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**The Residence Life Phenomenon in England**

Chipperfield, Caroline Dawn

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# **The Residence Life Phenomenon in England**

**Caroline Dawn Chipperfield**

A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor Business Administration  
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University of Bath  
School of Management

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the 'Residence Life' phenomenon and investigates the factors and drivers for its development in the context of the English higher education sector.

The research for this study included a detailed investigation of Residence Life through the review of a broad range of literature, using both academic and grey sources to ascertain the main features and drivers in the creation, and proliferation of this phenomenon. The research also incorporated a survey of practitioners from across the higher education sector and conducted a deeper analysis, through a series of interviews, into the manifestation of phenomenon in three English institutions. The key findings from the study are:

1. The term Residence Life is in common usage across the English higher education sector and represents a paradigm shift in the consideration of residential accommodation from that of a material building, housing students, to one where accommodation is at the heart of community-building and wellbeing.
2. That, due to the unique residential nature of UK higher education, student accommodation is integral to the university experience and student success. Despite the popularity of the residential university model, the Residence Life phenomenon manifests in institutions differently due to several factors including the ownership and availability of student accommodation, the strategy of the institution, the staffing structure and how the programme is funded.
3. The Residence Life phenomenon is part of the management toolbox in the mitigation of risk for universities. Residence Life contributes to an institution's financial stability, supporting universities in student recruitment, retention and student success; developing partnerships; and managing reputation, Residence Life and accommodation play a strategic role in a university's decision-making process.

On the basis of the research findings, a series of Residence Life models, developed for English universities is presented and a systems-level typology is proposed. The study recommends that these models are adopted by institutions in order to build understanding of the purpose and potential of Residence Life programmes and secure effective alignment with institutional missions.

## Contextual Forward

This thesis submission comes as the Covid-19 pandemic rages across the world, disrupting and impacting societies and governments in its wake, leaving a particular legacy on education. For many educational establishments, there has been an acknowledgment that learning is changing and the need for a digital offer has been expedited as universities (and schools) raced to support students online. It is strange to think something so small, so unexpected, can potentially change the world forever. The lasting impacts on global higher education, the student experience and Residence Life programmes in student accommodation may continue for years to come.

As many politicians have said in the past, 'never waste a good crisis'. Often a crisis is the pivot for widespread transformation – an opportunity to review and to innovate. More than ever, institutions will need to focus on the student experience, including what students need now and what students will need in the future.

Even through the lens of a global pandemic, it seems likely that a residential experience and the associated programmes to support and enhance student life will continue for years to come. Indeed, as academic programmes develop online, it looks even more likely that a residential curriculum may be the one differentiator universities have to set them apart from other institutions, although this may be significantly different as the future unveils.

For many institutions, the reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, and for students that remained in accommodation throughout the lockdown in England, was to rely on the Residence Life programme framework. The online Residence Life offer was the glue that kept a community in physical isolation connected and it will play an important role in supporting students when they head back to university campuses. *“Residence life will be more critical than ever this year, with Covid-19 restrictions set to last into autumn term”* (CUBO, 2020b). A Residence Life programme can be translated for a digital platform, provide current and up-to-date information for students as the guidance changes, and support the building of communities and shared-interest groups. *“The move to digital reslife began with the lockdown in March, as universities and private PBSA understood*

*the need to connect with and connect up students remaining in halls, as well as those back at home” (CUBO, 2020b).*

A survey by Unite Students in June 2020 found that despite the concerns surrounding Covid-19: *“79 percent of students say living away from home and being on campus is as important a part of their university experience as lectures and tutorials”,* the same percentage of students were *“concerned about the disruption to the social side of university”* and *“69 percent of parents were concerned about student isolation and loneliness” (UNITE, 2020).*

As the months pass, and analysis continues on the short and long term societal impact of the crisis and the institutional response, Residence Life, both as a physical programme but also in a supporting digital platform, like the delivery of academic material, may be changed forever: *“I have lost count of the number of students who have told us they would have dropped out of university without Residence Life. Of course, we care about our academic delivery, but a greater amount of time is spent outside of the classroom / art studio and that’s where we come in. Res life feeds into a number of our most basic human needs and our ultimate goal is for students to feel part of a strong and safe community” (CUBO, 2020b).*

This research was conducted before the Covid crisis was underway and provides a snapshot of Residence Life practice before the pandemic. Although the analysis has been conducted during the crisis, the findings have ramifications for the whole sector as it readjusts to meet the needs and demands of a post-pandemic society.

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I dedicate this thesis to my daughters, Gracie and Eliza, whom I wish happiness, good health and the gift of curiosity and knowledge. I hope they continue to value the importance of both formal and informal education and the daily joy of learning new things. *“May they have the grace to turn challenges into opportunities and the unending love and support of their family and friends.”*

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# CHAPTER 1 - OVERVIEW OF STUDY

*“Education is a natural process ...*

*and is not acquired by listening to words but by experiences in the environment.”*

Dr Maria Montessori

(1870 – 1952)

## 1.1 Background

The United Kingdom has a complex heritage of residential education, both in schools but also in colleges and universities. From the boarding houses of Oxford in the fifteenth century (Whyte, 2019) and the subsequent development of the collegiate model of education, to the development of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) in cities and towns across the country today, a residential experience is seen to be an integral part of UK higher education. Over time, the residential model of higher education has faced a number of challengers and challenges but has always remained a major part of the UK’s approach, particularly in England, marking a young person’s ‘rite of passage’, the beginning of adulthood for those pursuing the next stage of life, in this case, a higher education.

In the past, although important, and with exceptions, the accommodation building or ‘residence’ has been seen as part of being a student, but not considered to be part of the student learning experience. The concept of the ‘residence’, usually a student house, and the occupant’s exploits, has been regularly portrayed in the media. But the ‘life’ part of this offer has for many institutions been delivered in mechanisms outside the directorship of the institution, instead through student unions, city establishments and local services. Often student welfare has been provided by universities on campus, but in many cases this support has not been linked directly into the student residences.

Over the last few years there appears to have been a step change in the way these services are delivered in English universities, their focus, and the

underpinning support structure behind them. This shift, both in philosophy and delivery, appears to have coincided with the meteoric rise of the Residence Life phenomenon.

In the broadest sense, Residence Life describes a wide range of extra-curricular activities and support, organised for students living in residential accommodation. This seemingly North American 'import' has infiltrated the vocabulary and structures of increasing numbers of English higher education institutions year on year.

Working in the Student Accommodation sector, it was clear there were changes in the perception and expectation associated with the student residential environment, but I was curious to know what was really meant by the term Residence Life and whether it was fundamentally different to previous 'activities' or social programmes organised for students in the past. Was this change simply a shift in the use of vocabulary, a re-branding exercise across a group of established activities and support under a new title or umbrella of services called 'Residence Life', or was it reflective of something more significant? Does this phenomenon signal a deeper transformation taking place in English institutions?

For every change that occurs in life there is usually a set of circumstances or external forces that are sitting behind the observed impact. In this case, what are the factors that have driven this perceived trend surrounding the proliferation of the Residence Life phenomenon? Acknowledging that it was likely that any current change or trend would have a lasting impact on the overall system, what do these factors, and this change overall, mean for universities in the near and more distance future? Would this trend define a university's strategy and/or impact on its reputation? Would this change reach across a higher education institution into academic schools and faculties? What changes would this trend have on the way students (and parents) select an institution when choosing a university for study in the future?

This thesis is a study of the Residence Life phenomenon in universities in England. This work aims to understand more fully what the term 'Residence Life' means in the context of the English higher education and to better understand the drivers that have led to the development of Residence Life programming in

England over the last five to ten years. New trends can have a lasting effect on the future trajectory of university programmes and approaches, so part of this work considers the impact of Residence Life developments on the future strategy of English universities. The research questions framing this thesis reflect my ongoing interest in this area, both from a professional and academic perspective.

In this chapter I discuss my motivation for selecting this topic, my experience both personally and professionally, and my aims and objectives for my research. I define the phenomenon called 'Residence Life', provide the rationale for this research, and propose how I explore and model the phenomenon in more depth. I outline and discuss the following chapters for this thesis and provide a summary for this chapter.

## **1.2 Personal and professional experience**

As a parent of two children, I see educational development as a daily occurrence, both at school, but more dramatically outside the classroom, in everyday life, mainly in response to experiential activities and stimulus. For example, I have seen how a visit to the supermarket can consolidate an understanding of addition or division, how baking a cake can start a discussion on types of raising agents and how cooking a red cabbage can begin conversations on pH - acids and alkalis. It is this experiential learning outside the classroom, in the home - especially in the more domestic of situations - which seem to be of greatest value to educational learning and development, particularly of young people.

I originally trained as a secondary school science teacher and two authors were particularly influential during my training and development as a teacher. Firstly, Swiss biologist and psychologist, Jean Piaget, who looked at how children develop an understanding of the world around them, their cognitive development and his four distinctive stages of conceptualisation (Piaget, 1932). He was one of the first researchers to appreciate how important the social context is in the learning process.

Secondly, Rosalind Driver who contributed to a deeper understanding of the way children learn scientific concepts through constructivism (Driver, 1985) and the important role of the teacher as facilitator and critical friend. As a newly qualified science teacher, the role of the classroom educator seemed very clear - it wasn't

to simply transfer knowledge like the passing across of a book, but to actively encourage the testing of ideas and theories, to build up an understanding by actively learning and asking, "What happens if I do this? What happens if I do that?" From these combined approaches, the job of the teacher was in creating the environment for learning, or an alternative way to look at this could be the role of teacher in maximising the learning opportunities of the current environment. Consequently, thinking of student accommodation as a creative learning environment seems to be a natural step from a social constructivist viewpoint. These ideas are consistent and reinforced by the documented shift in educational approach across the UK and indeed more globally. This step-change can be regarded as moving from 'teaching' to 'learning', transitioning from an "*Instruction Paradigm*" to a "*Learning Paradigm*" and where the education institution's role is in facilitating that learning, creating environments and activities for learners to discover knowledge and solutions for themselves (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

However, the consideration of student accommodation as a learning environment is a relatively new idea in the UK. A report (Alexi Marmot Associates, 2006) looking at learning spaces in further and higher education published the results of a 'Learning and teaching trends survey' of twenty-nine individual institutions. The survey asked senior managers, estates managers and IT professionals in those institutions a number of questions on the current and future use and design of learning spaces and alluded to the role of the hall of residence as a learning space, although mostly in the provision of appropriate social/study space and high-speed broadband internet connectivity.

Working for an organisation called the University Partnerships Programme (UPP), I saw how private organisations can work in partnership with universities to develop and manage on-campus student accommodation. The close relationship with universities means the organisation needs to be responsive to partner institutions and student demands. This partnership has seen a change in the focus for the needs of accommodation, particularly over the last five to ten years. Increasingly, universities are looking for added value in their accommodation offer to students. As well as a range of accommodation design options – the bricks and mortar - an area of growing interest concerns the

learning, social and wellbeing aspects of the accommodation - the Residence Life.

Working in the partnership business model with universities has meant the institutions have generally been responsible for the pastoral and any extra-curricular activities organised in the halls of residence, but recently UPP have developed a programme called 'Home at Halls' at the University of Reading (University of Reading, 2020). Working in partnership with the university, the programme consisted of a range of events and community building activities. The programme was structured around five key themes (Community, Culture, Life Skills, Health & Wellbeing and Environment & Sustainability) and looked to complement a resident's university experience. The Home at Halls programme is also in operation on a number of other sites following the development at the University of Reading.

As the Residence Life phenomenon has grown throughout English universities, the associated higher education organisations, sector and professional bodies have begun to respond to the interest by developing a number of events and materials to target and support this mounting demand. UK universities and staff have been able to access a range of international programmes and study tours to explore this area in more depth. Examples of this include the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), a professional association based in the United States representing seventeen thousand professionals from around the globe, and the UK Universities Business Officers Association (CUBO).

These two associations offer an annual study tour to North America, usually focused on the city hosting the ACUHO-I annual conference and have a strategic agreement between the two professional associations, renewed in 2018, which underlines their commitment to developing Residence Life Programmes in the UK and Ireland.

CUBO, in association with ACUHO-I also organised the first UK forum on Residence Life held at the University of Sheffield in 2017 which attracted forty participants from universities across the UK to help understand this developing area. The forum organisers invited speakers from the United States to discuss

their programmes and share good practice. ACUHO-I provided a speaker for the Forum and promoted their vast library of materials, networking opportunities and online training resources. ACUHO-I also publish 'The Journal of College and University Student Housing' which promotes academic and professional practice in the subject area (ACUHO-I, 2020). As the majority of the membership and Residence professionals are based in the United States, the journal has a mostly North American readership, contributor list and focus. However, as the recognition of Residence professionals as a defined career type grows, it is increasingly likely that the journal will become more global in both readership and relevance for UK practitioners.

Currently, the operational aspects of creating and running a Residence Life programme dominate the discourse in this area and these can appear remote to the academic offer of the university. This education dichotomy, a separation between academic and student pastoral affairs (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006) can create a tension that leads to academic considerations focused in faculty buildings, and the social and pastoral topics left to be covered in areas outside the academic space e.g. accommodation.

This separation between academic and pastoral may be changing, for example, at the second CUBO/ACUHO-I Residence Life Masterclass at Loughborough University in 2018, the keynote speaker discussed 'Developing Your Residence Life links with Faculties'. They also discussed the importance of thinking of student accommodation as part of an integrated education experience, one that complements the academic offer. This approach suggests a need for a greater strategic alignment across the institution and deeper consideration of the institutional mission in order to develop a campus wide approach to learning, the curriculum and pastoral matters.

Working in a university setting, support or 'buy-in' from senior colleagues is considered to be one of the most important aspects in delivering a successful project. In order to get agreement and acceptance on projects, senior leaders need to understand the rationale and long-term benefit for any programme alongside the associated investment.



This research considered the importance and breadth of learning opportunities for students, outside the lecture theatre, on a par with the traditional academic environment. It is also an opportunity for universities who wish to grow this area and further develop the residential experience, to create a key strategic institutional differentiator and support the future sustainability of the sector.

### **1.3 Engaging with the literature**

In order to understand better the factors and the drivers for the development of Residence Life, a broader review of literature was required. Much of the Residence Life literature in journals relates to the actual delivery of programmes rather than the factors for its development and is predominately based on a particular type of North American model of higher education. This type of university featured in the Residence Life discourse tends to be strongly residential with university-owned accommodation located on or near to the institution's campus. This model of housing provision is different to many universities in England or may represent some of the accommodation available to students within an institution's broad portfolio.

There are also a number of other differences that may affect the relevance or appropriateness of the literature such as the different funding models in England and the United States, the expectation of students regarding their university student experience, the approach to staffing, and the perception of students as minors until they are twenty-one in the US (Eckel & King, 2004). In many cases, there is an increasing need to select the relevant articles and at times 'translate' this material for use in an English higher education ecosystem. However, despite the different context, this literature provides an extremely useful repository of the progress and issues developed in Residence Life over the last twenty years.

A key text which summarises these changes and developments is 'Student Learning in College Residence Halls' (Blimling, 2015). This publication focuses on the US system but is a text which provides useful 'signposting' of issues that may be or become relevant as the English model of Residence Life develops.

The literature supporting this thesis is broad and covers a range of areas that may have influenced the development of the Residence Life phenomenon in England. In order to understand Residence Life, a review of the literature relating

to the evolution of the residential model of higher education in England was required. It is also important to understand the wider higher education landscape and the policy decisions which may or may not have affected the development of the accommodation offer and Residence Life programmes. One fundamental shift in the provision of higher education in England is that of student tuition fees and the exponential increase in the amount students are expected to fund. Another area is the significant change in the provision of accommodation for higher education students in England, particularly surrounding the development of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA).

As well as the development of student accommodation and associated policy issues, another relevant area of research to consider was the physiological and sociological development of the student. Literature relating to Residence Life has been associated with the fields of student support, student wellbeing and, to a far lesser extent, generational studies and informal learning. These research areas form part of a wider body of research called student development theory. Emerging in the 1970s, work on the idea of student 'attrition', i.e. why do students leave part way through their university course (Tinto, 1975) built on the idea of identity and how this contributed to educational success (Chickering, 1969).

The associated work on student transitions and retention strategies, is likely to have influenced the development of Residence Life in England. By having a clear understanding of the drivers that affect students when they first arrive at university and the subsequent development of a set of interventions to support those students is, in reality, the beginnings of a Residence Life programme.

More recently, the Higher education Academy published a report on student retention and success (Thomas, 2012) which brings the role of accommodation more visibly into the discussion surrounding student engagement and belonging, alongside a number of projects and institutional case studies. The work highlighted research on student retention and non-completion (Yorke, 2000; Yorke & Longden, 2004; Yorke & Longden, 2008)

There are a number of seminal works published in grey literature that are particularly relevant to the issues surrounding the development of the Residence Life phenomenon. The 'University Mental Health Charter' discusses the

*“increasing concern in the UK, with a weight of evidence suggesting large numbers of students and staff are experiencing poor mental health, while a part of their university”* (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p6). The report highlights that university staff report they are dealing with *“increasing numbers of students experiencing high levels of serious mental health illnesses, including suicidal ideation, self-harm and episodes of psychosis”*.

The report looks at the possible numbers of students affected and the areas where possible mitigations can be adopted by universities to support students (and staff) in addressing these issues. The Charter considers four ‘domains’ – Learn, Support, Work and Live - with the role of residential accommodation central to supporting student mental health alongside the other aspects of the student’s university experience.

Professional bodies such as the UK Universities Business Officers Association (CUBO) are working closely with international bodies such as the United States Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I) to share resources and expertise. ACUHO-I publish the Journal of College and University Student Housing three times a year and it is considered the ‘go to’ publication for American Residence Life practitioners and Student Housing professionals. Currently, the Journal is mostly representative of Residence Life in North America and the contribution level to the publication from researchers and practitioners working in the English higher education system is low. As the discourse on Residence Life comes more to the fore, it will be encouraging to see whether an increased level of material is published representing a wider range of approaches as the Journal seems to be a natural host for a more global commentary on the Residence Life phenomenon.

My background, initially in teaching, then as an advisor in higher education policy and strategy, followed by experience working for a student accommodation company, has led me to consider the role of accommodation in a holistic university student experience. With students spending significant amounts of time in their residential accommodation and with welfare and ‘value for money’ concerns, the student housing block can no longer simply be seen as ‘just a set of bedrooms’. From a strategic perspective, institutions naturally want to make the most of their estate to ensure that every inch of infrastructure contributes to

the learning experience for students. Land is expensive, especially in cities, so maximising the educational value of residential accommodation seems sensible.

First and foremost, the bedroom and associated social space is a home for students, but it can also be seen as an experiential learning space. Different in nature and separate in purpose to a lecture theatre or a traditional laboratory setting, accommodation can form the natural extension to the campus learning space. It can potentially make it a powerful learning space for introducing community building activities and a complementary activity curriculum that sits alongside the academic programme.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the research**

As discussed in the introduction to this work, as both an observer to the higher education system in England, and an active participant, working in and with universities, it is clear there is an increase in the use of the term Residence Life across the sector, alongside a marked change in emphasis for residential student accommodation. Professional bodies, such as CUBO, are beginning to develop a range of resources supporting this area and conferences and training events on this topic are becoming more prevalent in response to high demand from across the sector.

This phenomenon clearly exists. However, there is limited research and analysis of the development of this phenomenon in England, both at the systems (or macro) level, and how it manifests at the institutional (or meso) level. Therefore, the aim of this research was to understand and research the phenomenon in England, to ascertain the drivers and/or conditions for its rapid growth and hence, what this means for universities, their operations and ultimately their institutional strategies. By understanding the sector-wide drivers for the creation of this phenomenon and its manifestation throughout individual institutions across England, recommendations for future strategies can be developed, creating an analytical tool for the higher education sector and university practitioners.

