented 'the Erasmus department were good at supporting and helping me with things if I emailed they always got back to me with a solution' (I-8). Similarly another student

stated 'we were still in contact the whole time so if there had been anything I could speak to her and she always responded and helped when I did need something' (I-20).

Students were, however, not always this positive and a number of students argued that more regular contact from their university was needed. For instance, an interviewee noted 'I think more regular contact to see how people are doing because I think when people are abroad they can feel a bit isolated so the occasional email would have been good' (I-27) and another stated, 'from the uni side I think especially at the beginning they need to be more proactive in finding out if people are ok' (I-33). Others claimed that their department had been slow with email replies or unhelpful when they were contacted. One student commented 'I don't think we had much contact or support from uni once we were there. They were actually terrible at replying to emails' (I-38) and another stated, 'I found that when I emailed them when I was there it took them a while to reply if they did reply at all and then the information in there replies was never that useful for me really' (I-34). These students argued that they did not think they were prioritised by their department as one student stated, 'the problem with being abroad is that with emails and the phone you don't always get a reply straight away... It's not their priority I guess so there were times when it got quite frustrating' (I-10).

When problems were encountered, for which students required the help of their department, they were in some cases disappointed with the support provided. The following quote comes from the student who lost their job mid-way through their placement (I-3). When they approached their university department in the UK for help, they did not receive the support they expected and required:

'I emailed the support tutor to tell her and to get some help in sorting it but I didn't get a reply and then it became official, so I had to start looking for another job and again the process of applying for the jobs which is meant to be through the support tutor was an issue because I didn't get any help. All the places I applied to for work said well we do take on placement students but it has to be through the university to make it official... but I couldn't get that so I had a lot of dead ends' (I-3).

In contrast to this, other cases were identified where students were very happy with the support provided when they had encountered difficulties:

‘[Tutor’s name] came to visit me in Spain and I told her all about my boss and housing situation. When it got really bad I actually cried down the phone to her because I was so upset about it all and I think she must have panicked because I got a call from my course director who is the big boss of the whole course and he said to call him whenever I need him and gave me his mobile number. They were incredible. They were really good’ (I-39).

It is common practice for placement students to receive a visit from a representative from their university whilst working at the host company. This is clearly more difficult to administer and organise when students complete a placement abroad. Despite this, a number of students in this study did receive a visit during their placement, although the majority did not. Students who did receive a visit often found them helpful. Students claimed that these visits gave them reassurance that they were being monitored and that support was available if they needed it. For example, one student commented, ‘they spent a day making sure I was ok, and it made sure I was getting something out of the year’ (I-18) and another stated, ‘It was really helpful and he came and saw I was doing my job and it was nice to have that support’ (I-9). Another student claimed that the visit had encouraged them to evaluate what they were gaining from the placement, stating ‘it was helpful because they kind of tested us to see if we had improved and what we were getting out of it. It was quite early on so they kind of challenged us to see how integrated we had got into Germany’ (I-7). For this student the visit allowed them to reflect on what they had achieved since starting their placement.

Students who did not receive a visit often argued that they should have, or would have liked to have, received a visit. Students often felt let down that they were not visited as they felt this was necessary. An interviewee asserted, ‘we didn’t have a visit like other unis did... I would have liked that, it would have looked good on the uni and make you feel a bit more loved’ (I-26) and another argued, ‘I think it’s pretty bad we didn’t get a visit, after all they charge half tuition fees’ (I-40). Despite this, a small number of students who did actually receive a visit were less positive about this support, often suggesting that they did not really feel it was necessary or beneficial. One interviewee stated, ‘well I was ok, I think if you had problems that could have been good but I was ok’ (I-2) and another commented, ‘personally it wasn’t really very helpful. Even when you met them they don’t really help

you in the sense of your dissertation of anything' (I-10). Two students also criticised the timing of their visit claiming that it had been too late into their placement to be beneficial to their experience. It was noted by one of these students, 'I think the visit was a bit late, it was about 2 weeks before I finished so obviously it was to get feedback how I was doing but it wasn't much help because there wasn't really much I could improve at that point' (I-27). The timing of visits is therefore an important factor to consider if they are to challenge students to get the best out of their time abroad. Despite these criticisms, the majority of students who did receive a visit were positive about this type of support received.

The support offered to students whilst abroad and the level of contact universities keep with students varies greatly. Little standardisation appeared to be present with respect to this support, which, as discussed here, often led to problems when students encountered difficulties. This research has identified many differences between the support and encouragement provided by HEIs and departments within HEIs before and during an Erasmus work placement. Due to the sample size, however, definitive conclusions about differences according to university type and subject area could not be made. An exploration of these differences is needed by comparing different types of HEIs and university departments to inform HEIs how best to cater for Erasmus work placement students. Such a study could also contribute towards increased levels of outgoing students from the UK and improve the support students receive whilst abroad. It is also recommended that future research in this area should include individuals within HEIs who are responsible for this support, such as Erasmus coordinators, to explore the organisation of placements from their perspective. This would make a valuable contribution towards understanding the organisation and administration of Erasmus work placements. An evaluation of the different processes currently in place would also allow standardisation to be considered and eventually established.

6.4.3 Finance and the Erasmus grant

In terms of support given to students whilst completing an Erasmus work placement, the Erasmus grant and additional sources of income are important factors to consider. Although the decision to go abroad was not frequently influenced by the presence of the Erasmus grant, the majority of interviewees claimed that the Erasmus grant was positive to

their experience. A number of problems were, however, identified with the Erasmus grant in relation to the timing and structure and amount of grant available. These findings enhance our understanding of how the grant affects the everyday lives of the students involved and highlights improvements that could be made to the system from the students' perspective.

In addition to the Erasmus grant, the majority of the students in this study received a salary from their placement employer and also a student maintenance loan, which UK students remain eligible for whilst abroad. It also became apparent that a large number of students also received extra financial support from parents. Students were often very comfortable financially because of these numerous sources of income. One student, for example, commented 'I had never had so much money in my life so I was quite happy' (I-1) and another stated, 'I seemed to have a lot of money, I was quite rich last year. Now I'm back in England being a student I have no money, it was one of the richest years of my life' (I-5). The financial support available to these students was sufficient and allowed them to live a comfortable life whilst abroad.

In some cases students coped so well financially that they did not actually need to use their Erasmus grant during their Erasmus period and instead used it for other purposes. Two students used the grant to pay for their final year tuition fees, one student stated 'I wasn't in trouble for money so I saved it for this year and its basically paying for my tuition fees, but I didn't use it during my Erasmus year I'm using it now' (I-19) and the other stated 'I saved my Erasmus grant and used it instead of a student loan in the final year which was amazing because that really reduced my debt' (I-33). Other students used it for living expenses during their final year as one student noted, 'I even managed to save some money for final year' (R-25). Another student, who was supported by her parents, commented 'I just gave it to my parents because essentially they were paying for me so they used that towards it I guess but I just gave it to them' (I-26). Another student who received a high salary commented 'I didn't spend any of my grant when I was on my Erasmus year. I didn't even use it to go travelling because I managed to save all my grant and some wages as well' (I-38). In these cases the Erasmus grant did not actually support the Erasmus period.

Other interviewees expressed the view that the Erasmus grant was 'a nice bonus' (I-19) but it was not enough to cover all the cost associated with their time abroad. A large number of students, particularly those receiving low salaries, agreed that without additional support outside of the grant the time abroad would have been unaffordable or very difficult. One student commented, 'Erasmus at the end of the day its free money that you don't have to give back which is a bonus but it doesn't cover everything, you do need extra help' (I-31) and another student stated, 'you do need support outside of Erasmus' (I-29). Students were therefore often required to use other sources of income that was often provided by their parents. As one student noted, 'I was phoning my mum and dad all the time to put money in my account' (I-21) and another stated, 'I was into my overdraft and using up my loan and still desperately needed the bank of mum and dad' (I-37).

Students who struggled to find this additional financial support often faced financial difficulties and regularly claimed that the Erasmus grant was not sufficient. One student commented 'I couldn't just ring mummy and Daddy to ask for a hand-out, I did really struggle at times, it was tough being poor some days!' (I-40). Other students also reported having had friends who struggled financially when in this situation. One commented 'I had friends who were on low pay and they were really on the breadline even with the grant. I don't think it's enough' (I-38). For these students, finance was a major problem and in a number of cases this impacted negatively on their overall experience. For example, one student commented 'I didn't really have that much money to spend so that kind of inhibited my attempts to socialise' (I-12). In other cases it restricted students' chances to travel. One student stated, 'because of my financial situation I couldn't afford to travel really' (I-8) and another noted, 'in an ideal world I would have like to visit more places in Germany. I went to some places close to where I was but if I had more money I would have done more' (I-12). A lack of financial support impacted on the students' abilities to socialise and travel whilst in the host country with many seeing their lack of money leading to what one student called 'lost opportunities' (I-40). Although the majority of students in this study did not struggle financially, those who received a low salary, or did not receive additional support from their families, did often face such issues.

Students in this study also often expressed dissatisfaction with the timing and structure of the Erasmus grant payments. Students received the Erasmus grant in two instalments; the

first shortly after they had started work and the second during the latter half of their placement and in some cases students received an extra payment after they had returned to the UK. Students received the first instalment of their grant when they had arrived in the host country and could prove that they had started their placement by getting their employer to sign and return the required forms. This system created a number of problems for students, particularly those with little support from family and those who did not get paid until after their first month of employment as they struggled financially to cover the costs of moving abroad and supporting themselves before the grant was paid. One student stated, 'they say the Erasmus grant is to help you to move over and help with the moving costs and things but we didn't actually receive it until we had done all that' (I-16) and another asserted, 'It comes so late... the time you need that help is in the beginning for moving there and travelling there and buying what you need like pillows, pans and moving costs' (I-25).

Students were often moving to different climates and these students struggled to prepare for this before receiving their grant. One student who went to Norway for their placement noted, 'especially going to a completely different climate because I was going towards the end of winter so I needed to buy winter clothes and shoes, it wasn't a lot but it was still money so it would have been nice to have it beforehand' (I-8). By the time students received their Erasmus grant they had often already received their student loan and in many cases they had already started to be paid by their employer. At this stage the Erasmus grant was less needed. As one student commented, 'It was a bonus at the end really because I got it five months into my placement so it was a bonus when I was out there but I didn't expect it because I didn't know' (I-19) and another noted, 'to be honest the timing of it is terrible they give the first instalment in October and I started my placement on the 1st August... so come October I had sorted myself out' (I-13).

Many students spoke of using overdrafts, loans and gifts from family and friends and personal savings in order to cover the initial costs of their Erasmus period. Where this was not possible, students were affected by their lack of finances and were very restricted in terms of what they could do in the initial weeks after arriving in the host country. This led to students not being able to take part in activities to meet people and often left students isolated. One student stated, 'those first few months so I didn't go out at all, especially the

first month. After that I wasn't in high spirits because I was bored I hadn't really met many people because I couldn't afford to go out so after the first month I wasn't a happy bunny... it put me in a negative state of mind' (I-13). Another student similarly commented 'I think it held me back initially at the start. A lot of my friends were travelling since September, like my German and Dutch friends because they received their grants quicker so they were able to travel but I was really held back' (I-21). The timing of the first Erasmus grant therefore often negatively affected the experience of students. This was more of a problem for students who could not rely on financial support from their families and those receiving a low salary.

A significant number of students also received Erasmus payments once they had returned to the UK. This was in some cases due to a delay in the payment of the second bulk payment or due to left over funds from the annual Erasmus budget that were then distributed amongst students who participated during that year. This timing often confused students. The grant in these cases could not be used to support the students whilst abroad and instead was used once they had returned for their studies in the UK. In a small number of cases this was, however, used to pay off debts incurred whilst abroad. In general the students agreed this timing was not ideal as one student stated, 'It seemed the most illogical time, the last bit you get when you're back in England which I don't have any use for it now, obviously I'll find a use for it but I don't see the logic to giving it to me now' (I-13). Students were therefore often dissatisfied with the timing of both Erasmus grant payments.

In terms of structure, a number of students commented that two bulk payments of the Erasmus grant was not an ideal arrangement with many arguing that a monthly or quarterly payments system would be preferred. It was argued that the bulk payments encouraged students to be irresponsible with the money with many reporting to have 'blown' the money soon after receiving it, leading to financial problems later. These students did acknowledge that it was their responsibility to spend the money correctly but argued that monthly payments would have made this easier.

In general, therefore, it seems that without family support or a reasonable salary, students struggled financially despite receiving the Erasmus grant. This supports the suggestion that

Erasmus remains difficult or in some cases unobtainable for lower socio-economic groups as additional financial support is needed if a time abroad is to be feasible (for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Messer and Wolter, 2005; Otero, 2008; HEFCE, 2009). However, in a number of cases student salaries allowed them to cope financially without a great deal of additional support and therefore the programme does have the potential to widen participation to students who are required to support themselves whilst abroad. The results of this study in relation to the Erasmus grant indicate that improvements are needed if the grant is to be distributed in the most effective way to benefit the student experience.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the experiences of outgoing Erasmus work placement students from the UK. Commentators such as Engle and Engle (2003) and McLeod and Wainwright (2009) have argued that more needs to be done to evaluate fully the student mobility experience. This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the lived experiences of mobile work placement students thus making a valuable contribution to the literature that has tended to neglect this form of mobility.

The heterogeneity of the student experience has been highlighted throughout this chapter as well as the impact individual characteristics such as gender and language skills have on the students' overall experience. A useful concept in understanding the differences in students' experiences is the concept of the 'lifeworld' first discussed by Husserl (1970). This concept was used by phenomenologists to explore variations in individuals' experiences of the world. As described by Schutz, the individual brings to a situation a chain of prior lived experiences that are unique. The 'lifeworld' is therefore pre-structured for the individual dependent on previous experiences and stock of knowledge (quoted in Peet, 2006: 42). In phenomenology, it is therefore accepted that individuals experience their 'lifeworlds' differently. In this study, it has been confirmed that students experience their period abroad in different ways due to individual characteristics, developed through previous experiences and biographies. Students' 'lifeworlds' whilst abroad are therefore heterogeneous although as shown in this chapter, typical experiences can be identified.

Positive and negative elements of the students' experiences have been identified in this chapter; however, overall the students reflected on their experience as positive supporting the findings of commentators such as Teichler (2004b) and Figlewicz and Williams (2005). As discussed in this chapter, the experiences of students are varied and decisions made by students, such as job type and accommodation, can greatly affect not only their overall experience but also, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the outcomes of their stay abroad. A full understanding of these differences could inform students' decision making in terms of their Erasmus work placement and maximise the benefits of taking part in the programme. The findings discussed in this chapter reveal the differing experiences of Erasmus work placement students that, although similarities between groups can be identified, are generally very personal and unique experiences.

Chapter 7: The perceived effects of Erasmus work placement mobility

7.1 Introduction

A significant body of literature exists that has explored the multiple effects of student mobility in a variety of contexts (for example, Maiworm, 1997; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Teichler and Norris and Gillespie, 2009). As discussed in detail in chapter 2, this literature has tended to focus on students who have completed a period of study abroad with little attention given to the effects of completing a work placement abroad. This chapter contributes towards filling this gap by providing an exploration of the effects of Erasmus work placements from the perspective of the participating students. As this research aimed to uncover the effects of work placement mobility from the students' viewpoint, a quantitative approach, which has regularly been adopted by studies into the effects of mobility (for example, Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003), was not deemed appropriate.

This chapter is structured into four main parts. The first outlines professional effects, including contacts and references for future work and the impact the placement period had on students' future career plans. The second part of this chapter examines the positive and negative academic effects of work placement mobility and the third discusses a number of cultural and personal outcomes and benefits from the students' perspective. Finally, the future mobility plans and attitudes of students are explored. Similarities and differences between the effects of work placement mobility and study abroad are highlighted throughout this chapter.

7.2 Professional effects

As discussed in chapter 2, the links between student mobility and employability have been described as the 'missing link in the story', at least for the UK, as this connection has been relatively neglected in the existing literature (King et al, 2010). Brooks and Waters (2011a) argued that whilst research has frequently identified employability advantages of accruing overseas 'western' credentials, the employment outcomes of British graduates educated

overseas are more ambiguous. The employment outcomes of Erasmus and other credit mobile exchange students have also been largely overlooked due to a lack of large-scale studies and data availability. Research has therefore tended to focus on quantitative surveys that have suggested that the employment prospects of students who study abroad are enhanced when compared to non-mobile students (for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Teichler and Janson, 2007). It has also been suggested that placements based in the UK can enhance the employment prospects of participating students (for example, Bowes and Harvey, 1999; Blackwell et al, 2001; HEFCE, 2004). There is, however, a gap in the literature that is yet to explore the employability related outcomes of placements conducted abroad.

As discussed in chapter 5, employability was the main driver to the mobility of students in this sample. Increased employability has also been found to be the most frequently cited, beneficial outcome of Erasmus work placement mobility by the students in this study. All students interviewed, and the majority of student reports, claimed that they believed that their placement abroad had enhanced their employability. As one student stated, the placement is 'a feather in the cap when looking for future employment' (R-13), which was a view shared by many students:

'You know the work experience, all that it entails, all that it signifies is a huge bonus for an employer and it looks great on your CV' (I-3).

'It shows future employees that I am adaptable and will not shy away from a challenge' (R-3).

'I think it looks good that I did a year abroad and with working with all different nationalities so yeah I think it will help me get a job' (I-21).

As also highlighted in chapter 5, male students tended to emphasise employability as a driver to their mobility more so than females. Interestingly, however, when asked to reflect on the effects of their time abroad, female students mentioned employability as a positive outcome just as often as males. Although females are not necessarily driven to work abroad because of employability, on reflection, the majority do see this as a main benefit of the time abroad. Females were, however, more likely to emphasise language

learning as a positive outcome of their stay abroad than males, which will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Interviewees often commented that their placement had enhanced their CV allowing them to stand out from other candidates who would not have completed a placement abroad. One student commented, 'I think because it stands out I suppose it makes employers a little bit curious so I think you're more likely to get an interview and then you're one step closer and I can expand on it a bit when I'm speaking to them face-to-face' (I-24). Similarly, another student noted, 'I have had the experience of not just work but work in a foreign country in a foreign language as well which is something that not a lot of people have at all so it will definitely help me to stand out in future job applications' (I-34). For these students, having both work experience and the added benefit of completing this placement abroad were a combination of skills that they believed employers would favour. As one interviewee stated, 'it gives it that extra wow factor' (I-40). Overall students therefore believed that work experience abroad would be, and in some cases had been, favoured by employers. Surveys have identified that employers value experiences of international study and the development of international skills (for example, Fielden, 2007; Hermans, 2007; Trooboff et al, 2007; Archer and Davison, 2008; Ehiyazaryan, 2009). This idea appears to be embedded in the minds of the students in this study who believed employers would appreciate their international work experience, thus increasing their employability. Erasmus work placements were therefore seen as an effective tool in allowing students to gain an advantage in the labour market. It has been argued that academic credentials alone no longer provide such an advantage (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). This view was very much present amongst the students in this study.

Kehm (2005) found that the majority of former Erasmus students believed that employers valued the personal outcomes of study abroad. Students in this study also often linked their increase in employability to the personal changes they had experienced following their time abroad. Personal changes such as their improved confidence, independence and maturity were seen as key factors in enhancing employability. One student commented, 'that's the biggest advantage I think, if I hadn't done it and was looking for a job as the same person I was in second year I don't know how I would be coping really' (I-17). Another student commented, 'just the fact that I feel more mature and so much more

confident. Knowing that I have worked for my agency and presented in front of huge companies and I just got the hang of it and now it feels natural' (I-17). This student believed that this personal change would benefit them greatly in their search for employment after graduating supporting the findings of Kehm (2005).

As a result of the increase in confidence, which was regularly experienced by students following their placement (discussed in more detail later in this chapter), the students often stated that they could perform better at interviews. One student commented, 'I had to do three interviews for the civil service and people that I met at the first one were so nervous and I was thinking I'm not really that bothered because I had been over to Germany. It just gives you more confidence' (I-16). Similarly two other students noted, 'that's another benefit I think I got out of the whole year actually that I have come out of uni and I am really relaxed in interviews, I don't get anxious or anything because I have done it a lot of times before' (I-29) and 'I believe that this new level of confidence will positively help me in future job interviews' (R-30). Students therefore often felt the placement experience had given them more confidence in interviews that would lead to success in securing a job. Students also felt better equipped to deal with the interview process as one student commented, 'I think having done that I could offer much more I think in an interview I would have more to say and more to offer and ability to deal with situations that come up. I think I wouldn't be going into it clueless I would have an idea of how things work' (I-25). Similar to the findings discussed here, King et al (2010) also found that students often felt they had increased their employability through studying abroad with many reporting to have used their experience in interviews.

A number of students also commented that they were more confident in applying for jobs that they previously may not have applied for. For example, one student commented, 'the placement was good experience to put on my CV, but more importantly, I feel confident about applying for the kind of jobs now which before I would not have even considered' (R-6) and another stated, 'it's one of the more scary things you can do and it definitely makes you feel more confident about going for a conventional job opportunity' (I-18). Students who worked in large internationally recognised companies also regularly commented that they thought the company reputation had increased their confidence in gaining employment as they believed it would impress potential employers. One student

stated, 'for me the fact I worked for a big, well known company that makes you more confident too because if you've got in there you can get in anywhere' (I-15).

One third of the students in this sample had graduated and therefore had experience of looking for and securing employment. These students often stated that their Erasmus work placement had benefitted them in finding employment. One student commented, 'the job that I did is proved really useful for my job applications too because a lot of the things I encountered in that job helps you answer all the questions where they say tell me about a situation where this happened and so on' (I-4). Another student stated, 'over the summer I worked at Leeds uni teaching English and I wouldn't have got that job if I hadn't had my year abroad' (I-33). Similarly, an interviewee claimed that the skills they gained during their placement had led to their current employment commenting 'one of the things I did on placement was about the social media campaign. Knowing about it meant they were keen to employ me because it's a niche area to know about which I think they were surprised about' (I-29). A student, who was doing a PhD at the time of the interview, also felt the work experience had allowed them to secure the PhD position stating 'I didn't have to do a masters whereas a lot of people would have had to show they could do research but I was able to express what I had experienced and learnt. It gave me an edge over others' (I-32). For these students the placement experience had undoubtedly, in their opinion, helped them to secure employment after graduation. Similarly, Kehm (2005) and Teichler and Janson (2007) found that a majority of former Erasmus students have quoted their study abroad as a factor that helped them obtain their first job.

Many of the students who had experienced searching for work after graduation reported that their placement experience had impressed employers. One interviewee commented, 'I went to a graduate fair in London and when I mentioned the placement they are really interested and people seem more excited about hiring you' (I-13). Another student stated, 'going abroad it does look good and people comment on it a lot and it's a talking point at interviews not just the CV... I started a job pretty quickly when I wanted one, also having the confidence to know that if I wanted a job I could go out and get one' (I-30). Another student noted, 'at the interview I had to give a presentation on a company and how they can grow and I did my presentation on Amadeus and like spoke all about my experience and the guy interviewing me was like 'you seem to have really enjoyed your time there'

and I was like yeah, so it definitely helped me get the job' (I-2). A number of students had therefore encountered situations where the placement had allowed them to impress potential employers. Likewise, Maiworm and Teichler (1996) stated that students who study abroad identify their international competence and experience as a reason why employers hire them and King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) also found that Erasmus students surveyed felt their knowledge acquired during their year abroad studying had given them a competitive advantage in the job market. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) did however assert that foreign language proficiency, maturity and personal development, knowledge and understanding of host country and developing new perspectives on their home country were rated as more worthwhile outcomes of the stay abroad than employment prospects.

From the students' perspective, an increase in employability is a main benefit of completing an Erasmus work placement. This differs from research that has focused on study abroad both for the whole of a degree or part of a degree. For example, Brooks and Waters (2009b) discovered that degree mobility, in some cases, had actually led to problems securing employment, due to the longer duration of overseas qualifications and a lack of knowledge about overseas universities amongst UK employers. In terms of Erasmus mobility, previous research has tended to conclude that outcomes such as personal growth/development and academic benefits are more beneficial than professional growth (for example King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Kehm, 2005; Stronkhorst, 2005). Therefore, this research has identified a major difference between study abroad and work placements abroad with increased employability often being the greatest outcome from the students' perspective.

In terms of future research, it would be interesting to explore the longer-term effects of work placement mobility, especially in relation to future employability and careers. As Erasmus work placements were introduced in 2007, this was not possible in this study. This research has indicated that work placement mobility can have a positive effect on students' employability in a number of ways; however, a longer-term study exploring the future careers of mobile work placement students and the ways in which they believe their careers to have been influenced by their Erasmus period would be interesting. It would also be beneficial to examine the future job types of Erasmus work placement students compared to study abroad students, students who participate in a placement in the UK,

and those who do not take a year out of their studies. This would enhance our understanding of how different mobility types can affect students' future careers.

Employability has been found to be an important driver to Erasmus work placement mobility and increased employability has also been identified as a main outcome of this mobility. If the debate surrounding mobility and employability is to be moved forward, a better understanding of employers' preferences and attitudes towards different forms of mobility also needs to be developed. A study focusing on what employers look for in graduates and in particular whether they favour graduates who have studied or worked abroad would be beneficial here. A large number of students in this study believed that employers would favour work experience abroad more than study abroad or work placements conducted in the UK. A number of students also claimed to have already experienced this whilst looking for employment. Research is needed to investigate whether this is in fact the case from the employers' perspective and how preferences vary by employment sector. A full understanding of employer preferences could be used to promote work placement mobility if it was confirmed that this mobility is favoured or appreciated by potential employers.