In order to fulfil this aim, my objectives of this research were firstly, to establish a detailed background for the research of the Residence Life phenomenon, through the review of a broad range of literature, using both academic and grey sources

to ascertain the main features, conditions and drivers in the creation, and proliferation of this phenomenon.

Secondly, my objective was to understand the domain of the English phenomenon through an institutional lens and construct a system-level model for Residence Life. This model provides an overview of the sector and a landscape typology for deeper analysis. This model, populated from a survey of Residence Life practitioners operating in institutions across England, is used to select universities for further research.

Thirdly, my objective was to understand the manifestation of the Residence life phenomenon in institutions, to identify the development and design factors involved, and to use these to establish a set of institutional level models. Using the typology, a number of institutions, positioned in different locations on the model, were selected for further investigation. This involved interviews with practitioners who feed back into the development of the macro level Residence Life landscape and support a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Finally, I used the findings described above to develop a set of recommendations for practitioners and universities to support the further strategic development of their Residence Life offer and model.

## **1.5 Definitions**

In order to conduct the fieldwork and ensure consistency across the research it is important to frame a number of key terms. Throughout the higher education sector, the expression 'Residence Life' can have a range of meanings to individuals and institutions. Although the collegiate universities in the UK and others have been running pastoral and college-focused activities which have strong similarities to a Residence Life model, the term itself is derived from the North American context.

One of the earliest advocates for Residence Life programmes was Dr Elizabeth (Betty) A. Greenleaf, awarded the position of Director of Counselling and Activities for University Residence Halls at Indiana University in 1959 (Hunter & Kuh, 1989). Dr Greenleaf is highly praised as a particular individual who was instrumental in "*accelerating the concept of residential education*" (Blimling, 2015,

pxi) and the founding director of what became the Department of Residence Life at Indiana University.

Through initial research it has been difficult to identify the first use of the term 'Residence Life' as it is a term so ingrained in higher education in the United States that it is taken for granted and its heritage is not defined or explained. In discussions with Residence Life professionals from the United States there is an assumption that it has been in use for at least twenty years and may even date back to Betty Greenleaf's time.

In the United States and Canada, the standard definition of the term 'Residence Life' is 'a comprehensive programme that surrounds a student's experience of living 'on and off campus' in a hall of residence at a university'. Residence Life usually involves a series of planned events i.e., the programme, and a staffing support structure for delivery of the programme. Throughout this study I focused on the programme aspect of Residence Life; the 'what' that is being delivered rather than the 'how' or 'who' it is delivered by. It is worth noting that, in many cases, the terminology of Residence Life is used interchangeably between the people involved in the process and the programme itself, and in the North American context, for example, the 'Office for Residence Life' or the 'Department for Accommodation and Residence Life' usually oversees both the delivery process and the programme development.

In the UK there is a similar interchangeability in the term Residence Life for programming and for the staffing support structure. Within my definition I focus on the availability of a programme and its development, rather than the vehicle or mechanism of the programme. For example, whether it is delivered through the use of peers or paid residence assistants.

Originally designed to encourage students to meet and socialise with one another, Residence Life has become increasingly important for universities who see it as a possible tool for combating dropout rates, improving student safety and welfare, supporting positive mental health (Wilson, 2015) and ultimately enhancing the student's academic success.

For this study, I define Residence Life as: **A programme or informal curriculum designed to support a university student's social and cultural development, coordinated, and delivered in a predominately residential setting.**

### **1.6 Rationale for this study**

Residence Life is a phenomenon that is growing in significance as increasing numbers of universities in England establish programmes. Consequently, the informal curriculum, one delivered through a residential setting has never been more important for some institutions. For both students and universities, the expectation that the higher education offer stops as students exit the lecture theatre is under growing pressure.

The main rationale for this study is to better understand the Residence Life phenomenon: its definition, evolution, distribution, and future direction across higher education institutions in England. This is an emergent phenomenon in the UK, with increasing numbers of institutions developing and promoting their residence offer.

Initial research and analysis of Residence Life across a number of university websites showed that in both the United States and the UK, institutions deliver a wide range of provision and cover a broad range of topics. From observation, there is limited standardisation across the sector with many institutions promoting and developing their offer as bespoke but under the generic umbrella term of Residence Life. The first contribution to this field was to provide a series of models to better understand Residence Life programmes and their development in a variety of university settings.

The second contribution was in generating new data to support the work of Residence Life professionals and their practice. This is an emergent field of study and benefits from an exploration of the Residence Life landscape across institutions in England. An open survey of English universities was beneficial to capture information on the institution's Residence Life provision and strategy in order to understand the wider landscape in greater detail, develop a set of possible delivery models and to group similar institutions and offers together.

The third contribution was in developing a set of recommendations for universities to support their broader strategy development during increasingly complex times.

This study provides insight for university staff, working at both strategic and operational levels to consider their institution and the opportunities (and threats) of their current infrastructure and strategy for residential accommodation and associated informal education.

Strategically, there is a discourse on the value and longevity of the residential model of universities. Is this a model fit for the future, fulfilling the requirements of students in the years to come? This thesis aims to demonstrate the opportunity for institutions to review their whole campus strategy and their offer to students in both the academic provision, but also within the broader residential environment.

In the past, in England, the residential experience in a university has been a secondary priority to the academic offer, with many universities seeing accommodation provision as the sole concern of the institution's professional services, based in the 'estates department', the 'accommodation office' or through one of many arms-length accommodation providers. Some institutions have recognised the positive impact of a residential offer and have developed a number of models to develop this area further, embedding it in their strategy.

As greater emphasis is placed on the whole student experience, there is a growing acknowledgement that students living in (university) halls and particularly through a 'value for money' lens are looking for a holistic offer. Learning can and should occur anywhere on campus, and this should be celebrated in the institution's strategy.

### **1.7 Contributions to policy and practice**

The topic of Residence Life programmes, and more widely developing a residential curriculum, is becoming increasingly relevant for universities across the UK. Institutions are responding to their students and the higher education sector's reporting demands to ensure they are both meeting the expected 'core' offer but at the same time looking to develop a distinctive approach in order to provide them with an advantage or edge over their competitors.

This neoliberal, collaborative yet competitive, nature of higher education (Olssen & Peters, 2005) is particularly evident as prospective students benchmark institution against institution. Universities regularly use data and information to



analyse the competition and benchmark themselves against other similar institutions, especially across particular segments e.g. universities in the same region, universities awarding degrees in similar subjects or universities which associate themselves in a common set e.g. Russell Group. Universities looking to recruit high tariff students have to demonstrate their value and appeal to prospective graduates who have a large choice in selecting an institution.

Research shows that students are selecting institutions on the academic choice but are also taking other factors into account when deciding on their university application. The independent research commissioned by SPCE Labs in March 2018 (University Business, 2018) shows that the academic course, curriculum and assessment were the most important aspects for those surveyed (8.4 out of 10) but undergraduates and graduates also rated the university's facilities as a high priority (6.3 out of 10) as well as the support services available (5.8 out of 10). All these factors ranked more highly than the size of the nearby town/city or the nightlife available. Looking at the score for support services and separating the ratings for those currently studying at the university (5.9 out of 10) with those who have already graduated (4.9 out of 10), it appears to be an increasingly important factor for new cohorts of students.

Increasingly, accommodation is playing a key part in student decision making. This is changing from 'is there accommodation?' to 'what is the residential offer?', and from 'what facilities are available?' to 'what is the residential programme – how will they help me to make friends?'

As well as the 'push' factors that are making universities consider their future strategy, there are also the 'pull' factors of distinctiveness and innovation. It is interesting to consider what universities will look like in the future. Universities in England tend to be homogeneous, less diverse and differentiated across many factors. In the majority of cases this is due to the funding system and the need to meet student demand and expectation. But looking towards the future there is an opportunity for universities to be more bespoke, distinctive and different to others.

These different models or Unique Selling Points (USPs) could be digital in nature. For example, there are a number of institutions which deliver all their academic content online. Many others deliver or showcase their academic content through

mechanisms such as MOOCs, Futurelearn and TEDx lectures. Responding in March 2020 to the Covid-19 pandemic, universities were quick to move programmes online, making content assessable whether students were still in residence or studying at home. Another direction for institutions in the future lies in further developing the model of the residential university - creating a holistic student experience with learning both in lecture theatres and outside.

What is the distinctive edge that residential universities have? Why would students still choose to attend a university in the future? Would a blending of the informal and formal attributes of a university curriculum be enough to save the university in the future? If a university has a highly prized residence life curriculum then it may provide a distinctive edge over its competitors – both other universities and content providers.

The main research objective was to analyse the factors surrounding the phenomenon of Residence Life, analysing the extent of programming in universities across the country and consider the main drivers, objectives and effectiveness of these programmes. The research looked at the structure of these programmes, analysing how closely the programmes fit the concept of a 'residential curriculum' and ultimately create a typology of Residence Life models. The research investigated the engagement of senior leaders in the development and delivery of programmes and the alignment with an institution's strategy. The ultimate aim of the research was to consider the importance of this informal learning in relation to the formal 'academic' curriculum and whether this focus on the informal curriculum would lead to a change in the balance of priorities for students and universities whereby extra-curricular activities become integral to a university experience, or a blurring of the line between academic and extra-curricular, creating a more holistic approach to student learning or ultimately, the death of the formal curriculum as we know it today.

Currently, research into Residence Life programmes and the factors, drivers and design has focused predominately on North American universities and their students. Institutions in the United States have developed in size, shape and governance, through a different history and funding mechanism (i.e. a long tradition of tuition fees and philanthropic giving) to those English universities have been subjected to. It may be that English universities, now facing similar issues

due to the introduction of fees, have got to a point in the development of the system that means many of these findings are relevant. It may also be that society is facing a monumental change in the expectation of students, parents and educators that all institutions, across the United Kingdom and America, are needing to respond differently and develop a new strategy.

The concept of Residence Life programming is an emerging one in the UK and although there is a commentary on the value of extra curricula activities and their benefit to academic studies, this more holistic approach to the student experience is one that is still in development. This research looks to understand the landscape for English universities and develop a model for the current approach to programme delivery. It considers the next step in the process for English universities and the likely development opportunities for the programmes. The research looks to contribute to the discourse on Residence Life and provide strategic leaders and operations specialists with a set of tools to develop the university model and business.

### **1.8 Thesis structure**

Chapter 1 provides the overview of the study, demonstrating the rationale and context for the work. The chapter introduces the underpinning professional experience guiding this work and outlines the rationale and key concepts for the study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature which informs the development of this thesis. The chapter discusses the emergent nature of the research field in the UK, the lack of literature in this area directly relating to the development of Residence Life in England and highlights a broad range of literature aligned to the phenomenon from across several research fields. Fields such as higher education policy, student development theory, identity development and social integration and belonging provide the background and help define the environment, offering insight into the development of the Residence Life phenomenon.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the thesis and outlines the research strategy and approach for this study. The chapter provides the rationale for the methods and details the procedure outlining the process for data collection. The

chapter discusses the use of an Exploratory Sequential mixed methods design and considers the development of a system-level typology for the Residence Life phenomenon.

Chapter 4 is the first results chapter and discusses the findings and analysis from the online survey.

Chapter 5 discusses the development of a new typology for Residence Life in England and presents the mapping of the survey results on the framework. This typology is used to select three institutions for further analysis.

Chapter 6 presents the deeper analysis of the Residence Life provision and development in three universities as case studies. Each case study discusses the circumstances and positioning of each institution and highlights the impact of Residence Life on the future strategy development of that university.

Chapter 7 discusses analysis which uses text from all the Residence Life practitioners interviewed to examine the systemic drivers, key themes that underpin the manifestation of the Residence Life phenomenon at a sector level.

Chapter 8 presents a discussion findings of the research, outlines the limitations and implications of the investigation, and discusses what these could mean for university strategies in the future.

Chapter 9 provides a summary of the research and provides a set of recommendations for the sector and Residence Life practitioners. The chapter concludes with a discussion on areas for future research on Residence Life.

The main chapters are supported by a number of appendices which outline the following: survey questions, questions for university staff, questions for university students, participant information and the participant consent form.

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter uses a broad range of literature to explore the development of the phenomenon of Residence Life. There is a significant gap in the literature specifically relating to the development of the Residence Life phenomenon in England and so research has focused on a number of aligned fields including student development theory, generational theory and higher education policy.

The review looks to highlight issues and policies that have influenced the growth of the phenomenon in both institutions and across the sector more broadly. This chapter discusses five broad themes which support the investigation of the phenomenon and inform the formulation of the research questions for this study. The selected topics and structure of this literature review have also been informed by my experiences and understanding of Residence Life working in higher education policy and strategy (2008 - 2017) and for a student accommodation operator (2017-2020).

### 2.2 Residence Life

Traditionally, a phenomenon refers to an extraordinary event, an observation which requires further investigation, or events which are particularly unusual or significant: *“according to the traditional view the criterion for being a phenomenon is an epistemic one, namely that we can acquire knowledge about it by observation”* (Apel, 2011, p26). The manifestation of Residence Life in England can be considered as one of these events. In less than ten years, Residence Life has become a key part of institution’s student services offer and is a term in common usage by universities and students in England. This chapter explores some of the possible factors involved in this meteoric development, looking at both a macro, sector level landscape, but also at meso institutional level elements that influence the bigger picture.

The term ‘Residence Life’ and its use in an English university context is a relatively new phenomenon, a recent export or adoption of a term used in the United States. Although the same words are used in the United States, there are a number of differences, in both the definition and the delivery of the programmes

in the English context. This is due to distinct variations in the two higher education systems, for example, different funding models, higher education systems and legal definitions. There is a body of literature written about Residence Life by researchers based and working in the United States (Zeller, 2008; Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Schmidt & Ellett, 2011; Bliming, 2015; Kerr et al, 2017; Kerr et al, 2020) and some written within the Australian context (Kunda et al, 2020). This literature is focused on the current and future application of Residence Life rather than the development and growth of a phenomenon. Predominately the literature is associated with a North American model of higher education and residential accommodation. The essence of this literature can be considered relevant to the English context in delivery and directions for future development, rather than in providing insight and commentary for its initial establishment and implementation.

Following the lead set in the United States (Zeller, 2008; Schmidt & Ellett, 2011; Bliming, 2015; Kerr et al, 2020), Residence Life in England is an emerging field of research which touches on the established fields of human developmental psychology and in particular builds on the areas of identity development, student transition and retention, as well as informal learning. In the literature, the importance of 'creating a sense of belonging' (Thomas, 2012) for the new student is highlighted, alongside the increasingly important role of residential accommodation in meeting these requirements.

There is limited literature on the growth of the Residence Life phenomenon and so focus of this review is on the aligned fields mentioned above. Having researched and analysed a broad range of literature, I have distilled the findings into five key themes to ascertain the main features and drivers in the creation, and proliferation of the Residence Life phenomenon in England. These themes are introduced below and then explored further in the following sections:

### **1. A place to live**

England's residential or "boarding-school model" (Hilman, 2019) of higher education means that student accommodation has been integral to the university experience. This accommodation has been provided in a range of settings, such as shared houses and purpose-built facilities. The demand for accommodation has increased as the numbers of students (both home and international) have increased (Tight, 2011). Traditionally,

accommodation has been a convenient place to live for students, with purpose-built accommodation sited geographically close to academic buildings to provide a temporary home during term time (Eckel & King, 2004). In the past, this accommodation has been seen by the university in terms of 'estate'; as a set of buildings to provide students with their basic needs of shelter, food and to ensure personal safety (Whyte, 2019). Today, the role of accommodation is crucial, as a home and community for students. For universities as businesses, the ability to provide accommodation is key to the success of the university in attracting students and ensuring their transition and progression through the student journey, as discussed below in section 2.

## **2. Proliferation of the student development model across campus**

Over the last twenty years there has been growing understanding across the field of student development, particularly looking at student transition (Perry & Allan, 2003) and retention (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993). In many cases, universities have used student development theories to assess impact, design mitigations and engagement to support students throughout their higher education journey. This has focused predominantly on the role of academic programmes and engagement, although recently there has been a shift with a more holistic approach involving informal settings such as residential accommodation (Higbee, 2002). There has also been a focus on generational studies and how the needs of generational student cohorts change (Coomes & DeBard, 2004a; Coomes & DeBard, 2004b; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The impact of loneliness on the student experience, and a growing awareness of student mental health have become significant issues for universities, alongside the interventions they can use to support students, both academically and in residential settings (McIntyre et al, 2018; UK Trendence Research, 2019; Mansfield et al, 2019). An understanding of the various student development models is key in supporting and ensuring student progression and success as discussed in section 3 below.

### **3. Impact of policy changes**

The higher education sector has seen a constantly changing landscape and emerging pressures following the introduction of tuition fees (1998) and, subsequently, their dramatic increase (2010) (Callender & Scott, 2013). The 'student as customer' narrative has seen an increased marketisation and commercialisation approach in universities (Marginson, 1997; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Nixon, 2010; Tight, 2013; Tomlinson, 2014; Guilbault, 2018). Student retention has become increasingly important from an individual's wellbeing perspective but also for the fiscal prospects of universities, to ensure sustainability and to secure funding (Stevenson & Askham, 2011). Alongside university-owned accommodation, private purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) has responded to the extraordinary demand (Holton, 2016; Holton, 2017) from international and home students in England and has undergone incredible growth in the last ten years. In turn, student residential accommodation has become an attractive mainstream asset class for investors keen to capitalise on this growth market (Feeney, 2019). Student accommodation is now part of the management toolbox for universities and is key to the strategic decision making, enabling some institutions to differentiate their business, as discussed in section 4 below.

### **4. Growth in Residence education**

Over the last five years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of holistic support across the student experience (Blimling, 2015; Lay-Hwa Bowden et al, 2019). There has been a drive to extend student development theories, used traditionally for academic engagement, to more informal student settings (Kuh, 1996; Coons-Boettcher, 1998). Student residential accommodation has been part of the acceleration in interest to translate and operationalise these theories to support the academic offer, support student retention, positive mental health (Student Minds, 2016) and increase student success (Schmidt & Ellett, 2001; Parameswaran & Bowers, 2014; Blimling, 2015; Peters et al, 2018; Kunda et al, 2020). This has led to the development and rise in a number of residential activities such as living-learning communities



(Keeling, 2006; Inkelas et al, 2007; Brower & Inkelas, 2012), residential curricula (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Kerr et al, 2017; Kerr et al, 2020) and the Residence Life phenomenon as discussed below in section 5.

## **5. The birth of a new phenomenon**

As well as understanding the elements contributing to the phenomenon it is important to understand the longer-term implications for universities, their operations, and their institutional strategy. Although the introduction of tuition fees brought a level of financial stability to institutions and the sector (Hubble & Bolton, 2018), the landscape created intensified both the regional and national competition for student numbers. The Residence Life phenomenon is both a product, and a response, to the changing political, educational and social environment. The Residence Life phenomenon can both provide a better student experience and contribute to the long-term stability of the higher education sector.

These themes are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

### **2.3 A place to live**

Traditionally, student accommodation has been seen as part of the university estate, as a set of residential buildings and a place to live. The demand for student accommodation arises from the higher education model, unique to England, that sees the majority of students study in towns and cities away from their home address. This model has been a defining part of the higher education offer in England and is considered to stem from the establishment of the universities of Oxford in 1096 and then Cambridge in 1209.

This residential model in England developed from the Oxford-Cambridge duopoly, where they provided the only two centres of learning in the country and to access this education, students had to travel from their home region to study in these two cities. Monastic tradition is considered by many to be the model for early universities, with the institution providing accommodation for study, living and dining (Haynes, 2013). Although an alternative 'distance learning' model, propagated by the University of London was subsequently in use, it was not as popular, and the residential model continued to grow across the UK into the nineteenth century and into modern times (Pietsch & Tamson, 2013).

The collegiate university model of Oxford and Cambridge and the early Scottish universities were used to help shape the first universities in the United States, many of these institutions remained, grew and developed through a collegiate, majority residential model (Eckel & King, 2004).