7.2.1 Contacts and references for future work

For a significant number of students in this study their Erasmus work placement led directly to an offer of future work with more than two fifths of the students being offered permanent jobs in their host placement companies. A number of other students also found opportunities for future employment through contacts established whilst completing their placement.

The students who were offered jobs following their placements often claimed they would not have had obtained an offer unless they had completed the placement. One student, who had returned to work in their host placement company after graduating, commented 'I think they wouldn't have taken me on had I not done my placement there so it was definitely on a experience basis and they knew me and knew how I worked and knew my skill level, so I would never have got the job if I had just applied directly' (I-8). Another student who had been offered a job once they graduated in their host company stated, 'I've got a job offer to go back if I want to that company because they liked me I guess' (I-

35). For these students, the experience gained during their placement had led directly to a future position within the host company, which, as highlighted in chapter 5, students had often hoped for.

A significant number of students also found future job opportunities through contacts they met whilst completing their placement. For example, one student commented, 'I wouldn't have got this job without having met them. The fact that it was abroad I think helped and refined the contacts I made because the international community is quite influential in the industry so immediately catapulting you into a kind of important group of people' (I-18). Contacts made during the placement period, not necessarily within the host company, were therefore seen as beneficial when looking for future employment:

'Every network is good and I think it's about 70% of jobs are found through networks. It has given me a wider variety of people from different countries and backgrounds so it can benefit me in the future, it makes your networks wider' (I-9).

'I'm always in contact with a few assistants who are good friends and they say "oh if you want to come work with us let me know and I can have a word" so you could feel the personal benefits of it too... you can see its good for the future' (I-21).

Similarly, Bakalis and Joiner (2004) reported that Australian students who studied abroad often gained access to global networks which might go on to provide employment opportunities in the future. A number of students also stated that contacts made whilst abroad would improve their employability by acting as referees in future job applications. One student commented 'I have been able to gain two references, one in a manufacturing field and another in an aerospace field which is great' (R-2) and another said 'references today are just invaluable, I don't think you get anywhere without references and I now have a great one from my boss on placement so I think that will really impress and convince people to hire me' (I-40).

As discussed in detail in chapter 2, the issue of unequal participation in student mobility and the role this potentially plays in reproducing advantage and maintaining class inequalities has gained increased attention over recent years (for example, Waters, 2006; 2007; Favell, 2008; Dhondt, 2008; Brooks and Waters, 2009a). This research has found that

students who participate in the Erasmus work placement programme often establish links and contacts with business that can lead to future employment. It could therefore be argued that participation in the programme may go on to advantage mobile students, leaving those who are unable to participate at a disadvantage in the labour market.

7.2.2 Impact on career path

As well as impacting on the students' employability, the vast majority of students in this research claimed that the placement affected their future career plans to some degree. This agrees with previous research findings as Little and Harvey (2006) asserted that work placements in the UK can help shape students' future careers, while Ingram and Peterson (2004) argued that study abroad can also impact students' future career plans.

For some students, the placement had confirmed the type of job they wanted to do prior to the placement, as one student commented, 'my placement experience has really helped me to understand my career prospects and I feel so much more confident and prepared to begin a career in coaching which I know for sure now I really want to do' (R-11). The placement had also influenced one student's decision to study for a PhD stating, 'the year abroad was pretty much the opportunity for me to figure out if I wanted to stay in research and it was invaluable in doing so' (I-32). For many other students their placement exposed them to a job role or career they wanted in the future that was very different to the type of job they wanted prior to the placement:

'I still want to work in the automotive industry but it's shown me I would rather be on the design side because some of it got quite repetitive but the design part really interesting, I think I would really want to be in that side' (I-1).

'Before I got my placement I wanted to go into more financial side but the placement was marketing which wasn't my first choice but it did open my mind to that marketing and sales side. I think after that I might go into more sales stuff after having done the marketing thing' (I-2).

These students had therefore changed their mind about their future career due to the experiences they faced whilst completing their placement. Students who did not enjoy their job role often discovered a career that they did not want to pursue. One student

commented, 'at the end of the year I decided it wasn't really for me but at least I can say I tried that for a year and it's not really for me so I can cross that one off the list and try something else' (I-31) and another student stated, 'It confirmed what I didn't want to do, translation was in the back of my mind as a back-up but it's not for me, It's deadly, so It taught me not to do that. But it did confirm I want to work with my languages' (I-22). Another student similarly commented, 'I came to realise that lab work is not my calling, yet am so grateful that I was able to learn this in the manner I did rather than half way through a PhD!' (R-22). Students saw this as positive as they had avoided beginning a career or job they would not enjoy after graduation as they had already discovered it was not right for them. This again confirms the suggestion made in chapter 6 that even negative aspects of the Erasmus work placement experience are seen as positive learning experiences that benefit students in the long term.

The size of the placement host company often influenced the students' preference for the type of company they want to work for in the future. For example, one student who worked for a large company commented, 'I thought well I don't really want to work in a big company because I felt like I was just a small fish in a really massive pond' (I-29). Similarly another student said 'well I want a smaller company really, I think I want to progress quickly which I couldn't do in a company like that' (I-19). In contrast to this, a student who worked in a small company commented 'I definitely don't want to work somewhere like that again, I need more people around me, more going on and more opportunities I guess' (I-39). For these students, the placement had shown them the type of company they would prefer to work for in the future.

Erasmus work placement students gain hands on experience, often to a variety of job roles, which the students in this study frequently described as invaluable to informing their future career choices. As one student commented 'you find out what you're good at and what you're not good at so it frames the decisions of what jobs you want to seek' (I-12). This supports findings by Ingram and Peterson (2004) and Norris and Gillespie (2008) who found that US students who had studied abroad often claimed their time abroad went on to affect their career choices. In terms of the impact of Erasmus study abroad on career paths, Otero (2008) found that over 58% of students reported that their Erasmus period had changed their career-related attitudes and aspirations to a large or some extent. In

contrast to this, nearly all of the students in this study claimed their career attitudes and plans had been changed through their Erasmus work placement suggesting that career influence may be more prominent for Erasmus work placement students than for those who study abroad. The reasons for this is likely to be that the opportunity to try a certain job or career is exclusive to work placement mobility and is not something students can gain through a period studying abroad. This suggestion is supported by findings from the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) who contended that students who choose an internship abroad are more likely to report that their time abroad ignited interest in a career direction than students who studied abroad (Dwyer and Peters, 2004). A large number of students in this study stated that they would recommend the work placement to others because of the role it played in influencing and informing their career decisions for the future, 'I would definitely recommend it, especially for people who are unsure about what they want to do in the future because it's definitely confirmation and a way of trying it out... for me that was the greatest benefit of the whole programme' (I-11).

7.3 Academic effects

Student mobility has regularly been associated with enhanced degree results and an increased likelihood to continue to further study (Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Hadis, 2005; Findlay et al, 2006; Bracht et al, 2006; Sanz-Sainz and Roldan-Miranda, 2008). Research that has explored the academic effects of study abroad has tended to take a quantitative approach often calculating the differing academic performance of mobile and non-mobile students (for example, Findlay et al, 2006; HEFCE, 2009). This approach is however problematic, as many other factors are associated with degree performance (Findlay et al, 2006). In contrast to these studies, this research explores the academic effects of work placement mobility from a qualitative approach, exploring how and why students believe their time abroad affected their academic studies on return to the UK. Both positive and negative effects have been identified in this study.

7.3.1 Positive academic effects

A number of students in this research stated that the Erasmus placement allowed them to improve their grades on return to university in the UK. In many cases, this was a result of

increased language skills; for example, one student commented, 'If I hadn't gone I wouldn't have got a first in French which would have probably meant I wouldn't have got my 2:1 overall' (I-4) and another commented, 'obviously it was a massive help for my languages, I jumped up a degree classification whilst I was there' (R-12). It was not, however, only an increase in language skills that had led to improved grades as students often reported that they had learnt skills they believed had been beneficial for their academic studies. For example, one student noted, 'I have learnt a lot on excel that I can bring back with me here now' (I-1) and another commented 'academically I got a lot of theory and knowledge' (I-15). Often these skills were discipline specific or could help students on particular modules during their final year. One student commented, 'I definitely understand finance a lot more this year' (I-7) and another noted, 'I took one module called multinational and transnational communications and whenever were talking I can relate examples to my year so that really helps' (I-17). For these students, the practical experience and skills gained whilst working abroad went on to help them academically. This was also found to be a benefit of work placements based in the UK by Auburn (2007), who stated that placement students often claimed to have applied or used things learnt whilst on placement in the final year of their course. A small number of students were also able to use their placement host company in their final year dissertation or coursework:

'It gave me an idea for my dissertation, I made fantastic contacts who I contacted later on to interview for my dissertation, the overall experience it changed a lot of things for my studies at university' (I-9).

'In my final year I kept links with my company I did some work for my dissertation in partnership with the company, we did work closely together for that and they sent me resources, it became a valid project, I think it impressed my lecturers as well which can't hurt!' (I-18).

A significant number of students commented that their placement experience had provided them with inspiration to do well at university in order to secure a good job after graduating. One student, for example, commented, 'I was more focused I just wanted to finish and get out into life and start working so I wanted to get good grades and succeed' (I-15) and another interviewee stated, 'when you've been on a placement and you can see

what's out there and what you can go on to do with yourself it really focuses your mind. To see the work you could be doing suddenly makes it important to do well' (I-18). For these students, the placement experience had encouraged them to work hard on return to university. Mandilaras (2004) similarly suggested that work placements completed in the students' home country of study made students realise that their future professional development is, to an extent, related to their academic performance. Mandilaras (2004) argued that this can stimulate the students' ambition so that they come back to university more focused and determined to do well. This research has found evidence to support this argument and also the suggestion made by Fielden et al (2007) that a period of study abroad can reinforce students' commitment to focus on their studies.

A significant number of students also noted that the placement had improved their time management and given them a changed approach to work. The majority of students worked from 9am until 5pm during their placement and this had often improved the students' time management skills and work-life balance. The students believed this had improved their approach to their academic studies on return to university. An interviewee commented, 'having a structured week it was brilliant and it has without a shadow of doubt helped me go into the final year, waking up on time, going to lectures and being awake all day' (I-20) and another stated, 'I'm not really in a student mode anymore like going out every night anymore. It makes me concentrate more on work I guess' (I-14). These students had managed to bring their attitude towards working full time back into their academic studies. For a number of students, the placement had also taught them to create boundaries between work and spare time. As one interviewee stated, 'when I came back I was able to treat university a bit more like work so working hard during hours and not just turning it into a continuous thing that you kind of half did all the time' (I-18). Another student similarly commented, 'my boundaries became better, like before I always felt like I had work hanging over me but I became better at switching between work and fun time' (I-33).

Students, therefore, regularly argued that the work placement benefitted them academically in numerous ways. Existing research has focused almost exclusively on positive academic effects of student mobility; however, a number of students in this study

reported that they felt their Erasmus work placement had not impacted or had actually negatively impacted on their studies on return to the UK.

7.3.2 Negative academic effects

A small but significant number of interviewees stated that their placement had not been beneficial for their academic studies. This tended to be the case for students who did not enjoy their work placement or encountered problems at work. A student who did not feel they were given enough work to do during their placement commented, 'because at the office I wasn't really doing much I don't really think it benefitted me that way' (I-13). Another commented, 'I did go there with the attitude of go on placement work hard with structured time management and stuff but because I was in such a mundane environment with not a lot of work it didn't benefit me like that, I came back even more chilled than before' (I-10). This student went on to state 'It did show me how important the final year is and I need to get the work done but I think I hoped to get more of a work ethic than I did' (I-10).

A number of students also felt that the placement experience had made them want to make the most of their final year before beginning a full time job. One student stated, 'I'm going to make the most of it because I'll be working forever after this' (I-12) and another commented, 'It also made me think when I came back this is my last year of living like a student so to make the most of it' (I-32). For these students, the placement had actually discouraged them from working on return to university as one student stated, 'I just keep thinking it's my final year now I'm just going to sleep as much as possible' (I-7). Some students were therefore critical of the idea that the placement helped them to improve their time management. One student commented, 'everyone who comes back from placement says they will do 9-5 but they don't, well I didn't' (I-4) and another stated 'I don't think it will help me do 9-5 or anything' (I-6).

Other students commented that they had struggled to adjust back into academic studies following their placement. One student commented, 'at uni its took me a couple of weeks getting back into having to motivate myself to having to do work outside of uni time, I fell slightly behind, so it's kind of been the reverse and made me worse without the structure' (I-1). Another student described how having experienced working life they became less

interested in studying, commenting, 'I think I was just losing interest with studying. I think it's because I was just ready to go out and work and start my life really' (I-24). Other students spoke about feeling unhappy on return to the UK as they were disappointed their Erasmus time had come to an end. This reflects what has been termed the 'Post-Erasmus Syndrome' (Fiorella de Nicola, ND) that consists of students having trouble adapting back to their former lifestyle and returning to university following a period spent studying abroad. This syndrome appeared to be present amongst a small number of students in this study who stated that they struggled to adjust back to studying and felt unhappy following the conclusion of their Erasmus period. For example, one student commented 'I was just miserable to be home I think, I didn't really want to study anymore I was kind of done with it. I just wanted to go back really' (I-40).

The existing literature focusing on the academic effects of student mobility has focused almost exclusively on positive effects (for example, Teichler and Jahr, 2001; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Hadis, 2005; Bract et al, 2006; Findlay et al, 2006; Sanz-Sainz and Roldan-Miranda, 2008). Although this research has found evidence to support the suggestion that mobility can benefit students academically, this is not always the case, with a small number of students claiming the time abroad had been negative for their final year studies. Often universities encourage mobility because of the expected positive academic outcomes (Findlay et al, 2006), but, as identified in this research, this is not always the case.

7.4 Cultural and personal effects

A number of cultural and personal effects have been identified by the students in this study including language learning, changes in cultural attitudes and awareness, personal benefits and changes in identity.

7.4.1 Language learning

The degree to which students use the host language during their time abroad has been found to differ greatly (discussed further in chapter 6). Subsequently, the language learning outcomes of the stay abroad have also been found to vary substantially. The language outcomes of the stay abroad are greatly dependent on factors such as the level

of language skills prior to the placement, type of host company and job role, living arrangements and social interactions. Previous research has tended to take a quantitative approach to exploring the links between study abroad and language learning recording the language competencies of students before and after a period spent studying abroad, often comparing the results to a non-mobile control group (for example, Teichler and Maiworm, 1997 and Sanz-Sainz and Roldan-Miranda, 2008). In contrast to this, the qualitative approach adopted in this study has revealed the reasons behind the varying levels of language learning between students. These influences are discussed here to reveal the complex factors that influence the language learning of students whilst working abroad.

Language has been found to be an important driver to the mobility of a large number of students in this study (see chapter 5). The majority of language students, and a number of non-language students did report to have greatly improved their language skills through completing an Erasmus placement and, therefore, this aim had been achieved. One interviewee commented, 'last August I was very scared and self-conscious when speaking German and just one year later I sometimes I say a German word or sentence to my family by mistake' (R-4). Students often commented that the placement experience had given them the opportunity to use the host language in their daily life, which had improved their language skills significantly:

'Every day was filled with a new opportunity to improve, whether it was reading a French newspaper on the way into work on the metro, or watching television after a day at work, I could see that my oral and understanding was improving tremendously. I instantly noticed the difference from before I left for my Erasmus year' (R-14)

'In Germany you have to and you're speaking it all the time so your brain just gets quicker and quicker, it takes me a couple of days to get into it but then by brain starts to think in German' (I-16)

This supports findings from numerous studies which have found a period spent studying abroad can lead to improved language competencies (for example, Guntermann, 1992; Meara, 1994; Lapkin, Hart and Swain, 1995; Teichler and Maiworm, 1997; Fielden et al, 2007; Sanz-Sainz and Roldan-Miranda, 2008). A large number of students reported that

they had gained confidence using the host language, which had benefitted their language competencies overall. Confidence in language skills has previously been identified by Freed (1993) as being a major benefit of spending time studying abroad and this was noted by the majority of language students in this study. One student stated, 'my language confidence has been boosted because before I went I hardly ever spoke in lectures but now I can because I understand what's being said and I can take part more' (I-7) and another commented, 'it has improved my confidence because before going I wouldn't have a conversation in German I wouldn't be able to write an email in German and send it out. Now I would write an email and I could hold the conversation and go out and have fun in German and understand jokes so it improved my confidence' (I-9).

The social interactions of students have been found to affect language outcomes. As discussed in chapter 6, a large number of students in this study socialised with locals and they frequently claimed that this interaction had subsequently improved their language skills. One student, for example, commented, 'meeting and socialising with so many Italians meant my language improved exponentially, and I even picked up local slang and fragments of dialect' (R-22) and another similarly stated, 'I learnt so much from just being with my friends and they taught me all sorts of slang and sayings and stuff so that really helped me. I have become fluent really' (I-38). Students' social interactions are therefore an important determining factor in the language gains of students. Students who socialised with locals reported much higher language gains than those who socialised with English students or international students who they communicated with in English.

Students often stated that they did not improve their language skills as much as they had wished to due to a number of reasons. As discussed in chapter 6, a problem encountered by a large number of students in this study was locals often spoke to them in English in situations where they were attempting to use the host language. Because of this, a number of students felt their language learning had been hindered. One student commented, 'I didn't really gain too much French, it has improved a bit but not as much as I thought it would because I didn't think people would speak as much English as they did' (I-20). Other students did not feel they had the opportunity to use the host language enough in the working environment as one student stated 'my Spanish is not good I got a below average mark the other day. The practical application of it was just nothing whilst I was there' (I-

39). This student worked in a small company with one other employee and therefore did not get the opportunity to use the host language. Language students who worked in English speaking companies were also often disappointed with how much they were able to use the language. One student noted, 'I think if I could do it again I would go to a French speaking company to improve my French because I didn't see much of an improvement because I was speaking English all the time' (I-27). Accordingly, students who work in companies speaking and working in the host language reported great improvements in their language skills.

A number of students reported that although their oral language skills had improved their written skills had not improved and in some cases they had actually decreased. For example, one student commented, 'I think I'm more confident speaking French, but I just realised my grammar was still horrendous' (I-2) and another student commented 'my spoken German is now much better, I think my written German has probably got a bit worse because I'm used to having German spell-check' (I-13). The students had therefore often been required to improve their speaking skills in a working context but not necessarily their written language skills. As one student stated, 'depending on what your job is you're probably not going to be reading and writing whereas when you go home you need to talk to people in shops and ask questions and that just involves speaking so that's the main one that improves when you're away' (I-3). One student noted that they believed this is a drawback of completing a work placement as opposed to studying abroad as they commented, 'one thing I lost which I think people got when they went to university is that they were taking Spanish lessons for foreigners to improve their grammar whereas I wasn't really working on that at all' (I-22). It appears therefore that the work placement is often beneficial in terms of improving speaking skills but it does not always give students the opportunity to improve their written language skills. However, this was not the case for all students as a number of students, particularly those using the host language directly in their work, did gain writing skills. As one student noted, 'I think a more formal writing style helped too, that definitely improved' (I-23) and another student commented 'I think it helped my language skills a lot, definitely written skills with having to translate and my reading skills too' (I-26). The types and level of language skills gained therefore depend

greatly on the type of job role students undertake and the degree to which they use the host language in their working life.

Non-language students have often been neglected in research investigating the language learning outcomes of study abroad. These students, however, form an interesting group as their language learning has been found in this study to be extremely varied and also often the most extreme. A large number of non-language students were found to avoid using the host language and therefore did not gain language skills whilst abroad. This was particularly common amongst the students who worked in English speaking companies and those socialised and lived with English people. This contrasts with research that has claimed that a time spent abroad leads to improved language skills (for example, Meara, 1994; Teichler and Maiworm, 1997). A small number of non-language students did, however, attempt to learn the host language whilst abroad and in some cases, they were very successful. These students tended to be those who worked in smaller companies with few other English interns and those who chose not to live or socialise in an English group. One of these students stated, 'I can hold a basic conversation now. If someone said something to me I would understand the majority of it maybe not a few words' (I-37) and another noted 'I can hold a conversation without even thinking about it now which I couldn't before. It was really hard at first, but yeah I massively improved' (I-36). These students confirm that it is possible for non-language students to work abroad and gain language skills despite a lack of language skills prior to the placement. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the environments students choose to spend time in greatly affects the possibility of this occurring.

A number of non-language students who did not learn the host language whilst abroad expressed concern that this may be a problem when looking for jobs after graduation. These students worried that potential employees would expect them to have learnt the host language and because they had not, they feared this would reflect badly on them. For example, one student commented 'I just think it's going to be difficult for when I go to my graduate job interviews and they say can you speak German and I say no. Then that's going to be a difficult conversation' (I-35). Another student remarked 'I do sometimes worry that because I did my placement in Spain they will expect me to be able to offer those language skills but I really can't. It does sound kind of bad that I was there for a year and didn't learn

it' (I-40) and another noted, 'I think because they see that you have done a year abroad they would expect you to be at a certain level with certain aspects' (I-10). In the case of non-language students the lack of language skills gained from their Erasmus placement was therefore often a concern and these students regretted not learning the host language whilst abroad.

Assessing whether the language gains of students varied according to gender was extremely complex. Female students were more likely to report language gains than males and to mention language gains as a main benefit of their time abroad. This is, however, expected to be due to the higher number of female language students included in the study and also due to the living arrangements and social groups students chose which meant females had more interaction with locals than males (see chapter 6). More male students reported to have acquired no language skills whilst abroad, but this again is due to the fact that more non-language male students were included in the sample than females. In terms of the non-language students, roughly the same proportion of females and males attempted to learn the host language. The living arrangements, job type and social interactions of students were therefore found to affect the language outcomes of the stay abroad to a greater extent than gender.

In terms of language outcomes, the effects of completing an Erasmus work placement vary greatly. Improved language competencies are for a number of students one of the main benefits of taking part in the Erasmus work placement programme, but this was not the case for all students involved, supporting DeKeyser's (2007) argument that the language gains acquired by mobile students is a complex issue to assess. As discussed here, various factors such as level of language skills, job type, working environment and social interactions determine the language gains of students. As suggested by Coleman (1997), it is therefore not simply a case of being abroad which improves language skills, as it has been found in this research that the context of the stay abroad and the environments students are exposed to are important factors to consider.

7.4.2 Cultural attitudes and awareness

Student mobility is often assumed to help develop cultural awareness amongst students that can better equip students for living and working in an increasingly connected world

(Fielden, 2007). The cultural benefits of studying abroad have also been found to be a positive outcome from the students' perspective (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Marcotte et al, 2007). This was also found to be the case in this study as the majority of students felt they increased their cultural awareness, which they viewed as a positive outcome from their time abroad:

'I think you just learn things that are so intangible that you can't really describe. Like different ways of doing things and different ways of dealing with people. Just being more open internationally to different cultures and experiences' (I-4).

'It has sort of informed me more about different cultures and helped me to learn about how the cultures are difference' (I-34).

'I think I have become a lot more open to different cultures' (R-14).

As shown in these quotes, students had often learnt about other cultures and subsequently increased their openness to difference. A number of students also described how they had improved their tolerance of other cultures. An interviewee noted, 'I was living with a French guy but he was Jewish and he had his religious needs when it came to cooking and stuff so that made me more aware and tolerant' (I-4). Experiencing difference had therefore taught students about different nationalities and religions. These findings support Anderson et al (2006), who suggested that mobile students lessen their tendency to see other cultures as better than their own and improve their ability to accept and adapt to cultural differences. It also agrees with Ingram and Peterson's (2004) finding that intercultural awareness can be a significant outcome from a period spent abroad.

In some cases, students reported that their time abroad had broken down previously held stereotypes of the host society. One student, for example, commented, 'it opened my mind a bit more than it was before I went because everyone has a stereotype of Germany. Everyone thinks it's strict and they follow the rules and everything meticulous and it's not really true. The people are different I mean yeah there are rules and it's a bit like that sometimes but then you have a good time and it is good' (I-35). This supports the findings of Otero (2008) who claimed that over 92% of Erasmus study abroad students surveyed reported that the period abroad had changed their understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background to a large or some extent. Maiworm and Teichler (1996)

similarly discovered that 85% of language students who had studied abroad claimed it had deepened their awareness of the culture of the host country.

In contrast to this, however, other students reported that their experience had actually reinforced or created stereotypes of the host society as one student stated, 'I think in part it reinforces stereotypes, I think when you're there you become aware of the difference you don't really know about' (I-25). For a number of students although their cultural awareness had increased, negative national stereotypes had in fact been reinforced. Examples of this are shown in the following quotes:

'In Florence people weren't welcoming, they were cold. I found that difficult to deal with when people slam doors in your face and don't say thank you or acknowledge you. You don't notice it when you're on holiday but when you're working it really wears on you. I don't have that experience where I'm from, you know good old Yorkshire folk, we're not like that so I do think it was cultural clash' (I-3).

'You don't get any German gentlemen. The whole time I was there a man never opened a door for me and if you were getting on a train they would push past you, if there was an old lady or pregnant lady they won't stand up for them. I know its small things and maybe this country is over polite but for me if you see an old person or woman you should give them your seat if you're 20 years old!' (I-16).