### ***2.3.1 Mass migration***

The residential model of higher education is typical in England, the rest of the UK, North America and Australia, but not universally across the globe. Every year in the UK there is a societal buzz in the air as 18-year-old students select their higher education institution and prepare to move away from home. As student numbers have grown rapidly, a residential experience has been perceived as a 'rite of passage' as the young person moves from childhood to adulthood. A residential education has been seen by many in England as a safe space to test ideas, to gain independence and still come home in time for Christmas (Whyte, 2019).

The UK's ex-Universities Minister David Willetts referred to this annual movement of young people from their homes to university, as a 'mass migration' of more than a million and a half students (Whyte, 2019). As the numbers of students studying in English universities has increased, so has the demand for student housing. This exodus has been propelled by the perception that particular universities are better than others and that the distance travelled by students from their abode, the pull or attractiveness of an institution, has been seen as a proxy for excellence.

For many other countries, the trend was to access higher education at their local university and to live with family at home. This may change in the future as the appetite for cross-border and transnational higher education grows (British Council, 2017), but in 2017-18, just over eighty percent of full time British students studied away from home (HESA, 2020a). This compared with just over fifty percent in Ireland and only a third of students in Scandinavia and the rest of Europe. Even in the United States, where there is a long heritage of residential education, just under two thirds of students go away to study. This is still a huge number of students though, with around 20 million students enrolled in degree-granting post-secondary institutions in the United States (NCES, 2018).

In England, the proportion of students studying away from home has not changed significantly in recent times. The Robbins committee on Higher Education report highlighted that in 1961/2 “*about a third of British full-time students in higher education were living in university residences, a quarter lived at home and the remainder lived in some form of lodgings*”. (Robbins, 1963, p194) (Tight, 2011).

Although the collegiate universities of Oxford and Cambridge had strongly integrated the residential aspects into the institutional offer, many other universities saw student accommodation as distinctly separate to the learning offer of the institution, and as either a wholly commercial activity or one ‘outsourced’ to private landlords and operators.

This choice by students (and parents) to study away from home may be due to a number of factors but makes the importance of understanding Residence Life and the associated phenomenon even more relevant.

### **2.3.2 Getting the basics right**

Over the last ten years there has been a change in emphasis within institutions. Residential accommodation has become viewed as not just ‘bricks and mortar’, but student homes (Parameswaran & Bowers 2014; Peters et al, 2018). In many cases this has been accompanied by a movement of the responsibility for student accommodation from the estates team in a university, to the department responsible for student services and/or the student experience. An example where accommodation has moved from the estates department to the student services area is University A featured in the case study later in the thesis.

Looking at student housing through the lens of human development, an assessment can be made on how successful the residential accommodation is in meeting and understanding human, and in this case student, physiological needs and motivations. One model which can be used as a framework for physiological need is Maslow’s Hierarchy. Outlined in his paper on human motivations (Maslow, 1943), he refers to the importance of understanding human development psychology and decision-making through the lens of fulfilling ‘needs’. Although controversial, Maslow’s hierarchy can provide a schematic to present the progression from basic human need to higher order requirements. In the hierarchy, each ‘need’ or motivation is progressive, with the lower ‘need’

having to be met or fulfilled before you can go on to the next level of need. The hierarchy starts with 'physiological' need as the foundation of the model i.e., basic shelter, then moves through the subsequent needs of 'safety', 'love', 'esteem', and finally reaches self-actualization, the stage where the participant is independent yet an active part of the community.

Assuming that student residential accommodation is subject to the same developmental environment as other situations, the process through which a student would move through these five motivations to the highest level can either be supported or hindered by the infrastructure and activities around them.

Figure 1 below shows the hierarchies and their relevance in housing students. The structural, physical environment dominates the first two needs in the hierarchy, with the requirement for a room that fulfils the basic requirements of shelter and safety. For example, if a student is concerned that the room's roof may be leaking or the heating is not working or the door will not close properly, then those concerns become the primary focus for the student, and they would find it difficult to focus on anything else. Once the basics of accommodation are satisfied then the less physical and more psychological aspects can be developed.

Each stage within this model represents student progression and increases the likelihood that students will remain on their course and be successful at the institution. Traditionally, accommodation providers have placed more emphasis on the first two needs with residences treated as part of the university buildings and estate. Once the 'basics' were right i.e., students have a room, food and are feeling safe, then the focus can move upwards to creating a community. This can also be considered to be a response to the recent focus on student mental health and wellbeing (Thomas, 2012; Samura, 2016; Thorley, 2017; Hughes & Spanner, 2019).

Over the last few years, the sector has introduced 'protections' for students which cover the first two Maslow hierarchies within student accommodation. These two hierarchies are based on the need for accommodation that is safe and meets the basic physiological needs. Introduced to comply with the UK Housing Act 2004, all universities have signed up to one of two codes of management practices

approved by the government: the Student Accommodation Code (UUK/GuildHE, 2022) and/or the ANUK/Unipol Code of Standards (Unipol, 2022). With the first two hierarchies covered, this then encourages accommodation providers to focus on the third phase of the hierarchy, that of love, need and instilling a sense of belonging and community.



*Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy represented through the lens of Residential Life and student accommodation*

Within the student accommodation provision, Residence Life can be used to enhance the basic needs. This could include fire safety tutorials or 'how to cook' advice and guidance, for example. Residence Life is predominately used for community-building, akin to the upper tiers of the hierarchy, where the purpose of the programme is to 'create a sense of belonging' (Thomas, 2012) and an inclusive residential community (Blimling, 2015). In some cases, the development of a Residence Life programme may be a fundamental shift whereas for other institutions it is a re-badging of an already established set of activities and interventions, but now with a greater awareness of the impact and more targeted outcomes.

## **2.4 Proliferation of the student development model across campus**

Research over the last twenty years has broadened understanding and awareness of the student cohort and the student journey (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Braxton et al, 2000; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Zeller, 2008; Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Briggs et al, 2012; Blimling, 2015; Student Minds, 2016; Greatrix, 2020). Although students can attend university at any age, the majority of students in England fall within a distinct cohort (HESA, 2020). According to Piaget and Erikson, human codes of conduct development can be divided into stages or periods. Erikson presented those periods in eight stages with the 'young or emerging adulthood' ranging from around eighteen to thirty-five years old (Erikson, 1993).

Recent research has broadened the understanding of student development with several theories focusing on the student journey (Burnett, 2007; Riskey et al, 2008; Bridges, 2011; Briggs et al, 2012; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Cheng, 2015), implementing and assessing transition support and understanding the factors around retention. Traditionally, the implementation of strategies to support student development has focused on academic and associated activities. More recently, there has been a focus on generational studies and the requirements for the emerging cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Pilcher, 1994; Coomes & DeBard, 2004a; Coomes & DeBard, 2004b; Rickes, 2009; Seemiller & Grace, 2016), noting differences and similarities to previous years' students. Research looking at the impact of loneliness (McIntyre et al, 2018; Mansfield et al, 2019) on the student experience, and a growing awareness of student mental health (Thomas, 2012; Student Minds, 2016; Thorley, 2017), have led the way in providing universities with a framework to support their students operationally and strategically.

### **2.4.1 Student Development Theory**

Student development theories examine how students grow cognitively and intellectually, including how they interpret the world around them, examining the way people think, but not what they think (Evans et al, 2010). These are an assorted group of theories that focus on the way students develop during their time at university (Evans et al, 1998).

Using this knowledge and understanding, higher education personnel (staff, faculty, administrators) can provide programmes and services based on the student's needs and requirements (Ortiz, 1995; Evans et al,1998). The use of theories can help to describe and explain behaviours as well as predict and influence students and student outcomes. This body of work has been prominent in the growth of academically related student services, supporting students outside the classroom in their educational endeavours and helping them to be 'learning ready'. This has seen institutions moving from a student services approach to a more focused student development mentality. This shift has been mirrored within the residential sphere as staff are more aware of the impact of accommodation on students and the contribution it can make to a student's academic success.

#### **2.4.2 Identity development**

A key foundation work in the area of student development is Arthur Chickering's theory of identity development. Built on the work of Erikson, Chickering created a set of stages or vectors which can be passed through in either direction by the student, at varying rates and experienced to a greater or lesser degree. He focused on the development of traditional-age college students rather than all young adults regardless of whether they were in higher education or not, as this age group: *"merits special attention so that institutions of higher education can better serve society and more effectively help young persons move productively from adolescence to adulthood"* (Chickering, 1969, p2).

Chickering's seven vectors were updated in 1993 (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) to reflect updated societal developments in gender and sexual orientation and acknowledge mature students and examine how a student moves through a series of stages to realise and be comfortable with their identity. The seven vectors include: developing competence; managing emotions; moving through autonomy toward interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose; and developing integrity.

As well as outlining the stages for development, Chickering also discussed six variables labelled 'institutional conditions' which can create a positive or negative impact. One of those conditions concentrates on the role that living in halls of

residence has on student identity development which can either support or negatively impact progress (Higbee, 2002). This highlights the importance of the residential community in slowing or accelerating an individual's development.

Chickering's theory supports the importance of creating a conducive environment and supportive framework for development which is particularly relevant when developing Residence Life programmes for students. However, the research has limitations in the social and historical context and may be more relevant for the North American model of accommodation where in many cases, students will be in university residences on campus for three or more years and allow time for students to backtrack or move at a slower speed along the continuum.

Identity development is particularly important when supporting the student in moving from one stage to another e.g., from living at home to first year studies; first year to second year studies; and so on. This movement or change can be considered to be a transition.

### ***2.4.3 Student transition***

Transition is an internal, psychological process that occurs when someone undergoes a change, passing from one stage to another (Perry & Allan, 2003). These changes are usually due to moving from a familiar environment to one that is less well-known or understood, and may involve a series of intellectual, cultural and social adjustments. For students, these changes start at induction and may be ongoing through the academic year. Any support in place will need to adjust to these changing dynamics (Jindal-Snape, 2010). In many cases, these changes are associated with, and can manifest themselves in, residential accommodation.

It is important for practitioners working in this field to consider these student transitions and there are a number of models (Cheng, 2015) to help describe the possible changes experienced by the individual student. The transition from one stage to the next may not be immediate and Bridges transition model (fig.2), developed originally for an organisational setting, presents three phases of transition. These stages describe the student's pathway through the change, moving through a neutral zone where the psychological changes take place, to recognising and embracing a new start (Bridges, 2011).



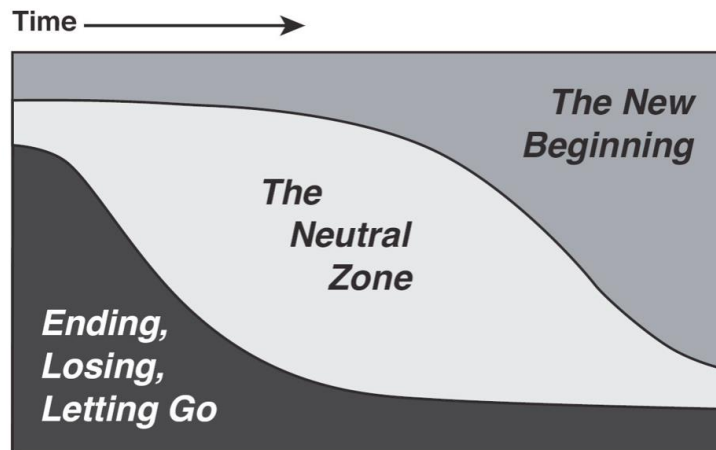


Figure 2: The three phases of transition, Bridges 2011

The measure of success in transitioning is called 'adjustment'. Once an individual comes to terms with these changes the adjustment phase begins and the student reaches a level of comfort and cognizance ready for effective learning (Risquez et al, 2008).

This Student Adjustment model can be further developed and extended into five stages. Research conducted at Deakin University, Australia by Menzies & Baron on international student transitions identified five phases of transition called: 'Pre-departure', 'Honeymoon', 'Party's over' and 'Healthy adjustment'. This model, based on a model for psychological adjustment to relocation (De Cieri et al, 1991) recognises a stage before the student arrives at the institution, highlighting the importance of establishing an early relationship with the student. The 'Party's over' phase is the hangover after the excitement of the first fortnight or so of 'welcome week' celebrations and induction. It is the realisation that the situation is permanent, and the change will remain in place for a number of months or years (Menzies & Baron, 2014). Constructing Residence Life programmes to accommodate these transitions can provide a student with a solid foundation for the rest of their studies.

A further development of the model looks at extending the transition period from the first few weeks at the start of the academic year to reflect the whole student experience, which may be three or more years (fig.3). Research was conducted with Australian first year students and proposes a model based on a more holistic, six phases: 'Pre- transition or Beginning to think about university', 'Transition or Preparing for university', 'Orientation Week', 'First year student induction

Programmes', 'The middle years' and 'Capstone or Final year experience' (Burnett, 2007). Three of these phases occur before the academic year starts and two before the students arrive on campus.

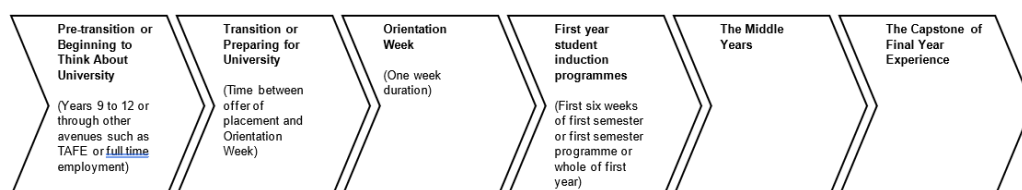


Figure 3: The student experience model (with a focus on first year experience), Burnett 2007

The transition and adjustment models discussed so far focus on the student, their psychological processes and emotional state. Another way of viewing transition is from the prospective of developing 'learner identity' and the external influences on the learner/student. These influences come firstly from the school or college the student was transitioning from, and then to the university or organisational influences on the student's development (Briggs et al, 2012).

The model (fig.4) highlights a process for achieving a positive learner identity - note the importance of 'commitment' at the centre of the chart. The model does not stipulate how these processes should be delivered by the organisation i.e., through an academic or informal curriculum. Increasingly, Residence Life programmes are beginning to support students before they arrive on campus, providing activities and information to support the 'Imaging', 'Aspiring' and 'Acquiring skills and knowledge' phases, maximise commitment and accelerate the time for adjustment.

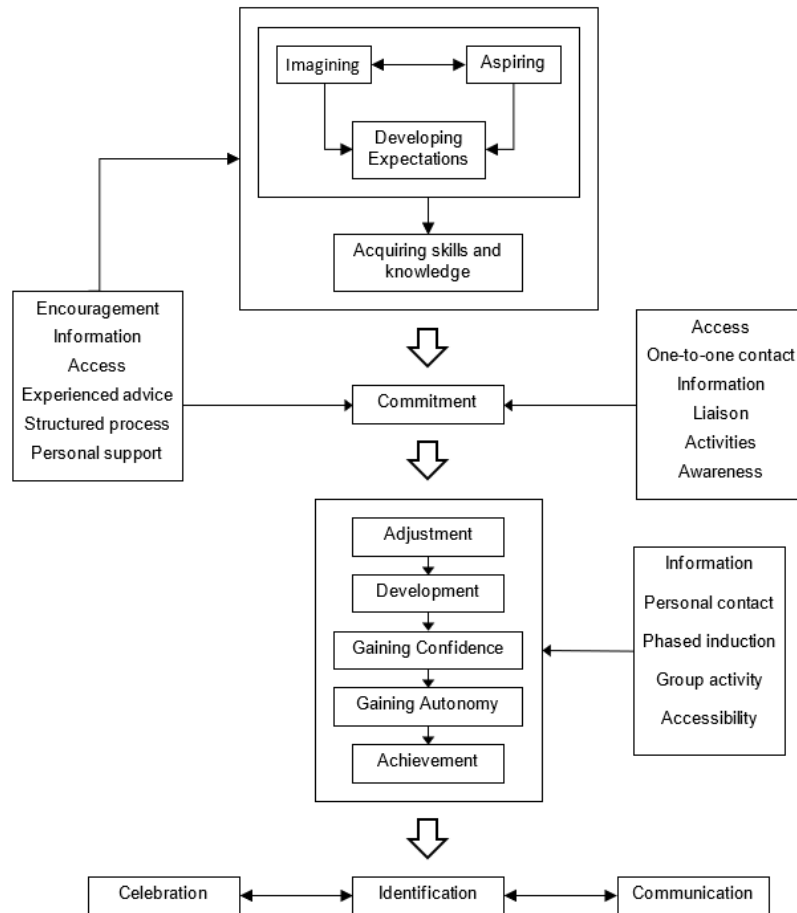


Figure 4: A model of organisational influence on the development of learner identity, Briggs et al 2012

This model of organisational influence aligns with the ‘principles’ of student retention (Tinto, 1975) (Tinto, 1987), (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993).

A set of interventions used by the institution and “*coping strategies*” (Richardson et al, 2012, p87) also play a key role in integration. Following the greater awareness of these issues, a Residential Life programme can provide key elements of this support across an appropriate and responsive timeframe. A Residence Life programme can also support student introductions and encourage students to make friends. Friendship and peer support are key coping strategies and: “*often people in their accommodation who provided emotional support when they were feeling uncertain about their new situation*” (Wilcox et al, 2005, p714). This programme provision means Residence Life may also support (both directly and indirectly) recruitment (Zeller, 2008).

Four factors have been identified that need to be assessed for successful transitions, these are self, situation, support, and strategies (Goodman et al, 2006). These factors affect an individual's ability to cope with change and can be viewed positively as assets (reducing the time and impact of the change) or negatively as liabilities (increasing the time and impact of the change). Residence Life programmes can create a range of interventions e.g., support and strategies that can lead to successful transitions for students (Zeller, 2008).

#### ***2.4.4 Psychological model of student retention***

Developing a psychological model of student retention considers that students arriving at university already have a set of attributes informed by their previous experiences and activities (Bean & Eaton, 2002). This prior awareness has been reached through three important mechanisms: self-efficacy assessments i.e. how confident am I in the new environment?; normative beliefs i.e. what do the important people in my life think of going to university?; and past behaviour i.e. am I prepared and ready for this experience? The aim of this model is to highlight the way an institution can support the student's 'self-efficacy' development through a series of interventions or programmes which focus on the student fostering positive attitudes, coping strategies for academic and social situations and developing a sense of being in control of their success. Research on developing self-efficacy beliefs found this approach to be strongly linked to student success through perseverance, resilience and achievement in their educational studies (Pennington et al, 2018).

In addition to these models, AMOSSHE, the professional membership association for leaders of student services in UK higher education, funded a project to look at the 'psychological' profile of a student across an academic year. Although the research focused on first year student transition, it provided a deeper analysis of the phases experienced by students and the subsequent demand for student support services. (Stefanov, 2014) created a series of charts (fig.5) demonstrating particular psychological 'pinch points' for students. Looking at academic pressures, stresses for the student increased just before academic examinations, but they were also high at the start of the year in September and October. Students could be feeling tired in the winter months whereas the process of 'adjusting to university life' had settled down by October.

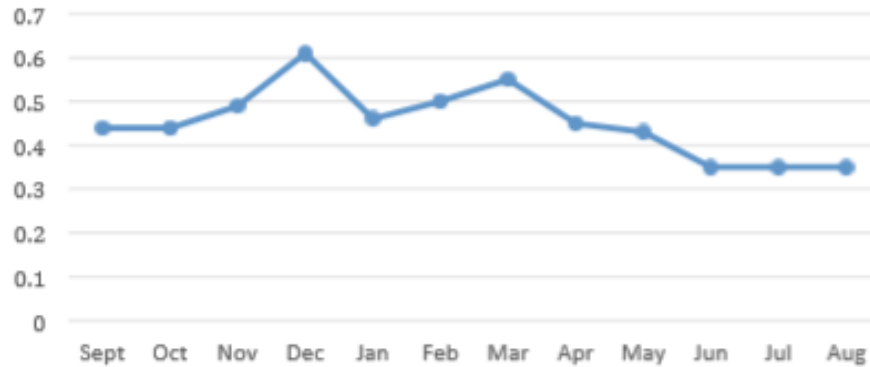


Figure 5: The 'Psychological' profile of an academic year, Stefanov 2014

Looking at these models and strategies it is poignant to note that they point to the need for a holistic, all-year-round support programme which encourages and assists students in settling into their studies (Baxter-Magolda, 2009) and bridges across and through the myriad student transitions.