The ESN (2008) asserted that students who go abroad to study are better prepared for intercultural dialogue. The findings of this research support this suggestion as many students stated that they had improved their communication skills when speaking to people from different cultures and this had often affected their behaviour on return to the UK. In particular, students often reported that they had changed their approach to non-native English speakers in the UK. One student commented, 'I can empathise better with non-English speaking people in this country' (R-23) and another stated, 'It's definitely changed my opinion of people who don't speak the language or don't speak the same language as me. I have a much greater sympathy for people who can't express themselves because of a language barrier so it's changed my opinion from that perspective' (I-8). Students often felt more aware of how to communicate with individuals who did not speak English as their first language, 'before I went abroad I wouldn't speak slowly or clearly I

would just speak at a million miles an hour but now I appreciated that English isn't their first language so there's no point motoring away, it's nice to take your time and make sure they understand' (I-12). The majority of students in this study noted this change, irrespective of whether they had learnt the host language whilst abroad. The findings of this study therefore support the suggestion made by commentators such as Williams (2005) that student mobility can improve intercultural communication skills, intercultural adaptability and intercultural sensitivity.

The changing cultural attitudes and development of communication skills students acquired through their time abroad has been found to affect the way students approach and treat international students on return to the UK. As discussed in chapter 2, Tang et al (2009) identified that a period spent abroad can affect UK students' opinions towards international students and integration at their home HEI. Tang et al (2009) is the only research study that has explored this issue and it therefore remains a gap in the literature. This research has found substantial evidence to support the claims made by Tang et al (2009). Students often felt more prepared, equipped and willing to support and communicate with international students when they returned to the UK for their final year of studies. For example, one student commented, 'I think it's made me more compassionate towards international students because I know how they feel and I know I wasn't a student but I was still in a new country... I suppose I can relate to their situation and I think I want them to feel welcomed here and to get to experience British culture because a lot of them don't' (I-33) and another stated, 'I am more interested in seeing how they are dealing with being in England because it would be nice to see how they are feeling about my country and it would be nice to help them because I'm sure it's not too easy being here' (I-3).

Many students actively became involved with international or visiting Erasmus students in the UK on return from their time abroad which they claimed was due to their own experience abroad. One student commented, 'you've got to be inclusive and drag people along to stuff kind of thing to include people. Like in my final yeah I got hooked up with Erasmus people and helped them out and invited them to our events and parties. Because I knew how difficult it was from my experience' (I-4). Similarly another student said 'I have joined a few groups where we help out with international students and I'm in a buddy

programme where you get hooked up with other international students to help them with problems and advice' (I-7). A third student noted, 'I have met some Germans and were meeting up every Friday to speak a bit of English and a bit of German. I didn't do that in the second year and I could have I just couldn't be bothered so it's made me get involved' (I-23). This finding suggests that encouraging outgoing mobility from the UK could help overcome the problem identified by authors such as Pritchard and Skinner (2002) that international students in the UK often fail to establish relationships with home UK students.

Many students stated that they wanted to offer international students in the UK the opportunity to experience life from a local perspective because that was often what they themselves had wanted from their time abroad. One student, for example, noted, 'I made really good friends with some of the Spanish girls in the final year because I really wanted to help them make the most of their time here so I like had them over for tea with my parents and showed them my town and stuff like that' (I-38). The ways in which students interact with international students are therefore often greatly affected by the students' own experiences abroad. This finding greatly support Tang et al's (2009) suggestion that outgoing mobility from the UK can benefit international students in the UK, supporting the argument that the links between incoming and outgoing mobility need to be explored further. Interestingly, a number of students also stated that they had, or planned to, take this attitude into the workplace also. One interviewee commented, 'say if we had a colleague who joined our company who wasn't that competent at learning English I would go out of my way to help because I have been there myself and had experience of that' (I-18). This suggests that it is not only international students who benefit from UK students having experiences abroad but also international workers who interact with previously mobile UK students. This is an important finding as in the context of an increasingly competitive global HE market, improving students' experiences in the UK is important. The link between incoming and outgoing mobility from the UK requires further attention.

7.4.3 Personal change and benefits

Fielden et al (2007) argued that overseas work and study placements provide clear benefits for students' personal development. A number of other studies have also found that

student mobility for studies can lead to numerous changes and development at the personal level. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), for example, found that 'maturity and personal development' were ranked as the most worthwhile outcome of studying abroad. Many other studies have also referred to personal growth or development as a positive outcome of study abroad (Stronkhorst, 2005). Such research has tended to state that personal development and change occurs but the type and degree of change and how this can affect other elements of students' lives are, however, yet to be fully explored.

All interviewees and the majority of student reports mentioned confidence as a main personal benefit they gained from their time abroad. One student noted, 'my placement has most of all boosted my level of confidence' (R-30) and another commented 'obviously coming out of the placement it has obviously helped me with confidence' (I-20). The experience of living abroad and meeting new people was found to boost students' confidence that they felt had benefitted them positively on return to the UK. One student stated, 'If you don't talk to people when you're there I wouldn't have met anyone at all so it's only through talking to people and chatting and getting to know people that I had a good time. I'm definitely more confident' (I-23) and another commented, 'I went quite shy, like I wasn't great on the social scene but when I got back I was just way more outgoing and I felt loads more confident in myself because I had seen places and done things' (I-29). This increase in confidence was often very important for students as it benefitted them academically, socially and professionally.

In addition to confidence, independence and maturity were also frequently mentioned as being positive personal benefits gained from the time abroad. One student commented, 'I felt more adult. I probably went as a boy to be honest and when I came back I was more mature really' (I-29) and another interviewee stated, 'It made me grow up and be a bit more realistic about life. When I started my placement I guess I was a bit naive and childish but when I finished I was more grown up' (I-15). The environment students had been exposed to whilst abroad had therefore required them to change as one student stated, 'I have definitely grown up, I feel more independent and responsible. Because I was just out there alone so I had to be' (I-7). The students often linked their increase in maturity to their time spent in a working environment, as this often required them to behave in a mature and professional manner. Murphy-Lejeune (2008) identified the intensive nature of

the study abroad experience claiming that the general student mobility experience is a potentially intensive formative situation in that individuals are pushed to change under pressure from the environment. This research has similarly found that the working environments students were exposed to often lead to personal changes.

The concept of 'empowerment' is appropriate when discussing the personal changes students experience following their time abroad. Empowerment has been defined as 'as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives' (Page and Czuba, 1999) and generally refers to individuals gaining power over their personal self in a positive way. Empowerment is, however, a problematic and complex term as its definition depends on the context in which it is used (Leach et al, 2001). As shown in the quotes above, students in this study often returned from their stay abroad feeling more confident, mature and with a more positive outlook on what they can achieve in the future. Completing a placement abroad was seen as a challenge and once completed the students gained confidence knowing they had been successful in completing this challenge. As one student described 'after having lived in a country I'd only visited once, alone, I feel as though there's nothing I can't do' (R-14) and another stated 'literally I feel like I can take the world on now' (I-40). The descriptions the students gave of the personal change they experienced due to their time abroad reflected very much with the idea of empowerment with many students returning with a renewed enthusiasm and motivation for study and work, new life goals and a clearer idea of what their future may hold and what they can achieve. One student noted, 'I became much stronger than I thought I could, braver, more ambitious, more in control, more outgoing and independent' (R-12). The concept of empowerment has not previously been linked to student mobility; however, it has been linked to other forms of migration in terms of the empowerment of women (for example Ryan, 2004; Piper, 2004). The concept of empowerment has been identified as appropriate for describing the personal changes students experience following a period spent working abroad.

Students who encountered problems during their placement claimed to have gained many personal benefits as a result of facing these problems. For example, one student noted, 'I think I'm more thick skinned now, especially after Italy, it was such a shock and so hard. Stuff like that and difficult situations like that you develop strategies for dealing with it and

I have now so that will help me with potential problems in the future' (I-3). Another student who encountered difficulties in one of their placements similarly commented 'I worked in a hard environment and went through hard times and got over all of them. So I have been through hard times so anything that happened here it wasn't an issue anymore I always remembered what I have been through before' (I-12). Another student stated 'I think I changed a lot, I feel like it was the hardest thing I have ever done so now I feel like well bring it on you know! I'm sure there are things in life that will be harder but it was really hard and so I just feel quite up for a challenge' (I-30). For these students the problems they encountered whilst abroad had in fact benefitted them personally as they felt that after the problems they faced abroad they could face future problems successfully.

Otero (2008) argued that studying abroad affects the attitudes and values of participants, this has also been found to be the case with a number of students in this study. One student commented 'I guess it just showed me how strong I am and what's important to me. For example like how much you take for granted family and friends' (I-10). Another student stated 'I definitely changed after being in Germany because you have to adapt and you find out more about yourself and what you value' (I-12). This student went on to state 'you look at things in a different light so you become less concerned about materialistic things and more concerned about people that care about you and the love they have for you. That sounds a bit wet. You just kind of appreciate the time you have with people you care about more because you don't see them on a regular basis and you're out of touch with their life' (I-12). For these students, the time abroad had greatly impacted on how they see their lives and what they value. All of the students interviewed claimed that the personal change and development they had experienced as a result of their time abroad had been positive with many claiming they had become a 'better person' (I-40). This supports the findings of Papatsiba (2005b) who argued that French Erasmus study abroad students gained a positive perception of themselves following a period abroad.

The changes students experienced due to their time abroad were often very individual making them difficult to generalise about. For example, one student who claimed they were previously known as 'quite loud and opinionated' commented 'I'm quieter, which is linked to thinking about things more like I don't say things that aren't relevant anymore.

I'm much more passive I think. I go with the flow more, more relaxed.' (I-39). Another student stated 'I used to be quite a stressed out person but after the placement I just chilled out, I suppose I just saw the bigger picture and it's not worth being like I was' (I-40). Although the personal effects were often very individual, all students expressed the view that the changes they experienced at the personal level had been positive. As one student commented, 'I got to sort of start again and rediscover myself and be a new person' (I-34)

7.4.4 A European Identity?

'Cross-border people mobility has long been seen as a promising method to promote European integration' (Sigalas, 2010: 241) and it has often been claimed that a period spent studying abroad can foster a sense of 'Europeanness' amongst Erasmus students (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Fligstein, 2008). This suggestion has, however, been criticised by commentators such as Papatsiba (2005b), who argued that students showed hardly any increased level of European identity after their stay abroad and Sigalas (2009) who similarly asserted that studying abroad did not contribute towards the development of a European consciousness or identity for British students. During the interviews for this study some interesting points were raised in relation to changes in the students national or European identity. It is important to note that this research was not designed to explore this area in-depth and therefore the results must be treated with caution.

A number of students commented during the interviews that they had returned to the UK feeling more European than they felt prior to their Erasmus period. One student commented, 'I definitely feel changed. I don't feel especially British now, I wouldn't say I feel German at all, but maybe European is a good way of putting it' (I-18) and similarly another student stated, 'I think I feel more European having had experience living there and seeing it first-hand. I think experiencing different cultures in Europe makes you feel more European really if that makes sense' (I-27). For these students spending time in another European country and with other European people had increased the degree to which they identify with a European identity, therefore supporting King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) and Fligstein's (2008) findings.

This was not, however, the case with all students in this sample and a substantial number of students reported that their time abroad had actually made them feel more British or

English. As one student commented, 'I had never really questioned my Britishness until I went there but it suddenly becomes a massive big deal and becomes a major part of your identity. Like everything you do is because of your nationality. You become this identity' (I-25). As described by this student, where differences between cultures had become apparent this had made the students feel more aware of their British identity. Another student commented, 'before going I considered myself more European than British but having been abroad and now coming back to my homeland if you like I am now more proud of the British identity, I'm more aware of my Britishness and identity now than before' (I-3). Through encountering difference, students had therefore become aware of, and in some cases reinforced their British identity. As one student noted, 'it made me feel more British, not having met any other British people, I was constantly having to sort of reveal my Britishness and talk about where I'm from and constantly having to reveal my identity if you like so it made me think more about it' (I-8). This supports findings by Sigalas (2010) that study abroad can have an adverse effect on the development of a European identity.

It was not, however, simply the case that students felt more European or more British or English following their time abroad, as it was in many cases much more complex than this. One student, for example, stated 'I would always class myself as British, it's so obvious I'm British so I couldn't just fade into the background. But I definitely felt more connected when I was living on the continent. I feel more European but I still wouldn't say I was European' (I-32). Students who do feel more European following their time abroad do not therefore necessarily identify with being European. Other students also reported that their time abroad had made them feel more British and more European at the same time:

'I suppose I do feel slightly more European but then again I also felt more English because I knew I was English and I was an English person in a foreign land. If you hear people speaking English you think oh yes that's my identity. But I would say I feel a bit more European and also if it's possible a bit more English. Environmentally wise I felt more European because I was interacting more within Europe and with European but internally I had that sense of being English' (I-12).

The effects on students' identities were therefore ambiguous and difficult to generalise about. When gender is taken into account, no significant difference can be identified; however, the social groups students spend time with, which differed according to gender, do play an important role. Students who spent time in an English social group almost exclusively stated that they returned home feeling more British or English. This was often argued to be because the students created a group that was often known as 'the English group'. The students therefore identified with this group making them feel more English as they became more aware of their identity. In contrast, students who spent time with either locals or other international students expressed much more complex changes in their identities and were more likely to state that they felt more European following their time abroad.