#### **2.4.5 Student retention strategies**

A key part of the adjustment process is whether the student settles into their environment and starts to believe the situation is right for them. If they fail to see themselves as a part of the institution, then there is a risk the student 'drops out' from the course (Zeller, 2008; Thomas, 2012). This can have significant impact on the students, not only for their immediate situation but for years to come. The impact on the institution is also substantial, both in reputation and also with regard to funding where the fees for that student stop and additional recruitment may be difficult late in the recruitment cycle. This area of 'student retention' research has been developing over the last fifty years. The term 'attrition rate' initially focused on the student and their motivation and ability to deal with the transition to university. The change in emphasis with the term 'retention' came in the 1970s (Spady, 1970). The concepts were developed further and a 'Conceptual schema for dropout from College' was created (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1982). For two and a half decades, this seminal theory dominated the understanding of student retention (Braxton et al, 2000). In this schema (fig.6), the motivation for a student to drop out comes from a combination of the student's characteristics (commitment) and their integration (academic, environmental, social) into an institution. This can be summarised as the student's level of persistence.

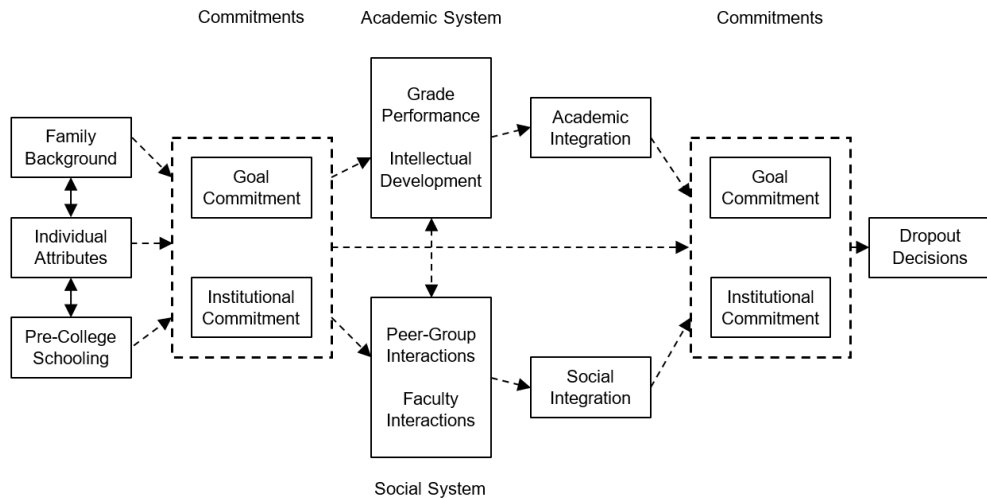


Figure 6: A Conceptual Schema for dropout from College, Tinto 1975

This conceptual model was expanded (Tinto, 1993) to broaden the scope and to develop the established categories. The iteration of the schema (fig.7) included an expansion of the institutional experience, moving 'faculty interactions' into the 'academic system' and looking beyond faculty interaction, developing the 'social system' further to include extra-curricular activities. The updated schema developed both 'systems' to include 'formal' and 'informal' situations.

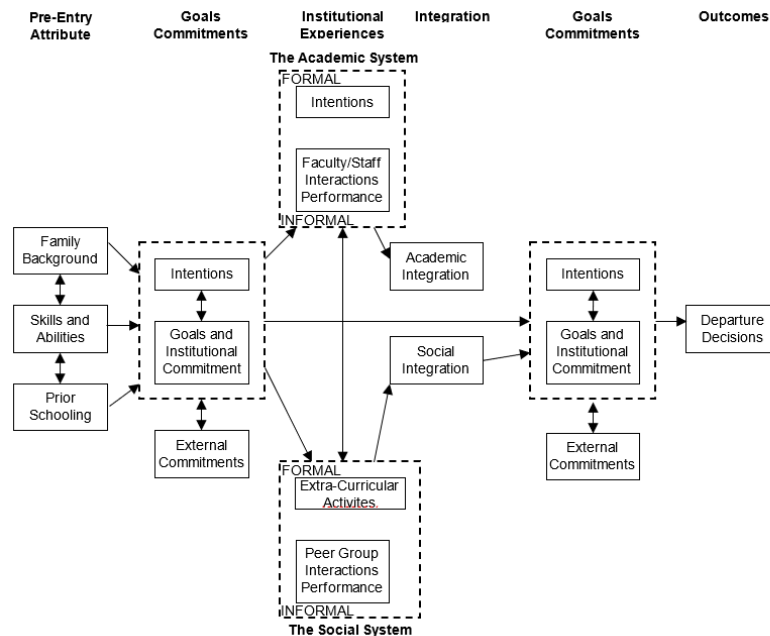


Figure 7: The updated Schema for dropout from College, Tinto, 1993

Work on the influence of student peers showed interaction in both academic and social setting was important for integration (Bean, 1985). Although Tinto's updated model reinforced the impact of the social sphere on students' retention, there was still more to investigate in this area (Braxton, 2000). One of these areas was the role of student residential accommodation (Thomas, 2002) in supporting students studying at academic institutions.

These concepts gained recognition in faculty settings, understanding the impact of a set of university interventions and measures in supporting student persistence, commitment and integration. There followed later the recognition of the role of student accommodation in creating a supportive environment to accompany the university's interventions. The accommodation provided a more familiar environment and helped to create a sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012). The further step in this process is to look holistically across the campus and acknowledge these student integration interventions can also be developed outside (or alongside) the academic context. Students spend significant time in their accommodation and these residences increasingly play a key role in developing a set of interventions or a 'programme' to support the student settling into university life. The role of residential education is discussed in more detail in section 2.5.

#### ***2.4.6 Student engagement, student mental health, friendship and loneliness***

Student development theories all highlight that the key to student integration and success is engagement (academically and socially), especially in the first few weeks (i.e. the first term) of starting at a higher education institution (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Engaging students early is central to Residence Life programmes, with the focus on social activities, finding like-minded peers and making friends.

A pioneering charity called Student Minds, created out of a recognition of the growing importance around awareness and action on student mental health, produced a report outlining a series of recommendations for accommodation providers (Student Minds, 2017). The report acknowledged that there had been a significant rise in the demand for student support and reported high levels of clinical psychological stress amongst the student population. The publication highlighted the role accommodation providers can play in supporting student

mental health and “creating a community that promotes positive wellbeing” (Student Minds, 2017) as well as practical steps in training staff, connecting support services and building student communities.

The report was one of the main publications to acknowledge the issue surrounding student mental health, and to recognise the role accommodation providers could play in supporting students and creating a resilient community. This led to the Student Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2019) which recommended a series of interventions and priorities for universities, many of which sat comfortably within the growing Residence Life arena.

One of the key principles outlined in the Charter is about building a sense of belonging, enabling peer support and the importance of friendship-making for students. The emphasis on friendship is supported in the literature and is especially important in sustaining wellbeing and better health (Kleiber et al, 2018). Many of the problems cited by students who leave their programme of study before completion include a difficulty in “*making friends and a lack of support from fellow students*” (Yorke & Longden, 2008). In many cases, a lack of friendship can lead students to feeling a sense of loneliness ((McIntyre et al, 2018; Mansfield et al, 2019; UK Trendence Research, 2019; Vasileiou, et al., 2019, UNITE, 2020).

Loneliness can have a big impact on the mental health of students and can seriously affect their integration into university life and their retention at the institution. In 2018, the Office for National Statistics published a report which found that nearly a tenth of young people aged 16-24 said they often or always felt lonely. The highest proportion of young people who often or always felt lonely was for 18-21 year-olds – the typical group for undergraduate students (UK Trendence Research, 2019).

This is supported by a study which found that “*loneliness was the strongest overall predictor of mental distress*” (McIntyre et al, 2018, p230) and that strong university friendship groups can provide protection for students and minimise the stress associated with academic assessment tasks, providing the route to academic and social success.



One study of international university students, a group thought to be at a particularly high risk of loneliness, found that students from Asian countries reported extreme social loneliness and suggested that institutions needed to have a strategic response to the issue (Mansfield et al, 2019). This research points to the need for a social framework to support integration and provide a mechanism for friendship creation. A mechanism such as a Residence Life programme is key in the design of support to reduce loneliness and can be a strategic tool in supporting a student's integration, supporting their future retention.

#### ***2.4.7 Generational theory - societal cohorts and peer personalities***

According to the Higher Education Statistical Agency, around seventy percent of all students are under 24 years of age in England. This figure raises to around eighty percent for English undergraduate students (HESA, 2020). This means a typical cohort has a variance in age of around only six years. With such limited delineation, a cohort could be expected to exhibit a common set of prior experiences, and a shared set of expectations and requirements for their academic studies and residence living.

There has been a discourse, if slightly contentious, in both the media and in academic literature on the characteristics of distinct societal cohorts and the impact of these characteristics on lifestyle choices, attitudes, inclinations, beliefs and values. A 'Generation' is a grouping of individuals identified through the shared experiences of their birth years and who could share similar attributes and approaches. This idea, that generations could be considered as a 'sociological phenomenon' was first suggested by Mannheim in 1923 (Pilcher, 1994).

Developing the theory of generations further, these cohorts identified by their year of birth, are said to exhibit a common mindset of approaches and concerns based on shared historical, technological, psychological, cultural and sociological dimensions. Each generation has a label, sometimes based on a particular historical or cultural context, for example 'Baby boomers'- the generation born in the years following the second world war (Biggs, 2007) or Millennials - the generation reaching adulthood around the year 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2003), which summarises the likely characteristics for adults in that cohort. Each

generation has a particular peer personality that defines and identifies the group (Strauss & Howe, 1991), providing an additional tool for educators and in the case of Residence Life, accommodation practitioners (Coomes & DeBard, 2004a; Coomes & DeBard, 2004b).

In the past, this generation cohort theory research has been particularly dependant on the economic, social and cultural landscape for a person developing from a child into an adult and can therefore be different in a range of circumstances. For example, the cultural and historical environment for a generation cohort growing up in Britain in the 1970s may be distinctly different than the same cohort growing up in Eastern Europe, where access to youth culture and technology may not have been the same. It can be argued that as the world becomes more globalised these cultural and historical aspects become less important and generational cohorts may become more similar and generalised across different national boundaries (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Each generational cohort is considered to have a shared set of traits, for example Millennials are said to have characteristics which include being tech-savvy, family-centric, achievement orientated, team orientated and attention craving (Ricketts, 2009). The dates and context for each generational group is shown in figure 8.

| Generational label            | Approx. cohort dates | Approx. University attendance dates | Context   |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Baby Boomers                  | 1946 - 1964          | 1964 -1982                          | Post war rebuilding of society<br>Cold war  |
| Generation X                  | 1965 – 1980          | 1983 - 1998                         | Political transition – recognition of rights<br>Moon landing<br>Start of personal computing   |
| Generation Y<br>(Millennials) | 1980 - 1994          | 1998 - 2012                         | Globalization<br>Satellite TV channels<br>Economic stability  |
| Generation Z                  | 1995 - 2010          | 2013 - 2028                         | Emergence of the internet<br>Mobility and multiple realities<br>Social networks<br>Digital natives<br>Dot com generation<br>9/11            |
| Alpha                         | 2010 - present       | 2028 onwards                        | Smart phones and tablets<br>Chatbots and voice assistants<br>Digital and market connectivity eg Amazon<br>Influencers – you tube, Instagram |

*Figure 8: The generational labels, cohort dates, university attendance dates and social context (dates from Seemiller & Grace, 2016)*

### **2.4.8 Generation Z**

In 1995, the same year as the internet began to capture the world's imagination, the first Generation Z cohort were born. This cohort, following the much-discussed Millennial generation, started their university studies in 2013. This cohort will continue heading to university until the new 'Alpha' generation arrive around 2028.

In 2014, an American study of more than 750 Generation Z students from fifteen institutions was conducted and data analysed (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Results from the study found the cohort had some similar characteristics to Millennials, but also found a number of significant differences which set the cohorts apart. The survey noted that university campuses and practices had been designed for previous generations and may no longer fulfil the needs of this new group of students.

Key findings of the survey and associated research, relevant to student accommodation and Residence Life, identified that Generation Z had a number of shared characteristics. They:

- Expect information to be available online and instant.
- Are always connected and have a huge 'Fear Of Missing Out' (FOMO).
- Are fearful about the world and place a priority on safety and security.
- Are worried about getting a job and employment opportunities during and post study.
- Are community engaged and advocates.
- Believe equity and equality are important in relationships and across society.
- Are strongly motivated by relationships.
- Rely strongly on technology, communicating across platforms and multitasking with a number of screens in operation.
- Have parents who are deeply involved in their decision-making.
- See their parents as good role models and have a close relationship.
- Use video, for example YouTube to get information.

The research on generational theory suggests there may be a number of factors influencing the development of the Residence Life phenomenon. With the

Generation Z cohort starting at universities and living in residences from 2013, this aligns with the development of Residential Life programmes in the UK. This step change in the emergence of Residence Life may represent a change in mindset from a practitioner viewpoint or observation of the students' changing needs. Equally, the response may be to an increased demand or feedback from students looking for a package of support.

The research (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) highlights that the Generation Z cohort are looking for supportive programmes that help them feel connected and provide information. They are also community minded, favouring an inclusive community, and place a high value on building and maintaining relationships. The attributes described above would also suggest that the Generational Z student is more serious about making the most of the study experience with a pressure to see the time as a 'means to a means' i.e. gain employment or postgraduate study after their degree.

Parents are also deeply involved in the decisions and expectations of their Generation Z children and young adults. In the media these parents have been labelled as 'Helicopter parents' (von Bergen & Bressler, 2017). It seems to be a characteristic of the cohort that the relationship with their parents is strong and they look to them for guidance and support. This support can be considered to be similar to that reflected within the Residence Life model.

Another area highlighted about this generation is their 'emotional fragility'. There seems to be a common trait that these students are generally less independent and less able to resolve issues (Gray, 2015). This may be a result of 'helicopter parenting' or a shared property of the group in response to societal expectations and the world around them. In the last few years, the emphasis on student mental health has also come to the fore with an increased focus on mental health and/or reporting (Thorley, 2017). In the UK, the Student Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2019) was launched in response to a growing demand and recognition from students, universities and parents. Looking specifically at student accommodation, a number of publications have recently published guidance and recommendations on student wellbeing in a residential setting (BFP, 2019).

## 2.5 Impact of policy changes

As discussed earlier in section 2.3.1, the majority model of residential higher education is different from the global model of studying in or near the home. This residential model sits within a sector landscape that has seen dramatic change in recent times. Universities in England have seen the introduction of student tuition fees (THEA, 1998), followed quickly by a significant increase in these fees. Many consider this increase as the initiation of a change in both student and university perception, seeing students as customers and proliferating the growth in the marketisation and commercialisation of the student experience. As student fees were introduced the 'cap' or institutional limit for student recruitment was removed. This gave institutions the opportunity to grow their student numbers as long as there was student demand. It could be argued that the impact this had on student recruitment practices between universities heightened competition and contributed significantly to the development of 'value add' cultures and the establishment of the Residence Life phenomenon.

Over the last ten years, the demand for higher education has accelerated rapidly in nations across the globe. In 2014, 200 million students were enrolled in tertiary education, and it is estimated that this number will double in just sixteen years to 400 million or more by 2030 (Altbach, 2016). This explosion in the number of students wanting to study in higher education has been in response to a transformation in the global economy, a shift from an Agrarian society to one that is digital, based on continual innovation and in the main, knowledge-driven. The change in the global economy has seen increasing national competition and a rising demand for highly-skilled workers, as well as leading to a growing middle-class population in both established and emerging economies.

As the United Kingdom and constituent nation England play an active role in the global economy, the impact of this dramatic economic shift cannot be viewed in isolation. The UK higher education system has also seen a rapid increase in student numbers with approximately 400,000 full-time students at UK institutions in the 1960s and this volume quadrupling to over two million by 2007 (Wyness, 2010). Recent figures from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency found that the figure for 2018/19 is approaching 2.4 million students, with just under a half a million students studying in the UK from overseas (HESA, 2020a).

In response to the surge in demand for student places, the English higher education system developed a new funding model to support tertiary education. This step-change was initiated by the Dearing Review 'Higher Education in the learning society' (Dearing, 1997), published just over twenty years ago. The report made a series of recommendations, which have initiated the transformation of British higher education from a system of government grants to a mixed model of tuition fees and government-sponsored student loans.

The subsequent implementation of the 'Teaching and Higher Education Act' (THEA, 1998) and the inaugural introduction of tuition fees signalled a fundamental change in the philosophy and approach for national tertiary education. By co-funding their studies, students were now seen as key financial contributors to their education and major benefactors of the gains of a higher education. In England, the student financial contribution element continued to grow until 2012 when the tuition fee was increased drastically to cover the majority cost of most courses.

It can be argued that this explosion in demand, or the 'massification' (Marginson, 2002) of higher education has also driven a 'new consumerism' (Schor, 1999) with the focus on higher education study as a both a symbol of status and a 'product'. This emphasis is a demonstrable shift in the perceived value of higher education, away from the advantage it brings to society (as a public good), solely onto the individual and personal gain.

Although student fees increased, for many universities they were not the sole, or majority funding source. English universities traditionally attract income from a number of sources including research funding from government, private companies and charities through to commercial income, for example their catering arm and venue hire.

At the same time as encouraging a marketised approach, the UK government has looked to maintain a level of control, for example universities were free to set their own tuition fee but only as high as a sector-wide fee cap. This mixture of increased regulation alongside a liberation or autonomy in endeavour can be considered to be a quasi-market (Le Grand & Bartlett, 1993), (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005) and creates a tension for universities as in some cases they are

expected to create, market and sell a product, whereas in other cases, limits and controls are in place (Agasisti & Catalano, 2006).

Despite the continual review and change in approach for the English higher education system there has been a distinct move towards a market driven system (Tomlinson, 2017). Although the systems of higher education are predominately seen as public systems, in reality they too are quasi-public and act in a quasi-market (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). The systems receive a mixed income consisting of government grants (direct), student fees, research funding, private philanthropic giving and other sources. The literature considers the impact of this new type of relationship and change in the expectation between students and their universities, and subsequent impact on the staff when addressing the needs of students when they are perceived as customers (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005) (Nixon, 2010).

Working in the English higher education sector for over fifteen years, I have seen a number of policy trends develop. One of the biggest changes to the university sector in England has been the introduction of tuition fees and the expanded recruitment of international students. Many would argue this would demonstrate the subsequent development of a higher education marketplace.

Before the removal of the student number caps, the university finance model was more akin to a steady state, limited growth (with any additional growth coming from the recruitment of international (non-EU) students) business. Today, the finance model is based on the 'ability to recruit' students, the attractiveness of the university's offer and delivery of service. All universities need to recruit students and, in the main, see them as customers, certainly in the student delivery model. This has led to a discourse on the impact of fees on both the delivery model of higher education and also the role of the student in the education process.

This fundamental shift in policy towards a Neoliberalist (collaborative yet competitive) systemic approach (Olssen & Peters, 2005), alongside a change in mindset to consider 'students as self-funders', meant students were now seen as the ultimate consumer of the service or product. Over time this has led to students becoming the key drivers for the operation of higher education, centred firmly at the foci of the system.

### **2.5.1 Students as customers**

The 'student as customer' concept has developed in academic literature over the last twenty years. In the UK, this concept development has been linked to the introduction of fees and the subsequent marketisation of the higher education system. A number of trends have seemingly contributed to this notion, including the massification of the system; the 'transfer' of increasing costs onto the student; the increased focus on the quality of the education and student experience; and the growing competition between higher education providers (Tight, 2013).

Despite the introduction of a £1,000 fee for home students in England in 1998 and the subsequent increase to £3,000 through the Higher Education Act in 2004 (HEA, 2004), there was a sense that this was a short-term fix and the country would need a different funding model to meet the demand for the increasing number of funded places without reintroducing caps on the number of students who could study at university.

At the same time, the government fiscal policy and associated austerity programme began to look for ways to make public spending reductions and reduce the country's budget deficit. In November 2009, the government appointed an independent panel to review higher education funding and student finance in England. The panel, chaired by Lord Browne of Madingley, included members from business and academia and were given the following terms of reference:

*"The Review will analyse the challenges and opportunities facing higher education and their implications for student financing and support. It will examine the balance of contributions to higher education funding by taxpayers, students, graduates and employers. Its primary task is to make recommendations to Government on the future of fees policy and financial support for full and part time undergraduate and postgraduate students."* (Browne, 2010, p57)

The broader economic context for this review is vital in understanding the rationale and analysing the recommendations. During this time, a global recession resulted in unprecedented cuts to UK public expenditure (Callender & Scott, 2013). There were pressures on the UK to continue to develop its knowledge economy whilst at the same time the financial constraints meant it



was important to 'balance the books'. University tuition fees rose up the list of political priorities as public funding was squeezed during the financial crisis. Many governments needed to take stock of their financial commitments and post-18 education seemed to be a natural target (Carasso, 2014).

Whilst it was difficult to see how the higher education sector, the developer and facilitator of higher-level skills, could expand with minimal impact on the Treasury without an extension of the student fees system, it was wholly unexpected that the level of student contribution would increase by almost three times the current fee, and move the co-funding element strongly into the student's domain.

The panel's final report 'Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education' (Browne, 2010) outlined the principles which framed the proposed approach:

1. *More investment should be available for higher education.*
2. *Student choice should be increased.*
3. *Everyone who has the potential should be able to benefit from higher education*
4. *No one should have to pay until they start to work.*
5. *When payments are made they should be affordable*
6. *Part time students should be treated the same as full time (Browne, 2010)*

Additionally, a corresponding set of recommendations for government included removing the annual £3,290 student tuition fee cap and providing 'upfront' student loans to cover fees and living costs plus additional means-tested grants for students from lower income families. Students would start to pay the loans back once they were earning over £21,000 and any loan not repaid within a window of 30 years would be written off. Part-time students would be treated similarly to full-time students with access to student tuition loans.

The government's response to the Browne Review was a White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System' published in 2011. This was a different government to the one that originally initiated the review due to a General Election held in the middle of the process. The government took a number of the principles and recommendations to develop their interpretation of the review: *"Our student finance reforms will deliver savings to help address the large Budget deficit we were left, without cutting the quality of higher education or student numbers and bringing more cash into universities. They balance the financial demands of*

*universities with the interests of current students and future graduates.”* (BIS, 2011, p2)

The emphasis of the government was to save money and not compromise the number of students able to access the higher education system, whilst at the same time institutions needed to improve their student experience and increase the social mobility of students.

Although the word ‘customer’ was not included in the text of the report, the emphasis in the Browne Review on ‘student choice’ and reinforcing that students should be paying more for their courses as they would be benefitting directly from their studies, gave strength to the notion that they were now customers.

This emphasis built on earlier positioning that an introduction of student fees in 1998 began the drive for students to see themselves increasingly as customers and, in return, wanting more for their money (Marginson, 1997). The introduction of student fees also caused a shift for universities in addressing the needs of students as perceived fee-paying customers (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), (Nixon, 2010). The new fee system came into effect in September 2012 with the balance of funding towards the student, this reinforced the step change for the sector to see students as customers (Guilbault, 2018).

The Higher Education and Research Act (HERA, 2017) introduced further ‘market reforms’ and established a new regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), with a remit that included a focus on competition, student choice and outcomes.

This was a significant change for the sector and although it had been a gradual process, the fee regime had developed from a ‘contribution to costs’ model to a ‘paid in full’ model almost overnight. A Higher Education Academy (HEA) report highlighted that the increase in fees was affecting students’ expectations, for example, they were expecting better facilities, resources and higher levels of personal support (Tomlinson, 2014). The HEA report suggested that students would prefer not to see themselves as customers but link the experience to financial measures e.g., value for money and/or return on investment (Tomlinson, 2014).

However, by 2017, a Universities UK (UUK) report stated that nearly half (forty seven percent) of students regard themselves as a customer of the university and

eighty percent of those asked said that personalised advice and support is important to them (Universities UK , 2017).

In England, the discourse on the higher education market was further developed with the publishing of an independent review of post-18 education to the UK government. The review sets out a set of eight principles. Principle 7 states *“Post-18 education cannot be left entirely to market forces. The idea of a market in tertiary education has been a defining characteristic of English policy since 1998. We believe that competition between providers has an important role to play in creating choice for students but that on its own it cannot deliver a full spectrum of social, economic and cultural benefits”* (Augar, 2019, p8).

This review acknowledged the discourse that, in many cases, the higher education system in England behaves and is treated like a market. The review makes a set of recommendations on the funding and delivery of higher education courses and reminds the readership that the system involves a ‘parental contribution’ towards the costs of maintenance, dependent on the parental income, reiterating the reliance of students on their parents despite being legal adults (Chipperfield & von Behr, 2019).

Despite raising a number of issues, the review has not been developed further at this time. This is likely to be due to a change in government and the focus on the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **2.5.2 Students as co-producers**

In many cases, students behave as or are seen or treated as customers, but this concept may be more ‘multi-dimensional’ than at first thought (Budd, 2017). Students seem comfortable with the service or transactional elements associated with being a customer, but the transformational parts of the relationship need a different status (Culbert, 2010). For example, students want to be treated as customers on course design and approaches but not on graduation, teaching, curriculum design or examinations (Koris & Nokelainen, 2015; Koris et al, 2015). The literature suggests that student’s behaviour or expectation as a customer is not uniform across the range of services offered by a university.

It is still felt that the higher education sector has an out-of-date understanding of what being a customer means and how it should work in practice (Guilbault,

2016). For example, customers are not passive recipients of a service, but integral to the development, as co-producers of the learning (Mark, 2013). A view of the 'student as customer' may point to an approach whereby students are looking to co-create their experience, working together with the university to both demonstrate what areas are priorities for students, but also how students would like to earn this knowledge or learning.

The role the student plays changes depending on the circumstances and although it may be better to think of a student as a co-producer, they fulfil a number of roles (member, client, participant) and ultimately as a learner (McCulloch, 2009).

In December 2017, the UK's National Audit Office published a report on the higher education sector. The study (NAO, 2017) looked at how UK higher education 'functions as a market', highlighting that the majority of funding comes from the student via tuition fees (i.e., buying the service) and universities are able to recruit as many students as they feel they can attract and accommodate (i.e. sell and promote the service). However, the report highlights that the UK higher education sector is not a 'traditional market' and identifies particular 'quirks' of the system surrounding student choice, access, outcomes and pricing. For example, students select their prospective institution on a number of complex and personal factors, not on the cheapest, as there is very little variability in the pricing of courses. So, if institutions are all charging the same price, it poses a number of questions: what are they getting for that charge, what will the student have access to and how will the experience support them? In reality, this is the student's return on investment or 'passport'.

Although there is a difference in the potential earnings for subjects and institutions ten years following graduation (LEO, 2020), it is also the perceived student experience during the time studying at the institution that can be the differentiator. The National Student Survey (NSS, 2021) measures the feedback from nearly half a million students on satisfaction. The measures of student satisfaction and outcomes also feed into the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), an institutional level award which rates universities from Bronze to Gold (Shattock, 2018). These rates are publicly available on the Office for Students website (OfS, Teaching Excellence Framework - TEF, 2021) and are used by many institutions

as a way of promoting their student offer (Gunn, 2018) . This finding is supported by the National Audit Office who highlighted the increase in marketing and advertising and the increased investment in buildings and facilities (NAO, 2017).

Over the last few years there has been a growing level of acceptance that, in many cases, the English higher education sector behaves as a market where the students are predominately the co-producers and ultimately, the customers in the transaction. This is particularly poignant in the marketing of courses and the emphasis on the student experience. Although unlike a traditional marketplace where price is the differentiator, higher education needs to trade on other aspects such as the course offered or the institution's reputation. If providers are all charging similar amounts for a course, institutions need to consider other ways of differentiating their offer and 'return on investment' for the student. In this situation, institutions need to review their student proposition and look to develop new areas, potentially outside their academic provision, to differentiate themselves from other universities.

### ***2.5.3 The role of accommodation in student recruitment***

As discussed earlier in this chapter, residential education is deeply rooted in British society: *“Residential higher education is entrenched in English culture and leaving home to study is considered to be an important part of the higher education experience”* (Hubble & Bolton, 2020, p3). In many institutions, however, residential accommodation has not been seen as the environment for extending education, whether this is through formal or informal learning. The recognition that interventions which mitigate student retention can also be developed for a residential setting has caused a shift in the perception of the accommodation space and the marketing opportunities this can provide.

Growth in student numbers in England fuelled an increasing demand for student residential accommodation. Some of this demand was met through the increase of student houses or HMOs (House in Multiple Occupation), whilst many universities invested in building new accommodation, funded either through their own means or in partnership with an investor. Many universities, especially those based in city centres or which owned a limited amount of spare land, looked to the private operators building and managing Purpose Built Student

Accommodation (PBSA) close to their institutions. The universities collaborated with private operators and, in many cases, made 'nomination agreements' (where the university agrees to nominate a minimum number of students for the accommodation each year and for an agreed period, in return for a level of control on rents and say in operational matters) to ensure accommodation for their students.

Accommodation has become an important aspect in promoting and marketing a university. Over time, this emphasis on accommodation and a university's ability to meet their 'first year guarantee' (the ability to provide every first-year undergraduate student with a room in university associated accommodation) has become an important differentiator between universities, with the pressure on institutions to provide access to accommodation for increasing numbers of students who are preferring to live in university-associated accommodation for a longer time. Student residential accommodation has been one of *the "prominent features in the college recruitment arms race"* (Brown et al, 2019, p267).

Moving away from home to study at university has become embedded in our society: *"leaving home to go to university ... is a deep-seated part of English culture"* (Augar, 2019, p195). With this cultural acceptance and a level of expectation, students have become more discerning over the choice of their student accommodation and have clear ideas on what is good for them socially, spatially and mentally in their new home (Holton, 2016).

Over time, students have begun to seek higher quality residential accommodation, but this has also encouraged a residential paradox (Bronkema & Bowman, 2017) whereby increasingly students and their parents prefer studio and en-suite designs. This can leave students feeling more isolated than students sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities, with more luxury accommodation having a negative effect on mental health and wellbeing.

Students spend a significant amount of time in their residential accommodation. This focus on accommodation has moved the perception of a student bedroom away from a facility to an active part of the student experience: *"Our homes are important spaces through which emotions are produced, performed and regulated. They carry significant material and symbolic value and are inscribed*

*with meaning and belonging that are often crucial in shaping and (re)producing collective and individual identities.” (Holton, 2017, p1).*

#### **2.5.4 Student residential accommodation in England**

The majority of universities in England own their own accommodation or work with a partner who operates residences for students that attend their institution. There are also a number of private operators who build and run Purpose Build Student Accommodation (PBSA), with the majority of this provision in larger cities. Students can rent a room directly with these operators or sometimes the university will have a ‘nomination agreement’ with the operator. The university would then market these rooms to the student.

In the UK, just over eighty percent of students study away from home (HESA, 2020a) with around 30 percent of full-time first year students live in private PBSA, up from 22 percent five years ago. A further 40 percent live in halls or accommodation provided by the university, this proportion has remained broadly unchanged over the same period (Knight, 2019). Therefore, for many universities, providing accommodation or providing access to accommodation for students is an important aspect of their planning and recruitment of students.

Traditionally, a university’s residential accommodation offer develops over time and is attributed to a combination of the historical/strategic and geopolitical context in the establishment and development of the institution. Figure 9 shows the possible factors involved in the development of residential accommodation for a university in the UK.

| <b>Factor</b>                           | <b>Consideration</b>  | <b>Outcome</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Historical and strategic context</b> |   |   |
| Heritage                                | Was the institution established to attract a student cohort locally from the resident city or cities nearby or was the university established to attract a national cohort of students?                     | If the institution was established as a nationally recruiting institution, student accommodation may have been included in the development plan for the campus.   |
| Mission                                 | Does the institution have a mission or aspiration to be ‘research intensive’ or ‘globally excellent’ or attract the ‘brightness and best’?  | Accommodation is considered to be a key part of a university’s offer to students, especially in the recruitment of overseas students and to attract high tariff students, and more recently the ability to provide a ‘first -year guarantee’ where all first-year undergraduate students are guaranteed ‘university associated’ accommodation for one year. |
| Student recruitment                     | Is the institution nationally or internationally recruiting, is accommodation key to attracting students to the university and/or city? Do similar tariff/ranked institutions have more/less accommodation? | Accommodation is considered to be a key part of a university’s offer to students, especially in the recruitment of overseas students and to attract high tariff students. University may benchmark across similar tariff and selecting institutions to ensure parity of offer.  |
| Access to funding                       | Does the institution have access to their own funds, able to borrow the funds directly, or through  | If an institution can fund the accommodation development themselves or work with  |

|                                  |  |   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
|                                  | a partnership with an external investor, to develop new accommodation or refurbish and modernise existing accommodation?   | investors then new accommodation can be built on campus or on a location close by. If this is not possible then an institution can work with private operators (if available) or the private rental market to provide accommodation for students.   |
| Courses and demand               | Has the institution seen a rapid growth in student numbers over the last ten years? Is the institution looking to grow student numbers – either nationally or internationally? Has the institution developed a set of new programmes, for example, a new medical school, that needs accommodation to attract students? | In order to expand, access to accommodation is usually required. This can be developed by the university or in partnership with investors and/or private providers.   |
| Strategy                         | Was the university's strategy to be a residential institution, for example, collegiate in nature? Has the University's strategy developed over time to encompass a residential accommodation offer?  | A university may have access to large amounts of residential accommodation on campus and need to modernise offer to provide 'fit for purpose' accommodation themselves and to compete with the local private market. University strategy may change over time and require a more residential position; therefore the accommodation offer needs to reflect the change in approach. |
| <b>Geopolitical context</b>      |  |   |
| Political and planning landscape | What are the local/City Council and Council Planning Office aspirations for the university's residential accommodation in the city or region? Does the Council have anti-studentification policies? Does the Council favour Purpose Built student provision?   | Planning consents may be more difficult or easy to obtain based on the institutions approach and the Council's planning policies. Local/City Councils may favour the development of student housing in a particular area and a decrease in the private rental market or shared student houses (House in Multiple Occupancy - HMOs).   |
| Estate                           | Is the university city or campus based? The cost of land in a city tends to be more expensive than the cost of land on the outskirts, a conurbation or rurally.  | If the university has access to land either on or near campus, then building new accommodation is easier than having to purchase land and build new residences.   |
| Environment                      | Is it easy for the university to develop accommodation? What are the surrounding landscape, land ownership and operational factors?  | Depending on the location of the university it may more challenging to develop new accommodation if the area is of historical or environmental importance. It may also add to the cost of any project to modernise or develop new residential buildings.  |
| Alternative or private provision | What is the alternative student housing provision – both PBSA and private rental housing offer in the city or area? Is the private sector a strong competitor or prospective partner in providing university student accommodation?  | Universities can work with local operators to provide university associated housing through nomination agreements and other mechanisms.   |

Figure 9: A table to show the factors and consideration for the development of residential accommodation for UK universities

These factors define a university's development and may influence the development of the Residence Life programme. However, for the purpose of this research many of this possible variable are difficult to quantify and are better suited to understanding the wider narrative.

### **2.5.5 Models for the operation of student residential accommodation**

Student residential accommodation can be provided through a range of models and, in the main, these focus on the ownership and/or management of the accommodation premises. The nine modes are as follows:

1. University owned and managed.
2. University owned with an external operator.



3. Shared ownership between a university and an external partner, university managed.
4. Shared ownership between a university and an external partner, external operator.
5. Private (direct let) student accommodation with a nomination agreement from the university.
6. Private (direct let) student accommodation.
7. Privately rented shared houses.
8. Room rental in a private house.
9. Live at parental or relative's home.

These facilities can either be on campus or further afield and can include PBSA or shared housing. Many universities have students in a combination of accommodation provision.

A university's accommodation portfolio may play a role in the development of its Residence Life programme. For example, if a university doesn't operate the student accommodation it may be more difficult to influence the residence programme. However, an institution may not own or operate its own accommodation but there may still be an opportunity to coordinate a programme. The variables for developing the typology need to straddle across the operational and historical factors of a university and focus more on the intent of the programme.

### **2.5.6 The rise of PBSA**

The increase in student numbers studying in the UK has led to a large demand for student accommodation. Constraints on the availability of private residential housing suitable for students has meant a growth in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) on campuses and in English cities. PBSA can be built and run privately by accommodation operators, sited near the campus or close to the city, and built and run by universities for their students. Partnership models, where operators build on campus working with the institution over a number of years, are also prevalent. According to the UK Student accommodation report: *"1.1 million students are now studying outside their home region, highlighting*

*continued positive trends in terms of demand for student accommodation”* (Feeney, 2019, p8).

English universities are constantly under pressure to provide enough residential accommodation for their students, as individuals look to select their study institutions on a number of factors including availability of accommodation. As the proportion of overseas students studying in the UK increases, they are contributing to the demand for accommodation: *“23 percent of the total full-time student body is now from the outside the UK ... [with] 54 percent international growth in the last ten years”* (Feeney, 2019, p9). The increase in student numbers means universities are growing in size and becoming more commercial organisations: *“in order to survive in a competitive market where service to students is paramount”* (Stevenson & Askham, 2011, p6).

A survey in 2017 asked sixty thousand students considering studying in the UK: ‘What five things are most important to you when choosing a university?’. In reply, many prospective international students cited ‘high-quality teaching’ and ‘scholarships’ but a substantial proportion of those surveyed highlighted the importance of ‘affordable university-owned accommodation’ (ISS, 2017).

The drive for better student services fuelled significant investments in university estate with capital expenditure across the UK sector exceeding £3bn for three consecutive years (AUDE, 2018). Some universities have been able to raise these funds themselves but others have either formed partnerships to develop new facilities or relied on the commercial sector to meet the shortfall: *“The rising cost of a university education has increased student expectations and student accommodation is one area of provision that universities have had to re-examine by redeveloping or refurbishing parts of their existing stock or reaching out to private purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) providers to ensure the quality of student accommodation at a time when supply was being increased to satisfy the growth in student numbers”* (Stevenson & Askham, 2011, p6).

This purpose-built model of student accommodation has grown significantly in the last few years with institutions (either their own, or via leases from the private sector) providing 382,000 beds (AUDE, 2018). In response to increased number and demand from students, universities have responded in developing their

estate, including residential accommodation. This renewed focus has not simply looked at infrastructure, but also on the overall experience or offer to students. As well as maintaining the bricks and mortar aspect of accommodation, providing housing for large numbers of students comes with other issues - physiological, psychological and sociological - which impact on student welfare, success, and in some cases discipline requirements.

## **2.6 Growth in residence education**

As discussed, universities in England are now looking at the student offer in the widest terms, not just the experience in the lecture theatre or workshop, but in every aspect of engagement including, and extending to, the residential programme. This has seen a renewed focus on the role of accommodation in supporting and enhancing the student experience and learning.

In the majority, the learning within a residence will be practical and, in many cases, student-led. Residence Life activities will be predominately experiential which reinforces the importance of the residential experience in the learning process (Kolb, 1984). Building on the work of Piaget and others, Kolb's experiential learning theory suggests that students learn best when they are taking part in active learning (Coons-Boettcher, 1998). Kolb's theory sets out a four-stage learning process starting with the 'Concrete experience' followed by 'Reflective observation', reviewing the experience, then 'Abstract conceptualisation' (analysing and learning from the experience) and finally 'Active experimentation', where the student tries out what they have learnt. This makes the residential setting a particularly suitable environment for learning, provided there is enough time put aside to work through these stages. This learning could be formal academic-focused curriculum or a more socially-engaged programme that encourages community building and socialisation.