This research has found evidence to support claims made by King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) and Fligstein (2008) that student mobility can make students feel more European but it has also been identified that this is not always the case and the effects on students' national identity can be ambiguous. Interactions with European and international students have been found to lead to increased feelings of Europeanness, whereas socialisation with English students can have an adverse effect on the development of a European identity. Therefore, in support of Sigalas (2010), this study has found that socialisation plays a key role in the development of a European identity. The qualitative approach taken to explore this issue has revealed the complexities of the effects of student mobility on identities. These changes could not have been identified in a quantitative study because students in this study expressed views that could not be easily quantified. This suggests that future research in the area should adopt a qualitative approach to fully explore this effect of mobility.

7.5 Future mobility plans and attitudes

The future mobility of mobile students has important policy implications both for the host country and the country of origin (Dreher and Poutvaara, 2006) and has therefore become an important consideration over recent years. There is a general consensus that mobility during the course of university leads to a much greater likelihood of international mobility after graduating and there is a growing body of evidence to support this claim (for

example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; HEFCE, 2004; Kehm, 2005; Findlay et al, 2006; Oosterbeek and Webbink 2006; Parey and Waldinger, 2007,2011). In order to explore this potential outcome, interviewees were asked about their mobility since completing their placement, their future mobility plans and whether they felt the placement had influenced these plans. At the time of the interviews, two thirds of interviewees were studying for their final year at university and one third had graduated. Only one third had therefore had the opportunity to work or move abroad following their studies. It was therefore important to explore the future plans and attitudes of students in relation to mobility. Exploring the mobility plans and attitudes of students shortly after their time abroad also overcame the potential problems involved in contacting students once they have engaged in future mobility outlined by Teichler and Jahr (2001).

Of the students who had graduated at the time of the interview, a third were working outside of the UK and just over a half aimed to work abroad in the future. Of the students who were in their final year at the time of the interview, the vast majority planned to work outside of the UK at some point in the future with many claiming they had already begun to explore such options. Within the sample there was therefore a clear willingness and desire to work abroad after graduation. This supports findings by Kehm (2005) and Cammelli et al (2008), who have argued that students with international experience, such as study abroad, are much more willing to take up jobs abroad.

The students' willingness to move abroad for work has in this research been found to be higher than suggested in previous research such as Bracht et al (2006) who reported that 50% of study abroad students surveyed had considered working abroad. In contrast to this, 88% of students in this study had either gone on to work abroad or considered working abroad, suggesting that working abroad can increase future mobility for work to a greater extent than study abroad. Assessing whether the students' willingness to work abroad in the future was due to the work placement experience was, however, difficult as it has been argued that students who study abroad are more likely to become mobile after graduation for other reasons, such as previous mobility (Teichler and Jahr, 2001). For this reason a qualitative approach was necessary in order to explore whether students felt their mobility plans had been affected by their time spent abroad as a student.

Commentators such as Wiers-Jenssen (2011) have argued that mobile students obtain more international jobs than non-mobile students partly due to the 'type' of student that takes part in exchange programmes, suggesting that students may have become mobile after graduation without the period of student mobility. In this study, however, a number of students expressed the view that they would have not considered working abroad after graduation before completing their placement. For example, one student commented, 'before I went it wasn't even in my radar but having been there and experienced it I would really like to go. And working abroad really wasn't something I would have considered before' (I-25) and another student noted, '100% if I hadn't done the placement I wouldn't have even thought about working in Paris but now I do I really want to work there' (I-29). For these students, their Erasmus experience had played a major role in encouraging them to work abroad in the future.

Other students stated that they may have considered working abroad prior to the placement but the placement had shown them that it would be feasible. One interviewee stated, 'I always wanted to use my languages and travel but I suppose actually doing it made me see how I can make that dream realistic and also whether it is for me or not' (I-26) and another commented, 'I think before you actually do it you kind of doubt whether or not you can. Until you do it it's something you don't know' (I-31). These students had discovered that living abroad was a possibility, which had subsequently increased the chances of applying for jobs abroad. As one student, who had began looking for jobs abroad for after they graduated, stated, 'beforehand I wouldn't have even looked but I think the experience of last year I was like, oh wait, that could be amazing. I'm more proactive than I would have been (I-20). For these students taking part in the Erasmus work placement programme had encouraged them either to look for jobs abroad after graduation or to consider working abroad as an option for the future.

Many students in the sample therefore suggested that without the Erasmus work experience they would have been reluctant to take the step to work abroad after graduating. In these cases, the Erasmus period had acted as a 'trial run' to see if they could in fact work abroad. One student, for example, commented 'I've always liked the idea of working abroad but I'm not sure if I would have actually gone for it without the stepping stone of the placement, because it's a safe trial run, it's a good test' (I-18). Another student

stated, 'It's a test for yourself to see if you can adapt to it. I might have hated it so yeah it's a test to see if I could adjust to somewhere' (I-19) and similarly a third interviewee said, 'it was the test to see if what I thought I wanted was what I wanted and if it was possible' (I-37). These findings support the suggestion made by King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) that student mobility can act as a trial run for future geographical mobility.

As discussed in chapter 5, a small number of students chose to complete their placement in a host country in which they thought they may like to work in after graduation. This supports the suggestion made by Brooks and Waters (2011a) that student mobility can be linked to longer-term mobility objectives although this was rare amongst the students in this sample. On return from their placements, however, a larger number of students expressed a desire to return to their placement host country as a result of their positive experiences. For example, one student noted, 'I just can't get enough of the culture and the people. I think I am going to move here after my placement!' (R-26) and another stated, 'I loved it so much I am already hoping to go back next year' (R-16). A third interviewee commented, 'I can definitely see myself living there, I can see myself settle there like bringing up kids there I honestly can. In that area of France, it's just like perfect place. I love it' (I-2). In contrast to this, students who had a negative experience in their host country often stated they had been put off returning there but were not necessarily put off working abroad in other locations. A student who faced problems in Spain but enjoyed their placement in Austria commented 'I have been applying for jobs in Austria and Germany. But not Spain! I'm not good enough, and I don't want to' (I-39). Similarly, a student who had a positive experience in France but a negative one in Italy asserted, 'I would definitely consider moving to France a few years after because I like France it hasn't put me off France just Italy, I wouldn't go back to Italy' (I-3). The host country and the experiences students have within that country therefore play a major role in influencing the future mobility plans of students.

Limited academic attention has been given to mobile students who do not become mobile in the future and to the question whether their time abroad as a student affected this decision. A notable exception to this is Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2006) who found in a study for the ESN that students' satisfaction with their stay abroad impacted on students' future mobility plans, as those who were more satisfied were more likely to consider

moving abroad. Although the majority of students in this study claimed that their Erasmus placement had increased the chances of them working abroad in the future, a small number of students claimed that they had no intention of working abroad in the future, which was in some cases due to their Erasmus experience. For example, one student stated 'I probably want to work in England, I mean I enjoyed it and stuff but the language barrier was quite annoying, so I think now I want to stay in the UK' (I-1). Another student commented 'because now I know I don't want to live in France, I prefer my life in the UK but it was very interesting' (I-19). For this student, who described their time abroad as a 'test' to see if they wanted to relocate to France, the Erasmus placement decreased the chance of a future move outside of the UK. Another student stated that they would be more cautious in deciding to work abroad as they were now aware of the potential difficulties. This student noted, 'I think I would have said it more freely, like yeah I'll move abroad, but actually having been there for a year makes you realise how much you love your own country and what kind of problems you can face' (I-33). For some students, the Erasmus experience had therefore decreased the chances of working abroad in the future, which contradicts the argument that student mobility increases labour migration in Europe (for example, Oosterbeek and Webbink, 2006). It should, however, be kept in mind that this was only the case for a small number of students.

King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) found that students, prior to their year studying abroad, were more likely to consider pursuing a career abroad than students who had already completed their time abroad and also students who had studied abroad were more likely to see their next career move to be in their home country as opposed to abroad than those who had not yet studied abroad. Little explanation was given to this difference found by King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), as the quantitative approach adopted did not allow for an assessment of why this was the case. This research can however offer an explanation for this difference as it has been found that problems encountered during the time abroad can deter students from future mobility. These findings suggest that if the goal of creating a European labour market through the use of the Erasmus programme is to be successful, more attention needs to be given to providing students with a positive Erasmus experience. If experiences are not positive, it can actually decrease future mobility.

Little has been said about gender differences in terms of the future mobility of previously mobile students. This has been looked at in terms of academic mobility, but research in this area remains scarce (Jöns, 2011). The majority of American students who study abroad are female, however, as discussed by Welch (1997), female academics are then discriminated against in terms of future mobility. Ackers and Gill (2008) stated that this is partly due to the impact of partnering and children that can hinder female academics mobility. Interestingly, in this study, equal proportions of males and females expressed a desire to work or live abroad in the future. This is perhaps surprising as a number of female students commented that the reason they took part in the programme was to travel before they had responsibilities, which indicated that they felt their future mobility would be restricted (see chapter 5). When asked whether they planned to live abroad in the future, however, females were just as likely as males to express a desire to engage in future mobility. This suggests that the time spent abroad can encourage students to take part in future mobility who previously felt they would be restricted.

The findings of this research in relation to future mobility plans suggest that Erasmus work placement mobility has the potential to affect not only the geographies of student mobility, but also graduate mobility in Europe. As a large number of students expressed a desire to work abroad in the future, this mobility may contribute towards the highly skilled mobility of graduates within Europe. Furthermore, a substantial number of students had established professional contacts, in their placement host country, which is also likely to contribute towards the mobility of UK graduates in the labour market. Erasmus work placement mobility therefore appears to be a useful tool in increasing the mobility of UK graduates within a European labour market, which has long since been a goal of the European Commission (as discussed in chapter 4). In this respect, Erasmus work placement mobility may play a key role in the process of Europeanisation, particularly in terms of the labour market, due to the effects this mobility has on students' future career plans.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the effects of Erasmus work placement mobility from the perspective of the students who have participated in the programme. Outcomes which students have experienced since returning from their placement have been discussed as

well as effects the students expect to experience in the future. Academic, professional, personal and cultural effects have been identified in this chapter as well as the effects on students' future mobility plans and attitudes. It is important to keep in mind that these effects do not occur in isolation as they are often interlinked in numerous ways. For example, personal changes, such as increased confidence, can affect the students' academic studies, personal life and employability.

This research makes several contributions to the existing literature on the effects of student mobility. Firstly, and most importantly, it gives an account of the effects of work placement mobility from a UK student perspective, which has been neglected in existing research. Secondly, important differences in the effects of completing a work placement as opposed to studying abroad have been identified. For example, personal and cultural effects have regularly been found to be the main outcomes of study abroad from the students' perspective (for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003); however, in this research increased employability stands out as the main outcome of mobility for the majority of students.

Thirdly, differences in the effects of mobility in relation to gender have been identified in this chapter. Females were more likely to emphasise language learning as an outcome of their mobility, however, males and females were just as likely to discuss employability as one of the main outcomes of their placement and were also as likely to want to engage in future mobility. In terms of academic effects, no gender differences were identified. Although the drivers and experiences of students are therefore often very different according to gender (chapters 5 and 6), the effects appear to be similar for males and females. Instead, factors including living arrangements, social interactions, host company and job roles were found to play more important roles in determining the outcomes of work placement mobility.

Finally, this study has revealed limitations to using quantitative methods to explore the effects of student mobility, as many of the findings discussed here would not have been identified in a quantitative study. The approach taken in this research allowed the personal and individual effects of mobility to be explored, which are often overlooked in more quantitative studies. On investigation of these personal effects, the concept of

empowerment has been found to be relevant, a concept that has not been previously discussed in relation to student mobility.

It is clear that the effects of student work placement mobility often transform students' lives and future plans. As one student stated 'this really was a life changing experience for me, I am a different person' (R-18). Students almost exclusively reflected on the effects of their mobility as positive with no students regretting their participation in the programme. All students also stated that they would recommend an Erasmus work placement to future students due to the positive benefits they gained from their own time spent abroad.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter discusses how this thesis contributes towards existing theory and knowledge and considers the way it deepens our understanding of student mobility and Erasmus work placements, in particular.

8.1 Thesis summary

King (2002) argued that it is important to recognise the variety of migratory subtypes under the general category of 'student migration'. As highlighted in chapter 2, student mobility for the purpose of a work placement is a subtype of student mobility that has generally been overlooked in favour of a concentration on study abroad. Responding to the call made by King (2002), this thesis has thus provided an exploration of the drivers, experiences and effects of Erasmus work placement mobility. Throughout this thesis, the focus has been on the students' own perspectives, which has allowed Erasmus work placements to be explored through their voices. This approach produced rich and detailed narratives of work placement mobility that make a valuable contribution towards the existing literature and provide an enhanced understanding of this particular subtype of student mobility.

After introducing the research in chapter 1, chapter 2 discussed the conceptual framework for this study and reviewed the literature surrounding both student mobility and work placements, thereby identifying a substantial gap in the existing literature on students' work placement mobility at an international scale. Chapter 3 explored the methodology used in this research and explained why the methods selected were deemed most appropriate. Chapter 4 provided the research context for this study by discussing student work placements, European student mobility and Erasmus student work placement mobility. It also outlined and justified the UK case study analysed in the following three empirical chapters.

The aim of this study was to ***provide an exploration of the drivers, experiences and perceived effects of Erasmus work placements in order to contribute towards an enhanced understanding of student work placement mobility***. As highlighted in chapter 1,

this aim was addressed through three main objectives. These were firstly, to examine the drivers of Erasmus work placement mobility for UK students; secondly, to explore how UK students experience an Erasmus work placement in industry; and thirdly, to examine students' perceptions of the effects of taking part in an Erasmus work placement.

Chapter 5 responded to the first research objective by discussing the reasons why UK students take part in an Erasmus work placement. In this study, employability, failure to secure a placement in the UK, language, finance and personal and biographical factors emerged as important drivers to mobility. The importance of these drivers did, however, vary according to factors such as gender, course type and language skills. Information availability and encouragement provided by UK HEIs also considerably shaped mobility decisions due to a lack of standardisation across universities and between departments.

Chapter 6 discussed findings relating to the second research objective. Taking part in an Erasmus work placement is often a personal and varied experience that is difficult to generalise about. Students often received little support when organising their Erasmus placements, particularly in terms of finding a placement and suitable accommodation. The social experiences of students also varied considerably, with students spending time in one of three main social groups: a group of locals, an international group or an exclusively English group. This research has argued that socialisation and contact with locals is more common amongst students who work abroad as opposed to study, mainly due to the way accommodation and integration in the workplace is realised. Overall, the Erasmus work placement experience has been found to be positive, and where problems were faced, they were seen as positive for personal development.

Finally, the third research objective was addressed in chapter 7 that focused on the analysis of academic, professional, cultural and personal effects as well as students' future mobility plans and attitudes. The effects are wide reaching with students believing their time abroad to have greatly affected their lives in numerous, interlinked ways. Overall, students viewed the effects of their mobility as positive, and often life changing.

8.2 Contribution to theory and knowledge

The findings of this study enhance our understanding of international work placement mobility by revealing the reasons why students take part in this form of mobility, how they experience this mobility and finally, what the students feel they gained from their time abroad. As discussed in detail in chapter 2, international work placement mobility is a substantial gap in both the student mobility and student work placement literature and therefore this study provides new knowledge in both areas of study. Given the dearth of research on international student work placement mobility, this research provides an important contribution to the literature.

The existing literature has identified that study abroad plays a key role in the internationalisation of HE (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008; Murphy-Lejeune, 2008). Commentators have, however, failed adequately to identify and assess work placements abroad as part of this process. This thesis therefore contributes towards conceptual debates relating to the internationalisation of HE by drawing attention to the role work placement mobility plays in this process. As suggested by Hermans (2007), employability in the EU and international market places can now be seen as a main focus point of internationalisation in HE, with cooperation between HEIs and industry being a strategic priority. Student work placement mobility is thus very likely to become an ever more visible phenomenon for policy makers, employers, students and academic staff.

It has become clear that processes of globalisation, which require graduates to gain skills and knowledge to work within globalised economies (Brown et al, 2008), have encouraged the work placement mobility of UK students. The students in this study were very aware of these requirements and viewed completing a work placement abroad as a strategy in acquiring such skills. Work placement mobility also reinforces globalisation by encouraging the mobility of individuals after graduation, leading to subsequent highly skilled migration of future workers. As a large number of students expressed a desire to work abroad in Europe in the future, this mobility also appears to be reinforcing processes of Europeanisation, not only in HE, but also in the labour market. Therefore, the research demonstrates that current student work placement mobility is potentially leading to new geographies of skilled and highly skilled mobility in Europe and beyond as new graduates use the mobility capital they now have to find jobs outside the UK.

Student work placement mobility is also linked to, and reinforces, the neoliberalisation of HE. Students were often motivated and encouraged to take part in the Erasmus work placement programme in order to increase their employability. As discussed in chapter 5, students often perceived a work placement abroad to be essential, as they did not believe that their undergraduate degree alone would be enough to ensure success in the graduate labour market. This reflects the neoliberal agenda, which is prominent in UK HE, to streamline away from education for the public good, towards education for employability purposes. In the UK case, therefore, it appears that student work placement mobility is very much encouraged and sustained by processes of neoliberalisation in HE. As mentioned in chapter 5, it is possible that the UK is an exception in this respect, as the focus on employability, brought on by processes of neoliberalisation, is higher in UK HEIs than elsewhere in Europe. This, in part, explains the popularity of Erasmus work placements amongst UK students.

This study has contributed towards knowledge of outgoing UK student mobility, which has until recently, generally been neglected in existing student mobility research. As highlighted in chapter 5, the majority of students included in this study had the option to study abroad but chose to work abroad; therefore, it was possible to analyse the reasons why UK students do not participate in study abroad options. The analysis has revealed that language and finance are substantial barriers to study abroad, thus supporting findings of previous studies (see, for example, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al, 2006). Work placement mobility, however, overcomes the language and finance barriers associated with study abroad by offering the opportunity to work in English speaking companies and to earn a salary. Erasmus work placements therefore have the potential to widen participation to non-traditional Erasmus students, and thus to achieve a goal that has been promoted by the European Commission for some time. Furthermore, a considerable number of students did not view placements based in the UK or study abroad options as unique enough to allow them to stand out in the competitive graduate labour market. UK students have therefore been reluctant to study abroad as this experience is not viewed as beneficial for future employability. In contrast, UK students fully embrace the chance of acquiring employability skills and international experience through participation in the Erasmus work placement scheme. Erasmus work placements are also allowing UK students

to overcome a failure to secure a placement based in the UK, and therefore mobility is acting as a 'second chance' to complete a reputable placement. As discussed in chapter 5, this is similar to findings that suggest international degrees can provide a 'second chance at success' for UK students in gaining access to a prestigious degree (Waters, 2009b).

As this research focused solely on UK students, what is now needed is a cross-national study involving students from other Erasmus sending countries in order to explore national differences in the drivers, experiences and effects of Erasmus work placement mobility. The literature focusing on study abroad has shown that the motivations and experiences of mobile students often differ according to home country (Teichler, 2002) and therefore a similar study is needed that focuses on work placement mobility from the perspective of different home countries in order to explore these differences. This was not possible in this study due to time and logistical constraints, but it would contribute greatly towards a wider understanding of work placement mobility in Europe more generally.

In terms of the student experience, this too, has been highlighted as a gap in existing literature (Engle and Engle, 2003; Figlewicz and Williams, 2005; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009). In this research, the experience has been explored from the students' perspective, thereby revealing the complexity of the student experience. Importantly, this study has shown how decisions made by students, in terms of living arrangements and placement selection, can go on to have a significant impact on the overall experience of students, in particular their social interactions. Mobility experiences are often treated as entirely positive activities, with little attention being paid to the challenges faced by students whilst abroad. In contrast, this study has provided an analysis of common problems faced by students and how they overcame such problems. This makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature by challenging the idea that all mobility experiences are entirely positive.

Important gender differences have also been identified in this study in terms of the drivers, experiences and, to a lesser extent, the outcomes of work placement mobility. Very few studies have taken into account gender in terms of student mobility, particularly in a UK context (Brooks and Waters, 2011a) and therefore these findings have gone some way to enhance our understanding of the role gender can play in student mobility. It has been

revealed in this study that gender plays an important role in not only determining the drivers to mobility but also in the overall experience students have whilst abroad.

This research has also contributed towards existing research by taking into account the role HEIs play in encouraging, facilitating and supporting work placement mobility. The existing literature focusing on study abroad has tended to neglect the role HEIs play in outgoing mobility, but this study confirmed that HEIs play an important role in encouraging and in some cases discouraging mobility from the UK. The lack of standardisation of information provision amongst HEIs emerged as the main problem that needs to be addressed in order to facilitate access to Erasmus work placement mobility for a wide range of students.

One of the main contributions this study makes towards existing research is that it has demonstrated that student work placement mobility shares a few similarities with study abroad but is profoundly different. These differences have been established through comparing the research findings to previous studies as well as the experiences of those students who both studied and worked abroad. Very few research studies have acknowledged the similarities and differences between the two forms of student mobility and therefore this research contributes new knowledge on the differences between these two sub-types of student mobility. Appendix D summarises the main points that distinguish traditional study abroad and work placement mobility in relation to the study's three research objectives. This study has highlighted that work placement mobility is very different to study abroad, but further work needs to be done to explore fully these differences. For this reason, future research should treat study abroad and work placements abroad as separate forms of student mobility to explore the differences and similarities between these experiences. A comparison between students who study and work abroad, in the same academic year, in the same host countries would be ideal to compare the experiences of different mobility types. A full understanding of these differences would inform future mobile students' decisions regarding which mobility option to choose. Future research might also explore the differences between work placements conducted abroad and placements conducted in students' home countries of study in order to assess the similarities and differences in these two experiences. This, too,

would inform students' future decisions as to whether to complete a placement abroad or in the UK.

The methods employed in this research allowed the Erasmus work placement experience to be examined from the students' perspective and has prioritised their voices. This approach allowed rich and detailed data to be collected. Similarly to Murphy-Lejeune (2002), this approach has aimed to add nuance to more standardised findings of student mobility research (King, 2011). It is recommended that this approach is adopted in future research to explore student mobility as many of the findings of this study could not have been uncovered or explored in a quantitative study. This research has highlighted the importance of work placement mobility for those who participate in programmes such as Erasmus and this experience is therefore worthy of further attention. The Erasmus work placement programme has the potential to transform students' lives, and the effects of this should not be underestimated. As one student commented 'this was a once in a lifetime opportunity, I know I will never be the same again, it did just change everything about my life, it just made everything better' (I-15).

As outlined in chapter 1, geographers are increasingly focusing on a range of areas relating to education, including student mobility. Despite this, research into different subtypes of student mobility, such as work placement mobility, remains deficient. Geographers interested in education and mobility are well placed to develop new avenues of research into sub-types of student mobility, which will allow us to gain a detailed understanding of the complex differences between different forms of mobility, for different purposes, in a variety of international contexts.

In conclusion, by exploring Erasmus work placement mobility, this study has contributed to a better understanding of international student mobility. This thesis has answered the following questions; why are Erasmus work placements popular amongst UK students? How do students experience such a placement? What are the outcomes of this form of mobility? Student work placement mobility has been identified as an important and interesting form of student mobility, which cannot simply be treated as a sub-set of study abroad. This thesis has also engaged with debates surrounding the neoliberalisation of HE, identifying how such processes are affecting students during their time in HE. As discussed

in this chapter, this thesis therefore makes a valuable contribution towards academic knowledge.

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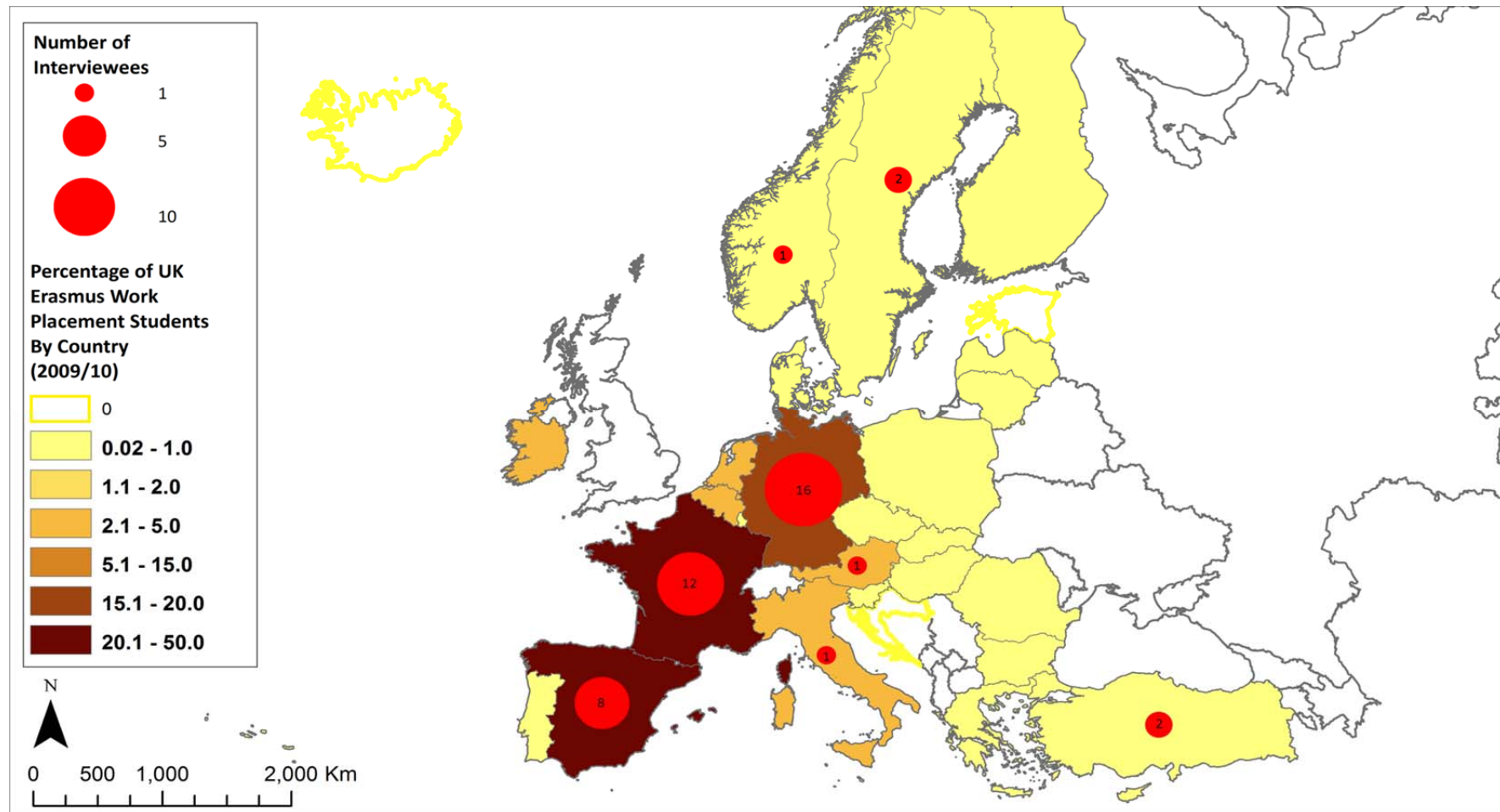
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Appendix A: Erasmus participating countries, the destination of UK Erasmus work placement students (2009/10) and interviewees' host countries (Data sources: European Commission, 2011 and interview data).