### ***2.6.1 Living-learning communities***

Living-learning communities in England have their roots in the early collegiate university system established by Oxford and Cambridge, based on the monastic tradition. Although the colleges were originally 'boarding houses' for poorer students, eventually they became learning communities in their own right with students and teachers living in close proximity. This immersive approach to

learning has long been recognised as beneficial to students: *“Living is to be defined as more than a bed and learning as more than a desk; they are part of a total process, a wholeness of student experience on the campus. To contribute favourably and consistently to this experience, the living and learning that go on in student housing have to be stimulated and sustained by planned programs.”* (Riker, 1965) cited in (Parameswaran & Bowers, 2014, p58).

Today, a Living-Learning community or ‘LLC’ (also called a Living-Learning Programme or ‘LLP’) is a specific term for a residential learning community that is built around shared interests (York, 2020). Despite their inception at the University of Wisconsin in North America in 1927 (Nelson, 2009), it took a number of years to establish the model, with these communities growing in number across the United States throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Keeling, 2006) and continuing to become a popular model for universities.

Predominately academic in nature, these communities range in size from a small number of students sharing some common interests, to almost a ‘college within a college’ (Brower & Inkelas, 2010). A typology for LLPs was developed following analysis of 600+ programmes in the United States and classified them into seventeen types including: civic leadership, cultural, fine and creative arts, political interest, research and wellness (Inkelas et al, 2007).

Research shows that learning communities increase student retention and academic performance (Hotchkiss, 2006) as well as a number of other factors (Stassen, 2003). Universities promote the benefits of the LLC and the link to student success. An example of these is Syracuse University in the US, which highlights the benefit of a LLC to include: *“enhanced academic and social opportunities, improved GPA, improved connection to faculty, increased persistence to graduation”* (Syracuse, 2020).

John Holland’s Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (Holland, 1985) outlines six basic personality types and six corresponding environments. This work is not solely directed to student development but to society in general. Holland proposed that people search for environments in line with their skills, attitudes and values. The concept of a Living-Learning community, a seamless learning environment, provides a space where ‘liked-

minded' students can live (and study) together and are more likely to settle in quicker and integrate with the student of the LLC (Kuh, 1996). This applies to both the formal and informal education of students and advocates a holistic approach across the academic and social spheres of engagement.

### **2.6.2 Residence Life**

Aside from a number of exceptions, for example, the University of York, LLCs are not common in the UK, but there is increasing recognition that students do better when they are part of a community and for many students, especially in the first year, this will be residential. Hence creating a sense of community within the residence hall is important (Blimling, 2003) and for many institutions, in the UK and the United States, the Residence Life programme is the mechanism for building residential connectivity.

As discussed in earlier in this thesis, the term Residence Life was developed in the United States and much of the current literature on this is written within a North American context. The Journal of College and University Student Housing, a publication edited and published by the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), is a regular and reliable source of literature covering most issues surrounding student accommodation. This publication is gaining in relevance and popularity outside the United States as Residence Life programming grows in importance for institutions. Residence Life is an established field in the United States and often the content focuses on the operational side of Residence Life rather than more developmental aspects.

Students in the United States are considered to be minors until the age of 21. This differs with the English system whereby a student is regarded as an adult. Only recently, with recognition of wellbeing and mental health, are universities talking to parents about their child's welfare. Student housing in North America is typically owned by universities and is usually located close to the academic offer on campus or nearby.

There is an expectation that students will stay in university student housing for the whole course – usually four years. In England, a typical undergraduate degree is three years and many students are allocated university or university-nominated accommodation for their first year only. Again, this is changing in the UK, with

institutions encouraging returner students for the third and second years of their studies and reflects the research regarding student success in second year. A Canadian study examining the impact of living in student residences showed an increase in first year Grade Point Average (GPA), but the significant findings were for second year students who lived off campus. These students were approximately fifty percent more likely to drop out of their course compared to those who lived in residence (Peters et al, 2018).

These findings are reflected by US universities. The University of Kentucky, for example, describes Residence Life as a 'home-away-from-home' and promotes the benefit of living on campus. The university highlights that student academic success is greater when students live in residence. For example, the GPA for students living off campus is 2.76, whereas for students living on campus it is 3.13. Although there may be other factors in play which indicate whether a student can/is able to live in residence halls this uplift in attainment needs to be explored further (Kentucky, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, a seminal work in this area is 'Student Learning in College Residence Halls what works, what doesn't, and why' (Blimling, 2015) which discusses how students learn in residence halls and discusses how to create communities and learning environments in residence halls. *"Those who live on campus will spend more time in residence halls than classrooms and their residence hall experiences will significantly influence their success in college"* (Blimling, 2015, pxv)

Literature looking at the learning and development outcomes of Residence Life programmes in an Australian University (Kunda et al, 2020), cites the outcomes at the University of Sydney's International House, home to two hundred students from across the world. The programme aimed to foster international understanding and friendship among residents and to promote a diverse and inclusive community. Ninety percent of students when surveyed consistently reported an 'sense of belonging'. Overall, the findings revealed that structured, informal learning activities can positively influence student growth and development, particularly in relation to cultural competence and peer networks.

In general, Residence Life programmes have been seen as mostly an 'informal' activity, for example, a schedule of social activities or set of events. However, a developing trend is involving faculty in the accommodation experience, as discussed earlier, through living-learning communities, but also as part of Residence Life programmes. This trend is growing with a recognition that a more holistic approach can contribute to student success (Schmidt & Ellett, 2011).

As discussed, the residential environment can provide a conducive environment for education: "*residence halls have become incubators for intentionally designed social and learning experiences.*" (Whitcher-Skinner et al, 2017, p1). This is also reflected in the design of accommodation (Samura, 2016), with more social space allocated in buildings for welfare activities, community building or more formal activities (Student Minds, 2016)

Whether or not the Residence Life programme involves a faculty element, the residence education can be considered to be a type of curriculum. This is both a significant shift in thinking, but also in programme status. This change has an impact, not only in the way the content is developed and constructed, but also in the way you would assess the success of the programme. This curriculum assessment would need a step change in programme design and the consideration of issues such as learning outcomes and student skill development, rather than an outcome based solely on student attendance.

### **2.6.3 Residential curriculum**

Although in the past, there have been activities organised for students living in residential accommodation (especially in institutions following a collegiate model), halls of residence have not always been regarded as a suitable student 'learning' environment. This 'education dichotomy' or separation between the academic and the student support service meant that learning was expected to take place in designated academic learning spaces and created a lack of integration or holistic experience between academic and services or professional staff (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006).

Despite this archetype, over the last twenty years or so, a group of practitioners in the United States recognised the importance of learning in residences and actively developed their accommodation programme offer, using best practice

from a formal curriculum model and translating this approach for an informal education experience delivered in residential premises.

First developed at the University of Delaware at the start of the twenty first century, the approach was used to develop a framework for delivering citizenship education in a halls of residence setting (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). Rather than measuring the success of a programme based on the number of participants or the number of events organised, the framework had a set of competencies that students would be expected to achieve in an allocated timescale.

This paradigm shift (Barr & Tagg, 1995), whereby the educator creates environments and experiences and/or builds situations to support students to learn, rather than simply ‘transferring knowledge’, began by articulating what knowledge a participating student should have by the time they had completed the programme. Twenty-eight competencies were linked to a number of learning outcomes and associated learning goals, in this case, based around ‘self-awareness, connection and community’.

This ‘learning paradigm’ approach lends itself to a residential setting and fits more closely to the ‘outside world’ where individual development comes from a number of experiences such as work and social interaction. This approach is a way of creating and conceptualising student learning both inside and outside the classroom. It acknowledges the experiences the student undertakes whilst outside lectures and is important in providing a holistic educational learning opportunity. This approach has become increasingly popular in universities across the United States.

As a follow up to the research presented in 2006, Kerr et al suggest that the responsibility for informal learning needs to be shared across both the academic and student affairs departments and in order to be considered as a ‘true’ residential curriculum, the programme needs to include the ‘ten essential elements’ (Kerr et al, 2017) – see figure 10.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Directly connected to institutional mission                                 |
| 2 | Learning goals and outcomes are derived from a defined educational priority |
| 3 | Based on research and developmental theory                                  |
| 4 | Departmental learning outcomes drive development of educational strategies  |
| 5 | Traditional programs may be one type of strategy – but not the only one     |



|    |   |
|----|---|
| 6  | Student leaders and staff members play key roles in implementation but are not expected to be educational experts |
| 7  | Represents developmentally sequenced learning   |
| 8  | Campus partners are identified and integrated into plans  |
| 9  | Plan is developed through a review process  |
| 10 | Cycle of assessment for student learning and educational strategies   |

Figure 10: The ten essential elements of a Residential Curriculum Model for learning beyond the classroom, Kerr et al, 2017

There are a number of United States-focused Residence Life manuals, books and articles on designing programmes (Zeller, 2008). Many, for example, (Blimling, 2015) look to educational outcomes research in order to design and implement their programmes. Using outcomes is also useful in the consideration of assessment and the measurement of programme effectiveness.

A residential curricular approach is particularly relevant where there is a climate of: *“greater accountability, cost reductions, increased return on investment, data-proving impact and more ... educators have an obligation to each of these constituencies and to their institutions to make the most of the entire college experience for students, including the opportunities of learning beyond the classroom.”* (Kerr et al, 2020, p1). As the English higher education system becomes increasingly focused on value for money and the return on investment, a residential curriculum looks to be particularly attractive to both students and universities.

As institutions become more tactical in their approach, giving consideration to the whole campus offer to students there is an opportunity to demonstrate that educational value goes beyond the classroom. Figure 11 shows the differences in approach between a traditional Residence Life programme and one following the new ‘revolutionary’ curricular offer (Kerr et al, 2020). From the table (figure 10), a curricular model starts with an alignment to the institution’s strategy and is more structured and targeted in the goals and learning outcome.

| Traditional  | Curricular   |
|--|--|
| Identifies list of general topics or categories to which students could be exposed | Clearly defined more narrowly focused learning aims are tied to institutional mission                    |
| Often based on reaction to recent needs displayed by students                      | Based on scholarly literature, national trends, campus data, and assessment of student educational needs |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Student leaders or student staff determine the content within the categories and the pedagogy   | Clearly defined learning goals and delivery strategies are written by those with educational expertise  |
| Determining effective pedagogy is often the responsibility of student leaders or student staff members                                | Lesson plans or facilitation guides developed by educators with necessary expertise provide structure to guide facilitation of educational strategies |
| Focuses on who will show up to publicised programs  | Utilises a variety of strategies to reach each student  |
| Evaluated based on how many students attend   | Assesses student learning outcomes and effectiveness of delivery strategies   |
| Sessions stand alone, disconnected from what has come before or what will come after, and vary by each student leader or staff member | Content and pedagogy are developmentally sequence to best serve learners  |
| Often in competition with other campus units for students' time and attention   | Campus and community partners are integrated into the strategies, content and pedagogy are subject to review (internal and external)                  |

Figure 11: *The traditional approaches versus curricular approach to learning beyond the classroom (Kerr et al, 2020, p4)*

This is a step change for universities in seeing an educational offer that is delivered in a residential setting as both a curriculum and a programme with specific learning outcomes. This places a Residential curriculum on a par with an academic curriculum and provides a framework for institutions' Residence Life approach.

To support institutions in developing a residential curricular approach, an assessment tool for universities to gauge their readiness to adopt a residential curriculum approach has been developed and considers four frames or areas for review: the Structural frame, the Human Resources frame, the Political frame and finally the Symbolic frame. By conducting an assessment across these areas, an institution's readiness for change can be ascertained (Lichterman, 2016; Kerr et al, 2020).

## 2.7 The birth of a new phenomenon

The discussion so far has described a political and social landscape, alongside a number of areas instrumental in the development of the Residence Life phenomenon in England. Although the introduction of tuition fees brought a level of financial stability to institutions and the sector, the landscape created from the associated policies and the subsequent market forces intensified both the regional and national competition for student numbers. As well as academic seats of learning, universities needed to operate as businesses and set strategies to manage the changing ecosystem beset with subsequent high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty. The following sections look at the role of the Residence Life phenomenon in response to the changing political, educational and social environment.

### **2.7.1 Universities as businesses**

Universities are operating in a commercial context with the success of the institution linked to the income it receives in order to pay staff and develop infrastructure. In the majority of English universities, student recruitment plays a key role in the success of an institution. Without government enforced student number controls (SNCs), an institution can market, recruit and enrol cohorts of students limited only by the attractiveness of the offer or by a ceiling set by the institution itself.

The attractiveness of an institution to students is based on a number of factors including reputation, location and subject mix, but for a sector that is predominately a residential model, accommodation, especially the ability to offer a 'first year guarantee' to students, is particularly important. This means having enough student bedrooms for every first-year student and others can be a big undertaking and implies a key strategic link between the availability of student accommodation and ability to recruit.

Over the last few years, many institutions have developed their own accommodation, investing their own funds or working through a partnership model with external investors. For institutions based in large cities, a reliance on private student accommodation providers may also be an option in providing some or all of the accommodation required.

The role of Residence Life in these transactions are two-fold. Firstly, working to add an additional layer of attractiveness to the university offer, i.e., demonstrating the support provided for prospective students and the community-building aspect of the accommodation. This is attractive to both students to facilitate friend-making and social interaction and reassuring for parents to see they have support in settling in their children. Secondly, Residence Life, based on the student development theories to support belonging, friendship making and contributed to the overall student retention, there is continuity throughout the year and ultimately maximises the rental income for the institution.

Whether students are seen and treated as customers or coproducers, the university business is dependent on developing and maintaining an attractive student offer and retaining students once they have been recruited. Universities

are penalised both financially and reputationally if a student 'drops out' before the end of their course: *"high attrition rates have financial implications for first-year students who drop out mid-year and for the universities, in terms of student places and long-term planning"* (Perry & Allan, 2003, p74).

The 'completion rate' - how many students complete their course of study out of the number of students who originally started the course - is seen as a measure of success for universities. These statistics and details are analysed and presented annually and contribute to university rankings. The data is highlighted on student study sites and available on the HESA website (HESA, 2020b). As well as the impact on the university business, students failing to complete their courses can materially affect their life chances and finances *"students who do not complete their degree will have built up a higher debt without accruing the benefits"* (HMO, 2012,p59).

As discussed earlier, universities in England are competing in a market for students. Irrespective of whether students see themselves as customers, it is still imperative that universities attract and recruit the numbers required for financial sustainability. For growing numbers of institutions in England, Residence Life is playing an increasing role in the marketing and support of the universities.

In 2017, one hundred and twenty-one university prospectuses were thematically analysed to understand their key marketing messages. The five key themes included location, course, credibility, career progression (employability) and student experience. Within the student experience theme, accommodation, student support and Residence Life were key tools in the promotion of the institution. Observations were made that UK universities strongly endorsed the view of a: *"global university with international students from different parts of the world studying in the UK"* (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019, p1575) and universities liked to demonstrate their investments in the student experience by showing images of *"students enjoying the sporting facilities or relaxing in the halls of residence"* (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019, p1573). Despite the commonality in the themes noted in the research, universities aim to present a distinctive approach to attract students, maintain financial stability and ultimately to gain competitive advantage.

## 2.7.2 Environmental uncertainty

In times of uncertainty, an organisation's response has been compared to the theory of biological evolution and adaption to take account of the resources available. Organisations, for example universities, need to develop a strategy to cope with the complexity of the environment and react/innovate where possible to mitigate new and established risks and succeed. Environmental uncertainties can be considered in three ways: State uncertainty, Effect uncertainty and Reaction uncertainty (Milliken, 1987). Figure 12 describes these terms and shows how these uncertainties relate to higher education strategy and policy:

| Uncertainty type | Definition   | HE landscape and impact on Residence life/accommodation  |
|------------------|--|--|
| <b>State</b>     | Uncertainty about the state (or characteristics) of the environment - external factors that cannot be controlled by the university.            | The funding model for English universities and the future of tuition fees<br>UK Border/Visa policy and attractiveness of the UK as a study destination<br>Planning regulations, housing policy and national/local government appetite for HMO/residential accommodation<br>Regulations and/or policy change on the number of students able to attend university and/or the subjects they can study (student number controls)<br>Promotion of alternatives to higher education and their attractiveness e.g. higher level apprenticeships<br>Demographic changes – more or less 18 years olds<br>Development and impacts on digital environment |
| <b>Effect</b>    | Uncertainty around what impact the changed environment would have on a particular organisation – what does this change mean for the university | Changes mean that students are less/more likely to study at English universities<br>Changes mean that students select an alternative to the residential model of higher education<br>Changes in student population<br>Digitalisation of education – students study away from universities  |
| <b>Reaction</b>  | Uncertainty on the options available and the likely consequences   | Ambiguity on the possible mitigations available and their impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New academic courses</li> <li>• Scholarships</li> <li>• New models</li> <li>• New geographical locations</li> <li>• Innovations e.g., curricular and/or Residence Life programmes</li> <li>• New ways of administration</li> <li>• Marketing trends</li> </ul>  |

Figure 12: An illustration of Milliken's uncertainty types for future of higher education

For organisations such as universities to be successful they need to be aware of these uncertainties, and to remain successful they need to continually adapt to the environment. This adaption process can be considered as a key part of the university's strategy with the decisions of senior leaders critical to its development and success (Miles & Snow, 1978).

### **2.7.3 Organisational strategies and decision-making**

As discussed earlier, it can be considered that universities in England are operating under a number of conditions, for example they are increasingly expected to run as a business in an actively commercial environment, but they also receive a level of public funding and are seen by many as a public good, a community or civic institution whose reputation is intrinsically linked to the city or region.

The literature describes this operating environment as a quasi-market (Le Grand & Bartlett, 1993), (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005) and although the system of higher education in England is predominately seen as a public system, in reality it is quasi-public (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). University strategies need to perform a balancing act based on these two worlds. To balance sometimes conflicting priorities, there needs to be clarity on the benefits but also an understanding of the significant challenges when developing an institution's long-term strategy. In summary there is a need to juggle the contradictory operating landscape of state regulation and academic autonomy (Agasisti & Catalano, 2006).

Although universities are increasingly seen as autonomous businesses, they are organisations that need to be responsive to the environment in which they operate, and to adapt and change to ensure they remain viable (Duncan, 1972). In many cases, these institutions have moved from a 'grant receiving' mentality to a 'selling' or marketing, neoliberalist approach.

There are a number of market forces in operation, some within the influence of the institution, as well as other factors that are uncertain and/or unknown. When developing institutional strategies, universities need to be aware of the internal and external (both the public and business faces) landscapes, alongside the student offer and research profile. In order to develop a robust strategy for the organisation there needs to be an awareness of the possible trajectories for the sector and an understanding of how to mitigate any challenges arising from external factors.

In essence, for many situations universities behave less like public sector organisations and more like commercial entities. These are organisations that need to remain current, have an awareness of changes in the market and be able

to adapt to meet customer (student, faculty and stakeholder) demand. How successful they are - their 'organisational performance' - measures how well they respond to their environment through their understanding of the external environment, internal organisation characteristics and the managerial strategies on which the organisation is reliant for survival (Boyne, 2003), (Boyne, 2004).

As discussed previously in this Chapter, Residence Life can be a key strategic tool, both in recruitment and retention of students. This strongly supports an institutions longer-term sustainability and aspiration for business growth. Institutions realising their accommodation offer within the suite of key institutional strategic and financial drivers, are able to design a Residence Life offer that contributes to institutional financial stability, but also provides a space for innovation.