Appendix B: Interview guide

General information

University and department studied in.

Title of degree course. Compulsory elements built into degree course?

Placement host country, host company and duration of placement. Salary?

Motivations

Why did you decide to do an Erasmus work placement?

How did you think the placement would benefit you in the short and long term?

How became aware of Erasmus funding.

Encouragement received from department or university to do an Erasmus work placement?

If it was an option... Why choose to do a work placement abroad rather than study abroad? Rather than a placement in the UK?

Why did you choose to go to host country and location within host country?

What factors influenced these decisions?

Discuss previous experiences of mobility prior to Erasmus placement.

Did this impact the decision to participate in Erasmus? In what ways?

Were there any factors that made the decision to do a work placement abroad difficult?

Experience

Discuss process of finding and securing the placement.

Did you receive any support from home HEI?

Discuss living arrangements and how organised accommodation.

Did you receive any support arranging this? Experience of this living arrangement

Social lives whilst abroad.

Who spent most time with? Experiences of such groups. Any social problems?

Could you talk me through a normal week whilst on placement?

Daily activities, working hours, type of things you would do at the weekend, holidays and travelling, who with?

Experience of the work place?

Language use at work. Relationships with workmates. Any problems at work?

Issues or problems encountered whilst abroad. How overcome such problems.

How did you cope financially whilst abroad?

Sources of income whilst abroad. Any financial problems.

Did you feel like you belonged/fitted in in (host country)?

How did you keep in touch with friends and family from home?

In what ways did your university or department support you whilst abroad?

If studied and worked abroad... Differences between the two experiences?

Effects and outcomes

How do you think completing the placement has affected you?

Academically, Personally, Employability, language skills

Did your placement inform any decisions you have made about your future career?

Where do you think you would like to work in the future?

Do you think this has been affected by your Erasmus experience?

Do you feel that any networks created or contacts made during your placement will be useful in the future socially and in relation to finding employment?

Discuss any changes in cultural attitudes.

Towards both host culture and general cultural awareness. Affected the students' behaviour in any way?

Effects on national/European identity.

Would you describe yourself as European? Was this affected by your time abroad?

What advice would you give to organisers?

How would you sum up your overall Erasmus experience?

Would you recommend it to others? What advice would you give?

Appendix C: Interviewee details

ID	Gender	University	Course Type	Degree title	Compulsory Elements	Host Country/s	Job Role
1	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	Mechanical Engineering	Optional	Germany	Lab testing assistant
2	F	Loughborough	One Language Module	International Business with one French module	Placement	France	Marketing and communications assistant
3	M	Sheffield Hallam	Joint Language	Tourism, French and Italian	Placement Abroad	Italy/ France	General assistant and tour guide
4	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	International Business	Placement	France	Equity sales assistant
5	F	Bournemouth	Non-Language	Tourism management	Placement	Germany/ Spain	General office assistant
6	M	Salford	Non-Language	Aircraft engineering with pilot studies	Optional	Turkey	Machine operator and car designs
7	M	Aston	Joint Language	International Business and German	Time Abroad	Germany	Finance department assistant
8	M	Salford	Non-Language	Prosthetics and Orthotics	Placement	Norway	Clinician
9	F	Bournemouth	One Language Module	Business and economics with one French module	Placement	Germany	Events organiser
10	M	Aston	Non-Language	Management and strategy	Placement	France	Project management team intern
11	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	International business	Optional	Germany	Assistant to CEO
12	M	Bournemouth	Non-Language	Leisure and Marketing	Placement	Germany	International dpt. Reports preparation
13	M	Aston	Joint Language	International Business and German	Time Abroad	Germany	IT and accountancy support
14	M	Salford	Non-Language	Aeronautical Engineering	Optional	Turkey	Machine operator and Aircraft engineering department assistant
15	F	Loughborough	Non-Language	International business	Placement	Germany	Client/customer service assistant
16	F	Leeds	Joint Language	Economics and German	Time Abroad	Germany	Fuel cards department intern
17	F	Bournemouth	One Language Module	International marketing with one French module	Optional	France	Project assistant
18	M	Salford	Non-Language	Acoustics	Optional	Germany	Project intern
19	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	Engineering	Optional	France	Fuel systems engineer
20	M	Loughborough	One Language Module	Politics with one French module	Optional	France	Office intern

ID	Gender	University	Course Type	Degree title	Compulsory Elements	Host Country/s	Job Role
21	F	Bournemouth	One Language Module	International business with one Spanish module	Placement Abroad	Spain	Internet marketing intern
22	F	Sheffield	Language	Modern languages	Time Abroad	Spain	Translator
23	F	Sheffield	Joint Language	German and management	Time Abroad	Germany	Purchaser/buyer
24	F	Salford	Non-Language	Physiotherapy	Placement	Sweden	Trainee within orthopaedic, neurology, respiratory, intensive care departments
25	F	Sheffield	Language	German and Dutch	Time Abroad	Germany	Administrator and translations intern
26	F	Leeds	Language	Spanish and French	Time Abroad	Spain	International relations office intern, including translations
27	F	Sheffield Hallam	Joint Language	French, Spanish and Marketing	Placement Abroad	Spain	Administrator
28	F	Sheffield	Language	German and Dutch	Time Abroad	Germany	Intern (rotations within finance, customer services and reception)
29	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	Geography and management	Optional	France	Product management
30	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	Management sciences	Placement	France	Marketing trainee
31	F	Leeds	Language	French and German	Time Abroad	Germany	Office intern
32	F	Manchester	Non-Language	Cognitive neuroscience and psychology	Optional	Austria	Practical trainee
33	F	Leeds	Joint Language	Maths and German	Time Abroad	Germany	Company in-house English teacher
34	M	Sheffield	Language	French and Russian	Time Abroad	France	Receptionist and personal assistant
35	M	Loughborough	Non-Language	Accounting and financial management	Placement	Germany	Financial analyst
36	F	Leeds	Non-Language	Graphic and communication design	Optional	France	Art project assistant, website translation
37	F	Bournemouth	Non-Language	Sports development and coaching sciences	Placement	Sweden	Coaching assistant
38	F	Salford	Language	Translations and interpretations studies with modern languages	Time Abroad	France/ Spain	English conversation class teacher and marketing and translation
39	F	Aston	Joint Language	International business and Spanish	Time Abroad	Spain	General office assistant and website management
40	M	Manchester	Non-Language	Business	Optional	Spain	Office intern

Appendix D: Similarities and differences between study abroad and work placements abroad (Data Source: Literature review, own semi-structured interviews and report analysis)

1. Drivers and barriers	Study abroad	Erasmus work placements
a. Employability	<p>Secondary driver to factors such as language and personal/cultural considerations</p> <p>As study abroad has become more popular the professional outcome has been reduced</p>	<p>Most important driver for the majority of students and in some cases the only driver to mobility</p> <p>Because of the infancy/scarcity of Erasmus placements they are seen as professionally beneficial</p>
b. Failure in the UK	<p>Failure to secure a prestigious university place in the UK can encourage degree mobility</p>	<p>Failure to secure a prestigious work placement in the UK can encourage work placement mobility</p>
c. Language	<p>Important driver to mobility</p> <p>Widely considered to be a major barrier to UK mobility</p>	<p>Important driver particularly for females, irrespective of language skills; gaining language skills is linked to increasing one's employability</p> <p>Reduced barrier due to option to work in English speaking company</p>
d. Finance	<p>Widely considered to be a major barrier to UK mobility</p>	<p>Reduced barrier as opportunity to earn a salary and avoid tuition fees</p>
e. Mobility capital	<p>A presence of 'mobility capital' encourages mobility</p>	<p>Both a presence and a lack of 'mobility capital' encourages mobility</p>
f. Role of HEIs	<p>Relatively neglected in literature, information availability seems to be problematic; differences in participation between institution types are acknowledged</p> <p>HEI staff can act as mobility 'champions' encouraging mobility</p>	<p>Information availability is a big problem for many students, especially those with no compulsory time abroad or placement</p> <p>'Champions' encourage mobility but members of staff also sometimes discourage mobility</p>
g. Gender differences	<p>Drivers to mobility are most often seen as gender neutral</p>	<p>Important gender differences exist in the drivers to mobility</p>

2. The experience	Study abroad	Erasmus work placements
a. Organisation	Study exchanges organised by home and host HEI	Students often receive little or no support organising placements
b. Accommodation	Students often live in halls of residence Housing usually organised by home and host HEIs	Halls most often not an option, students tend to live in private housing Students rarely receive any support finding housing which often causes significant problems; often students do not find preferred housing option
c. Social interactions	Socialising and integrating with locals found to be rare Social groups form around a collective 'Erasmus' identity Organisation of study exchanges affects social interactions Living arrangements can affect social experience Individuals can act as a bridge to local culture and people but this has been found to be rare	Almost half of students socialised exclusively with locals Students often disassociate with what they call the 'Erasmus label' Organisation within host company affects social interactions Living arrangements can affect social experience Common for an individual (most often a flatmate or workmate) to act as a bridge to local culture and people
d. Difficulties and challenges	Academic problems sometimes encountered whilst abroad Students face problems but overall every experience is framed as something positive	Problems in the work place in relation to job role sometimes encountered whilst abroad Students face problems but overall every experience is framed as something positive
e. Finance	Erasmus grants help cover the costs of study abroad	The majority of students needed financial support whilst completing their placements in addition to the Erasmus grant
f. Support received	Neglected issue in literature	Types and levels of support varied widely between departments and HEIs; little standardisation present; students often dissatisfied with support provided.

3. The Effects	Study abroad	Erasmus work placements
a. Employability	<p>Employability outcomes generally seen as secondary to factors such as language learning and personal effects</p> <p>Studying abroad is not regularly associated with establishing professional contacts for future work</p> <p>Study abroad is not associated with preparation for working life</p>	<p>Employability main outcome of the stay abroad with the majority of students mentioning this as the main benefit of their placement</p> <p>Two fifths of the students in this study gained an offer of employment; many students established professional contacts for future work</p> <p>Students often felt more prepared for entry to the working world following their placement period</p>
b. Academic	Associated with improved academic performance	Positive and negative academic effects identified
c. Personal	Personal development found to be an outcome but this is not fully explored	Personal change often dramatic and affect various aspects of students' lives; concept of 'empowerment' relevant here
d. Cultural	<p>Cultural benefits of studying abroad have been found to be a positive outcome from the students' perspective</p> <p>Prepares students for intercultural dialogue</p>	<p>Cultural gains important but generally seen as secondary to employability gains</p> <p>Communicate with international students in UK particularly improved</p>
e. Language	<p>Improved language skills widely accepted to be a main outcome from a period spent studying abroad</p> <p>A lack of contact with locals seen as problematic for language learning</p>	<p>A large number of students improved their language skills but a substantial number returned with no improvement</p> <p>Increased opportunities to socialise with locals often led to dramatic learning gains, particularly amongst non-language students</p>
f. National identity	Debated whether leads to increased Europeanness and Britishness	Can lead to increased Europeanness and Britishness at same time
g. Future mobility	Leads to increased chances of future mobility	Greater proportion of students expressed desire for future mobility than study abroad research has found; can also decrease chances of future mobility in small number of cases