An organisation's strategy develops from the way they approach a defined set of circumstances or 'problems' (Miles & Snow, 1978). These three problems are described as the 'Entrepreneurial problem' (how organisations develop their offer/product/service and grow the market), the 'Engineering or operational problem' (how an organisation makes, builds and distributes the product/service) and the 'Administrative problem' (how an organisation responds internally, the process and structures they develop).

Miles and Snow suggest a 'typology' of organisations: 'prospector, defender, analyser, and reactor'. Each type of organisation interprets and tackles the problems in a different way. A Prospector organisation takes an innovative approach to development, whereas a Defender organisation values stability. The Analyser organisation is a combination of the Prospector and the Defender, aiming to minimise risk and yet maximise the opportunity for profit. The final type of organisation is the Reactor which tends to be inconsistent and unstable. The strategy is one of responding to external changes slowly or not appreciating their impact or severity.

Figure 13 looks in more detail at the Prospector organisation, the 'Innovator' organisation, and analyses how this type of university may react to the new policy landscape through the assessment of the three problems outlined by Miles and

Stone. This table focuses on ‘products’ or services associated with Residence Life.

| <b>Miles-Snow Typology of organisation – context: Residence Life</b> | Approach to <b>Entrepreneurial</b> problem – how should universities develop their offer and grow their market (share)?   | Approach to <b>Engineering</b> Problem – how should universities market themselves and promote their courses?  | Approach to <b>Administration</b> problem – how should universities structure themselves internally?  |
|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Prospector</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and validate new products, courses and models e.g. develop LLCs, install faculty in residence, introduce a Residential curriculum</li> <li>• Seek agreements and commercial partnerships with externals e.g. community stakeholders, accommodation operators</li> <li>• Look for alternative funding sources e.g. additional ‘fees’ for education in residence</li> <li>• Create ways of commuting students using residences and having access to residence education</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Residence Life as a marketing tool to attract new student cohorts</li> <li>• Use Residence Life as a feedback mechanism for established students to innovate the university products//services</li> <li>• Create a Residence Life community through innovative use of digital and social media</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalise residence staff</li> <li>• Conduct research and develop evidence-based approach</li> <li>• Decentralise and reduce levels of management</li> <li>• Encourage collaboration across faculties and professional departments</li> <li>• Develop possible validation route for residence education</li> </ul> |

Figure 13: A Miles-Snow Typology for Residence Life

Analysis shows there is room for universities to innovate through the medium of Residence Life. Residential education, and more specifically Residence Life provides a space for universities to differentiate their student offer. Through the development and creation of new products and services for students, universities can set themselves apart from other institutions, at least until others follow in their footsteps. Unlimited by the regulations and accreditation demands of academic programmes, Residence Life also provides a vehicle for developing partnerships with stakeholders and making arrangements with commercial entities such as private accommodation providers.

## 2.8 Discussion

The literature review outlined earlier in this Chapter provided an overview and context for the objectives of the research for the exploration of the Residence Life phenomenon, discussed in Chapter 1. The review found a lack of literature relating directly to the development of the Residence Life phenomenon in England, however a number of aligned research fields provided a foundational base on which to draw and develop the framework for the research.

The review of literature indicated that the expansion of the phenomenon is both a product, and a response, to the changing political and social environment, and



pointed to five main themes which supported the prevalence of the Residence Life phenomenon.

As discussed in this chapter (section 2.3), throughout history, the residential element has been an important aspect to the English higher education sector. In 2012 there was a fundamental shift in the proportion of tuition fee a student in England was expected to pay. Although bringing an assured level of investment and financial stability to the sector, it also had an immediate impact on both the higher education sector, which was now competing for each student, and for the student who was seen to be paying substantial funds for their study. Students perceived this to be an investment in their future and started to be clearer and more vocal on their capital return. The student experience continued to be the focus for many universities keen to articulate their academic offer, student facilities and support.

The introduction of fees also saw the removal of the student numbers cap which meant the amount of home students attending universities could increase. Due to the residential model of higher education in England, the increase in student numbers placed a substantial demand on the need for student accommodation, close to the university library and academic facilities. This contributed to the development of a marketplace with students anxious to secure a university place and associated accommodation. The literature indicated that accommodation has become a strategic balancing act for universities, ensuring the university can meet the 'first year accommodation guarantee' whilst not over-committing to agreements with external operators. In many cases, universities rely on private accommodation operators to help them meet their need for accommodation provision, but in other cases these operators are directly competing with universities for residence-seeking students.

The literature review found that universities need to compete in the marketplace to recruit students and therefore need to adopt a strategic approach to ensure the sustainability and stability of their institution. There is a pressure to remain competitive with other universities and an emphasis on the student experience offer which goes beyond the academic provision.

Although many universities market to students (as customers), they adopt more of a co-producer approach. This has led to a strategic review of the campus experience, with the delivery of many student services such as accommodation viewed through a different lens. Over the last ten years there has been a deeper recognition of the student journey and understanding of the impact of student development and transition. More recently, this emphasis has moved solely from the academic sphere to a more holistic, campus-wide view which acknowledges the role of accommodation in student retention and success. The success of the transition to higher education can be shaped by many factors. As discussed in the previous section 2.4.3, these factors are a combination of pre-arrival and post-arrival influences constructed by the student and based on experiential and psychological processes.

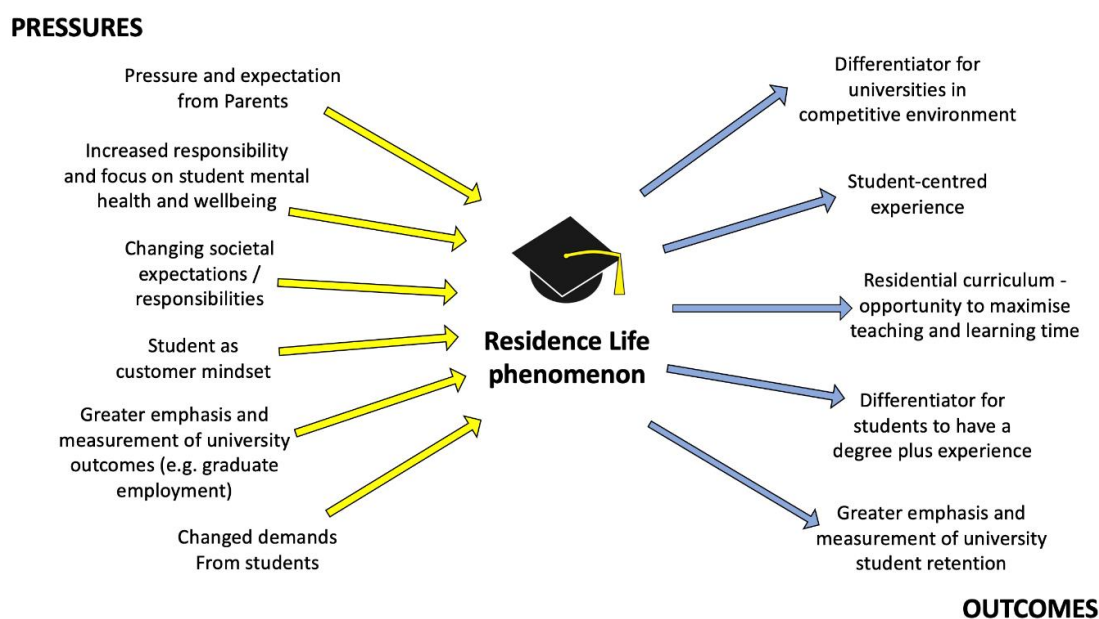


Figure 14: An initial model of forces associated with a university Residence Life programme

The research found that there has been a significant increase in the number and proportion of international students studying in English institutions in the last ten years. As well as implementing the retention and support mechanisms for these students outlined earlier in this chapter, they also require different support and provision to support their cultural adjustment (Peelo & Luxon, 2007).

This monumental change came at the same time as a new Generational cohort, called Generation Z, were starting university. The literature suggests that this

cohort of students had a number of characteristics that reinforced the need for additional support. These factors may have impacted on the need for an enhanced student welfare offer and suggest a development such as the phenomenon of Residence Life.

The review of literature found that Residence Life has become part of the 'toolbox' (fig. 14) which universities can use to both support the students' educational outcomes, i.e., a student's transfer to university and integration, but also as a major strategic and financial lever. Research showed that Residence Life is now part of the marketing effort in the recruitment of students as well as the support provided to ensure student retention and success. In a majority residential model of higher education, quite unique in comparison to the rest of the world, accommodation is increasingly being seen as the key to institutional success and supports the foundations for business growth, reputationally and financially.

Strategically, Residence Life is part of the wider strategic direction of an institution, for example, if the institution is looking to attract more international students and hence may need more accommodation, or whether the institution has a large 'commuter student' base and is looking to mirror a residential model across this cohort. These strategic directions may require building more accommodation or developing partnerships outside universities with accommodation providers or complementary organisations local Health Trusts who need key worker housing. This is all alongside the institutional responsibilities for student welfare and their educational success.

## **2.9 Research questions**

From the findings discussed in the previous sections, a framework comprising of a set of research questions was developed and refined to guide the next phase of the research.

As is evident from the literature, there is an interactional link between the political and social landscape of higher education in England and the proliferation of the Residence Life phenomenon. However, as this is an area of limited research currently, further investigation is required to identify the factors in play and how these impact on higher education institutions.

This research thesis aims to fill the gap in knowledge surrounding the development of Residence Life phenomenon in England and the subsequent impact on the future strategies of higher education institutions. In order to explore this phenomenon, the study is structured around a framework of research questions. These questions act as a guide through the investigation and are informed from the review of literature, from my observations and professional experience working in student accommodation and the field of higher education policy. For this thesis, the primary research question is:

**What are the main drivers contributing to the growth in the Residence Life phenomenon in the English HE sector since 2010?**

This inquiry can be categorised into a set of framing secondary research questions. These questions are intended to provide a structure for the investigation, to aid in the development for the design of the research method and ultimately provide a useful anthology for the wider sector:

- **How does the phenomenon of Residence Life manifest at an institutional level?**
- **What do Residence Life practitioners perceive are the drivers that have led to the Residence Life phenomenon in England?**

This thesis explores the meteoric rise of the Residence Life phenomenon and investigates the factors and drivers for its development in the context of the English higher education sector. The study will also look at individual institutions to analyse how the phenomenon manifests through the approaches used and the design of structures and programmes.

Findings from the literature review suggest a number of factors complicit in the development of the Residence Life phenomenon, however, there may be other factors in play, areas that have not been identified in the current literature. Confirming these factors and investigating whether there are others to be uncovered is the purpose of this research study.

As well as understanding the elements contributing to the phenomenon, it is important to understand the longer-term implications for universities, their operations, and their institutional strategy, and to provide a useful framework and tool for practitioners. Once a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon

has been achieved, the findings will be used to generate a set of recommendations to support universities in their understanding and decision making.

## CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the strategy of inquiry and research design selected for this study into the development of the Residence Life phenomenon in England. It includes the rationale behind selecting the research approach and explains the techniques and processes used for the collection, analysis, presentation and interpretation of the data. The chapter also outlines the field work that supports the methodology and describes the ethical considerations for this study.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the research questions formed the framework for this study. Preliminary versions of these questions were derived from the early stages of research and iterated further throughout the literature review. The primary research question: **'What are the main drivers contributing to the growth in the Residence Life phenomenon in the English HE sector since 2010?'** was supported by two supplementary questions which provided the overarching structure for the study: (a) How does the phenomenon of Residence Life manifest at an institutional level? And (b) What do Residence Life practitioners perceive are the drivers that have led to the Residence Life phenomenon in England?

### 3.2 Rationale for research approach

The Residence Life phenomenon touches upon a number of research areas including student development theory (Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 1975; Yorke, 2000), higher education policy and generational theory (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, there were currently limited research and literature on the initiation and development of the phenomenon, both as a focus on institutions and from a sector wide perspective. The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, in the context of the English higher education sector. Identifying and modelling the phenomenon, at both a systemic and institutional level, would enable the development of institutional strategies, and contribute towards the long-term reputational and financial sustainability of the wider sector.

In order to select a research approach, it was important to appreciate the variety of research methodologies and methods available (Bryman, 2012) and their

suitability for understanding, and solving the problem under consideration. Using the research questions as the overarching framework for the inquiry it was important to select a methodology that used the combined strengths of both quantitative and qualitative techniques and data sets i.e., a Mixed Methods approach (Creswell, 2015; Creswell, 2018) to understand the phenomenon at large.

As one of the first research studies on the Residence Life Phenomenon in England it was necessary to ascertain both a sense of scale (quantitative) and an accompanying narrative (qualitative) to better investigate the phenomenon and subsequent impacts for the higher education sector.

### 3.3 Research design

After reviewing the initial research steps required for the investigation, an **‘Exploratory sequential’** Mixed Method design was selected. This method was described in the literature as particularly relevant for use where the landscape is not well understood (Creswell, 2015). This approach provided the structure for a progressive investigation where the initial findings informed and guided the next stage of the research. This mixed method design can be represented as a flow chart which demonstrates the individual processes (see fig.15).



*Figure 15: Exploratory Sequential mixed method design from (Bryman, 2015) based on (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)*

In order to develop a similar flow chart for this study, first the research processes needed to be clearly articulated and described (see fig.16). The processes chart documented the questions the research would address and the possible sources of data to investigate the inquiry. The processes chart showed that rather than the traditional ‘qualitative then quantitative’ approach, or vice versa, the investigation would have three ‘phases’ with an additional qualitative process.

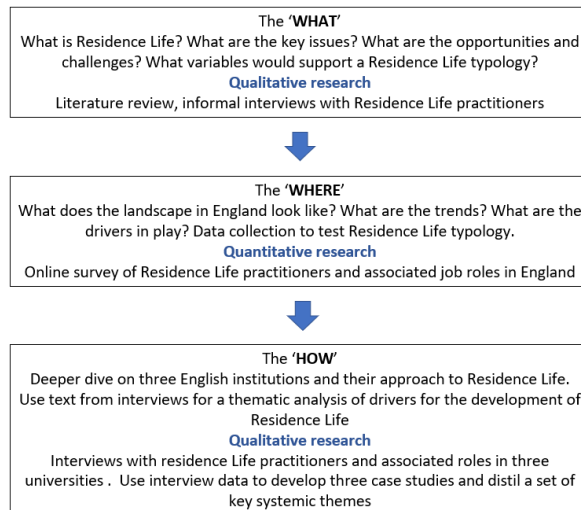


Figure 16: The research processes for this study into Residence Life

Figure 17 shows a standard exploratory sequential design, however, the research processes analysis for this investigation showed that an additional 'qualitative' phase was required. This additional feature was introduced to the basic design to create an advanced mixed methods procedure (Creswell, 2015) called a 'Multistage Evaluation'.



Figure 17: An Exploratory sequential design for mixed methods (Creswell, 2015)

Figure 18 shows the multistage evaluation (top flow chart) alongside a summary of the research study procedures (lower flow chart). The diagram demonstrated the additional research phase required, i.e., developing the case studies and models.



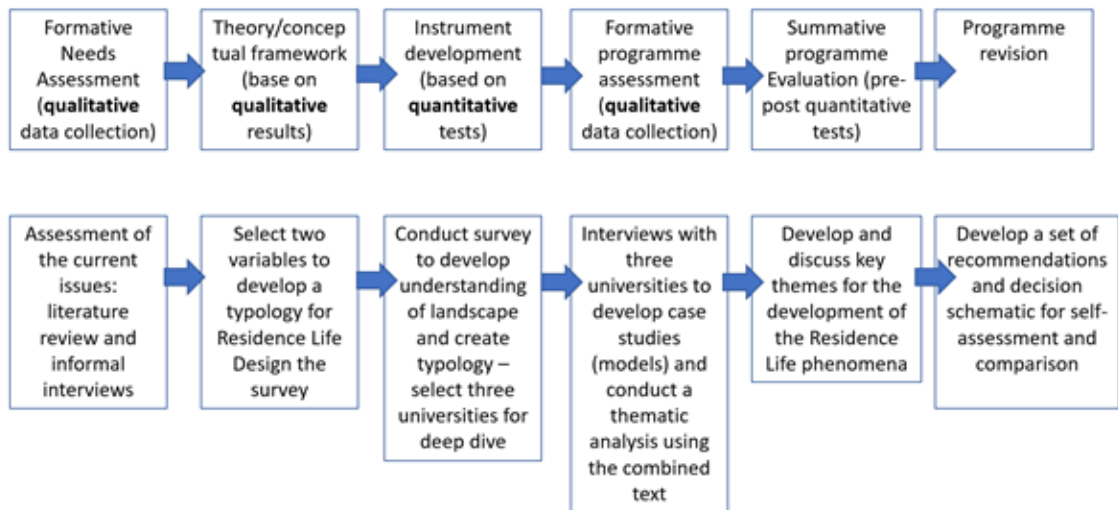


Figure 18: A Multistage Evaluation using an Exploratory Sequential design (top flow chart), with the study procedures mapped alongside (lower flow chart) (Creswell, 2015)

### 3.4 Procedure

This section describes the research procedure and outlines the overall plan for the investigation (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). The procedure was a holistic investigation using established research design techniques, selecting methods appropriate for each research question. This approach enabled the formulation of a framework and plan for the exploration of the research topic.

An Exploratory Sequential method was selected which is an approach to combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a sequence of phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The research design was structured into a set of phases which helped articulate the rationale and expectation behind each stage. Each stage played an important role in the contribution made to the overall investigation, for example, the initial qualitative phase provided ‘critical fodder’ (SAGE, 2019) for the quantitative phase i.e., the questionnaire.

A ‘twelve step process’ was adopted for this Mixed Methods research project (Cohen et al, 2018), summarised as:

- Phase 1 – **Qualitative data collection**

In order to gain a contextual understanding of Residence Life, qualitative research was conducted through informal interviews and a review of academic and grey literature. The research considered a set of initial questions to explore the field: What is Residence Life? What are the key

issues? And what are the opportunities and challenges? This phase provided an overarching view of the topography across the sector and provided input into the philosophy for the development of the Residence Life typology. This phase helped to inform the development of the survey to understand the landscape and assess the Residence Life provision in England.

- **Phase 2 – Qualitative results**

From the literature review and informal discussion, two variables were selected to initiate the development of a typology to better understand the operations and distribution of Residence Life in England. This phase informed the development of the survey and the questions needed to explore the landscape of Residence Life provision and to test the typology framework.

- **Phase 3 – Quantitative tests**

The third phase was quantitative research, conducted through a national survey to ascertain a deeper understanding of the 'size and shape' of the Residence Life provision across the sector. The survey was used to assess individual institutions and to test the Residence Life typology. Following the results of the typology, three individual institutions were selected for further study.

- **Phase 4 – Qualitative data collection**

The fourth phase was the qualitative research and data collection. This involved interviewing Residence Life practitioners and associated staff in the selected institutions to develop a set of case studies. These studies provided a detailed understanding of Residence Life in those institutions. The text data from the interviews was also analysed thematically to assess the key developments that have led to the Residence Life phenomenon.

- **Phase 5 – Evaluation**

This phase assessed the data and integrated the results to develop a set of key themes which underline the development of the Residence Life phenomenon.

- **Phase 6 – Recommendations**

The final phase analysed the themes and developed a set of recommendations for universities and practitioners. A decision schematic was also developed to enable an assessment and comparison of Residence Life models, and support university's future strategies.

### **3.5 Research sample and data sources**

Previous to this study there had been limited data and research into the manifestation of the phenomenon within the English higher education sector. This meant there were limited secondary data sources available to use for this research, however a wealth of data about universities, their students and estate, collected annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) was used in conjunction with the primary data collected for comparison and deeper analysis.

In order to research the Residence Life phenomenon, primary data needed to be obtained directly from English universities and representatives from areas associated with Residence Life. Initial desk top research found there was a large variation in the staff roles associated with Residence Life, some linked to student accommodation, some to student services or student experience roles.

This ambiguity made the identification and targeting of practitioners difficult and therefore, to obtain data on Residence Life, an open survey inviting participation from a range of roles was designed. This survey was designed to be inclusive and representative of the diverse set of job titles and organisational structures operating in Residence Life, providing a clearer understanding of the overall landscape. This landscape enabled the targeting of institutions for interviews and the subsequent development of case studies.

### **3.6 Data collection methods**

The approach to primary data collection was twofold: a quantitative survey that generated data to understand the wider landscape and support the development

of institutional typologies; and qualitative case studies generated by semi-structured interviews. Institutional documentation available publicly on institutional websites, and information provided at/or following the interviews, alongside secondary data from publicly accessible sources such as Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) were also used in the analysis of the case studies.

The table below (fig.19) summarises the data collection method for each research question.

| Research question  | Data collection methods   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>What are the main drivers contributing to the growth in the Residence Life phenomenon in the English HE sector since 2010?</b></p> <p><i>Also need to understand:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the operating context at both a systems and institutional level?</li> <li>• What are the Residence Life phenomenon drivers at a systems level?</li> <li>• How does Residence Life manifest at a systems level?</li> </ul> | <p>National policy context</p> <p>Informal conversations</p> <p>Open survey</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Analysis of key themes</p> |
| <p><b>How does Residence Life manifest at an institutional level?</b></p>  | <p>Desk top research</p> <p>Literature review</p> <p>Open survey</p> <p>Interviews</p>  |
| <p><b>What do Residence Life practitioners perceive are the drivers that have led to the Residence Life phenomenon in England?</b></p>   | <p>Informal conversations</p> <p>Open survey</p> <p>Interviews</p>  |
| <p><b>Implications and recommendations</b></p> <p>How will the Residence Life phenomenon impact on the future strategies of a university?</p>  | <p>National policy context</p> <p>Literature review</p> <p>Interviews</p>   |

Figure 19 - Planning matrix showing data collection methods

### 3.6.1 Quantitative survey

The surveying method was selected to ascertain the national landscape of the Residence Life and to better understand the characteristics of the phenomenon. A survey research method is defined as *"the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions"* (Check & Schutt, 2012, p160) and is used to determine a set of characteristics of a given population. This approach enabled an exploration of the phenomenon and included any participants operating within the bounds of the English system and who identified themselves as being aware of the phenomenon.

In order to ensure a good sample size of participants taking part in the survey it was conducted online and promoted widely through digital social networks. An article on Residence Life, highlighting the survey was also published online (Chipperfield, 2019) and promoted through social media.

The online survey (see Appendix 1) was developed to provide a detailed understanding of the Residence Life phenomenon in higher education institutions. The survey development was informed by undertaking desktop research and informal conversations with practitioners to understand key issues before developing the survey.

The survey was designed to provide data on a number of areas including the purpose and priorities of the Residence Life programme, the funding arrangements, and the delivery and design of the programme. From the analysis of the data, three institutions were selected for further investigation in the form of interviews with practitioners.

The first two questions were designed to ascertain whether the institution had a programme and the length of its existence. If the answer was 'no' then the survey participant was taken straight to the final section to provide further insight on their role, views and university. However, if the survey participant answered 'yes' to a programme and provided the length of operation, they were taken to the second section of the survey looking at the purpose. This section was designed to establish the purpose and the institutional priorities for the programme and identify whether the programme was related to the strategy of the university.

The third question was designed to ascertain the perceived purpose of the programme and to gauge whether the emphasis was on individual student success or the development of a student community. Question eleven asked whether participation in the programme was compulsory, or that elements of the programme were compulsory. These questions provided the data for the typology assessment outlined in more detail in section 5.2. Question 14 provided a checking mechanism to compare practitioner perceptions with the answers given previously in questions three and eleven. A free text box was also provided at the end of the survey for participants to note down any observations or explanations.

The survey hosted by JISC Online Surveys (formerly BOS), was launched in April 2019 and was open for six weeks. The link to the survey was emailed to around hundred contacts currently working across the higher education sector and was featured in a national higher education policy blog (Chipperfield, 2019) about Residence Life.

The link was circulated to contacts in a number of higher education agencies and representative bodies such as CUBO, a professional association for senior managers of commercial and campus services in higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland (CUBO, 2020a) and AMOSSHE, the Student Services organisation (AMOSSHE, 2020), to highlight the research and asking them to pass on the link to their members. The link was also circulated through the 'Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy' JISC mailing list and circulated on LinkedIn.

### **3.6.2 Qualitative case studies**

The data collection for the case study development was based on semi-structured interviews. A set of questions were developed (see Appendix 2) to provide a framework for the interview and to ensure a level of consistency between the interviews.

The questions for the interviews were developed following the online survey and covered six main areas. These areas provided a structure for the development of the case study and enabled comparison between institutions.

The first set of questions were used to establish the practitioner's current role and responsibility and to understand the wider staffing structure. The next set of questions provided an opportunity to understand more about the institution, to provide a degree of context about the institution including the recruitment characteristics, accommodation profile, subject mix and values.

The third and fourth sections focused on the current Residence Life offer in the case study institution and whether the programme linked specifically to the university's strategy and/or curriculum. From the literature review (Kerr et al, 2017) discussed the ten 'conditions' for a residential curriculum (see figure 10) and so these questions also tested the alignment of the institution with these principles.

The final section provided an opportunity to discuss the future plans for the institution both in the overall strategy of the organisation, but also in the future development of the student accommodation offer. This section provided an insight into the institutions direction and the likely impact of the Residence Life phenomenon in their institutions and more broadly across the sector.

### **3.7 Research setting**

In order to provide a bounded space for the study, the research focused on institutions operating only within the English higher education system. This was to ensure the research reflected one funding system and fee regime. In the UK, higher education is a devolved matter which means each government within a constituent nation of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) is responsible for the design and implementation of their own model or system of higher education.

Tuition fees were introduced in the UK through the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998, with each undergraduate student paying up to one thousand pounds a year. Following devolution in 1999, each national administration was able to develop a different system for higher education, and currently, each has a distinct approach to tuition fees and funding.

The English system was selected for the research as it is the largest within the United Kingdom with over a hundred individual higher education institutions. The English higher education sector is also a system in which I have worked within, and therefore the system where I have the deepest knowledge and understanding.

As an emerging field of study in the UK, the first step was in understanding the Residence Life landscape in England. For this study, the initial assessment needed to be broad enough to ascertain the 'size and shape' of the resulting phenomenon across the English sector and at the same time, detailed enough to create institutional models to enable comparison.

### **3.8 Selection of cases**

There were a number of possible ways to select case studies for a research study. However, in order to understand the development of the Residence Life

phenomenon in England it was important to select institutions conducting Residence Life in a variety of forms and across a variety of institutions. If randomisation was used in the selection of institutions the study would have run the risk of missing important findings. As explained earlier in the chapter, there was also a level of difficulty in identifying Residence Life practitioners in an institution as role titles and structures differed between institutions.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

Analysis was conducted in three main tranches – interrogating the survey data, developing the set of case studies and distilling the key system-level themes. Each tranche of the analysis built on the section before to provide a deeper understanding of the Residence Life landscape and the manifestation and impact of the phenomenon.

This analysis was conducted within the broader context discussed in the review of literature in Chapter 2 which focused on the student development theories relating to student identity (Chickering, 1969) and transition (Bridges, 2011), retention (Tinto, 1975) and student persistence and the importance of community building and instilling a sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012).

#### **3.9.1 Analysis of survey data**

The survey was analysed manually and computationally using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. In some cases, the primary data obtained from the survey was combined with secondary data from HESA to create a richer set and enable greater comparison (see section 4.2 for more information). The data from survey questions three and eleven were used in the typology assessment outlined in the later section 5.2.

#### **3.9.2 Analysis of semi-structured interview data**

The data from the interviews with practitioners at three different institutions was used to develop the three case studies. A case studies approach was selected as these can be used to “*generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context*” (Crowe et al, 2011, p1) and can be a tool to explore and explain an everyday phenomenon.



The institutions were selected from the national survey conducted in phase 3 of the research study (section 5.2.7). Following a quantitative analysis of the survey results a typology was developed (see section 5.2.1) and institutions selected from varying positions on the typology. As well as the institution's position on the typology, the selection process also ensured that the case studies were representative of the broader higher education sector across a range of factors including the type of institution, size of institution and geographical location of the institution.

The interviews took the form of structured interviews with a set of questions (see Appendix 2). The questions were designed to be structured enough to provide a framework for comparison between the institutions but sufficiently open-ended to provide the opportunity for unexpected or novel answers and concepts.

A comparative case study approach was selected for research phase four to provide a more open-ended investigation of the Residence Life phenomenon in a number of English institutions. This qualitative method allowed investigation of a real-world phenomenon and is especially relevant for an emerging or new occurrence, and hence "*the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident*" (Yin, 2018, p15).

### **3.9.3 Analysis of key system-level themes**

As well as using the interview data to generate case studies and models at an institutional level, the text from all the university interviews were combined and analysed to collect key themes for the system-level drivers for the Residence Life phenomenon.

The interviews with the university representatives provided detail about their institution and approach to Residence Life which were represented in the case studies, however, these transcripts also provided a rich source of data for further analysis. The data from the case study interviews were analysed for key themes, looking to identify a set of recurring patterns and common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) relating to the systemic development of the Residence Life phenomenon.

### 3.9.3.1 Thematic analysis process

Qualitative interviews were conducted with three universities (A, B and C) and the transcripts from the recorded discussions were used to analyse the drivers and key themes which underpinned the development of Residence Life programmes in those English institutions. The data derived at these institutions was assumed to be representative of the themes and drivers for the broader sector. These broader, system-level themes then formed the basis for a discussion on the likely factors that have contributed to the phenomenon of Residence Life development in England over the last few years.

The thematic analysis is an iterative process, transforming large volumes of text into a set of codes which are grouped together and developed into a number of overarching themes. The thematic analysis process used is summarised as a flow diagram (Fig. 20). The overarching themes provided a lens and summary to support the final analysis and commentary development (Braun & Clarke, 2006), (Guest et al, 2012) and formed the basis for the discussion and insights in Chapter 6.

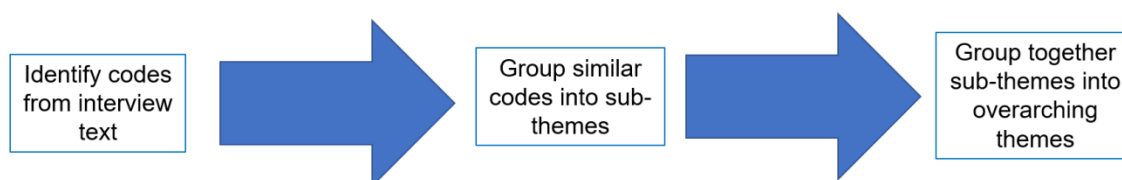


Figure 20 - The thematic process to develop key themes

The procedure used in this study followed a six-step thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which started by reading through the interview transcripts and outlining initial thoughts on the possible themes – these acted as a checklist for the final assessment (see fig.21).

|   |
|---|
| Changes in staffing structures                              |
| Creating a sense of belonging                               |
| Emphasis on student welfare                                 |
| Student loneliness and friendship                           |
| Importance of student accommodation in university selection |
| Diverse student cohort                                      |

|   |
|---|
| Parental involvement                                  |
| Increase in non-traditional students                  |
| Increasing awareness and impact of student experience |

*Figure 21 - Initial thoughts on possible themes checklist*

These initial themes strongly aligned with a number of areas underpinned by the student development theories discussed in Chapter 2. For example, Student loneliness (McIntyre et al, 2018; Mansfield et al, 2019), creating a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943; Thomas, 2012) and the impact of the student experience (Tinto, 1975; Yorke, 2000; Yorke & Longden, 2004; Yorke & Longden, 2008).

### 3.9.3.2 Developing a set of codes

The next step was to develop a set of preliminary codes. This involved reading through the text and identifying common and repeated statements. These were highlighted and the code noted as a comment in the margin.

Working through the text, a set of codes were developed based on the practitioner observations and comments made in the transcript. Text with similar codes were grouped together to distil into key sub-themes. Figure 22 shows an example of this process was conducted with excerpts discussing changes in staffing, structures and delivery grouped together from a number of practitioner interview transcripts.

The next task was to refine these into a set of comprehensive codes that encapsulate the text. These codes were then collated into larger groupings and from these distilled further to create a label for the group or a provisional theme. This set of themes was then refined and developed further to create a cohesive summary of the key discussion points raised in the interviews. They formed the basis for the discussion on the likely factors that have contributed to the phenomenon of Residence Life development in England over the last few years.

| Interview transcript  | Coding – level 1  | Coding -level 2 (sub-theme)   | Overarching theme  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p><b>University practitioner 1:</b> "so I've worked for the university for 20 years this year. I've been in this particular role in its current format for six years. I had a similar title for three years prior to that but it was a different structure and a different set of services."</p>   | Signals recent changes in staff/service delivery – new structures/services                          | Staff processes and procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New staffing and delivery structures</li> <li>• Shift from volunteer to paid professionals</li> <li>• Shift in service philosophy and/or design</li> <li>• Focus on quality of service</li> </ul> | Professionalising residence practitioners and service delivery |
| <p><b>University practitioner 2:</b> "Prior to, there used to be this role called the welfare advisor. They weren't advisors because they weren't trained. They had no formal training, so we changed that and we had this new welfare coordinator and we train them, so they know the types of issues that they will come up against, and then they know which services are best too."</p>   | Signals recent changes in staff/service delivery – formal training and professionalisation of roles |   |  |
| <p><b>University practitioner 3:</b> "When I first came into post, residences sat within estates, so they were within the bricks and mortar and we didn't have the student wellbeing service. We had some counselling out there and that was it really. So, we had a disjointed bunch of things which is fine, but it's a bit silo'd. So, I spent all that time trying to pull all these things together and to get people to understand that the impact their area has on the rest of the university."</p> | Signals recent changes in staff/service delivery – changes to structure and support rationale       |   |  |
| <p><b>University practitioner 4:</b> "We are going to change our model slightly, but we will still have... the current model at the moment is we have 40 RA's and they are spread across the portfolio. But we are changing that because it's so difficult to try and manage and work with these students. A lot of them come in and then realise by November time, that they've got other priorities that they want to... a lot of the time, it's their academic stuff that takes over."</p>               | Signals upcoming changes to staff/service delivery - structure and responsibilities                 |   |  |

Figure 22 - Example of coding from interview transcripts

### 3.10 Limitations

The Residence Life phenomenon is a new and emerging topic with limited research and data available. The research method was designed to get an appreciation of the national Residence Life landscape and then perform a deeper dive into a set of institutions to understand the manifestation of the phenomenon at a meso level.

There were two main data collection methods, namely, a survey and a set of recorded interviews. From this data, three case studies were developed and the interview text used to distil key systemic themes. The attractiveness of using a case study approach for this study was in the ability to use a narrative to facilitate and explain the complex relationships and situations. This was especially important in the consideration of an emerging phenomenon as the case studies support the exploration of unexpected and unusual findings.

However, it is important to be mindful of the limitations of the case study approach. These limitations can include:

- the generation of large amounts of complex data,
- not being able to distil the information into a useful format and generate valuable findings,
- non-numerical data that is difficult to analyse and compare.

To mitigate these issues, three institutions were selected as subjects for the comparison and a set of questions (appendices 1 and 2) were used to provide a framework for the explanatory case studies. The purpose of the case studies in this research was to provide three in-depth summaries and individual examples of the development and drivers for Residence Life in England. Each case study was summarised and presented as a model with a particular set of attributes.

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are critical to the design and completion of this research. Although this piece of research is predominately an academic work, there may be some limited commercial benefit derived through the reading of this work.

This thesis will be freely available to all parties. The anomaly and confidentiality of the institutions and participants in this study will protect a direct comparison and assessment of the approaches.

While care was given to guard the anonymity and confidentiality of the institutions, staff and students, it may still be possible that some will be able to interpret and identify the institutions studied for this thesis. While this is a possibility, every effort has been made to protect the identity of the institutions and individuals who participated in this research.

In order to safeguard the participants' rights, the following steps were taken in the study:

- Universities in the survey and case studies are not named in this document.
- The privacy and confidentiality of organisations and individuals were protected during and after the research process.
- Participants were provided with consent forms and information sheets.

There was no deception at any stage in the research process. Participants were made fully aware of the process and the associated expectations.

### **3.12 Chapter summary**

This chapter outlined the main considerations for the study and detailed the methodology to explore the phenomenon of Residence Life. The chapter discussed the rationale for selecting a Mixed Methods approach with a multistage exploratory sequential process and outlined the procedure in detail. The chapter discussed the development of a new typology to aid in understanding the broader Residence Life phenomenon, this typology is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS: SURVEY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the results from the national survey of Residence Life practitioners. Two questions from the survey were used to populate a sector typology for Residence Life and are discussed in more depth in the next chapter. and the development of a sector-level typology for English Residence Life. This chapter provides details on the participants responding to the survey alongside an insight into the operating context of English higher education.

### **4.2 Survey participants**

This section reviews the participants who responded to the national online survey. The purpose of this survey was to understand and articulate the landscape of Residence Life in England. The respondents to the survey also provided a good population of Residence Life practitioners from which to select the three institutions for case study development and subsequent systemic thematic analysis.

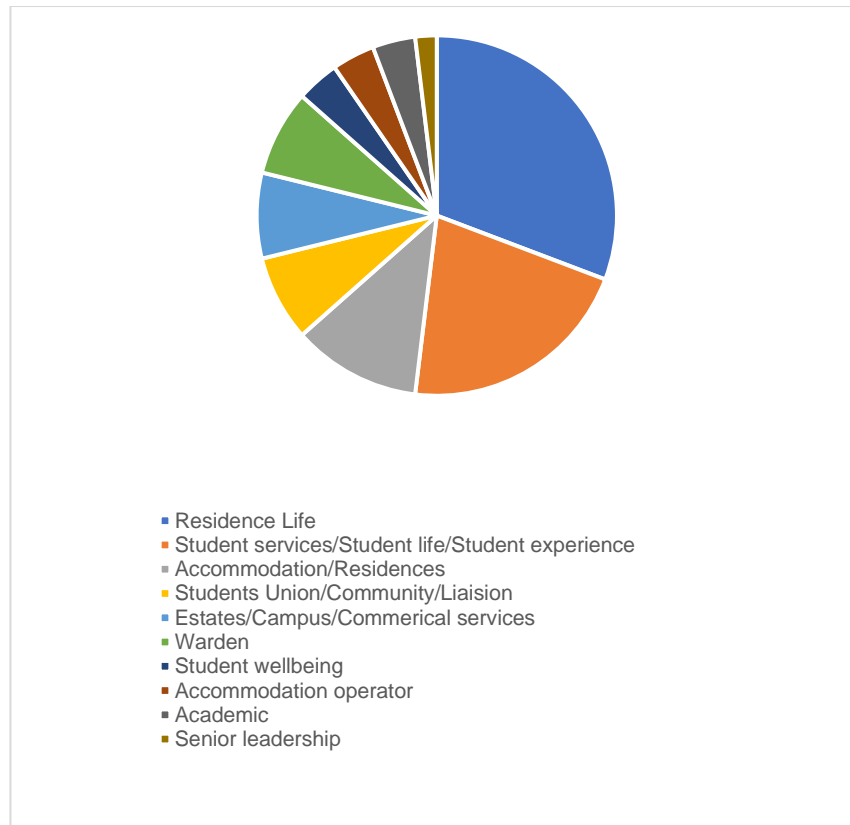
The survey was promoted via the Wonkhe article (Chipperfield, 2019) and via contacts working in student accommodation and student services. The respondent population were a self-selecting cohort and consisted of fifty- two participants from thirty institutions, achieving a good data set for analysis and interpretation. Where there were multiple entries from a single university, the numerical scores where aggregated and an average value obtained.

Participants were encouraged to complete the Residence Life in the context and understanding of their current job role. Concern that the self- selecting element of this research may be subject to bias, for example, a respondent may only participate if they thought their Residence Life programme was excellent, was not found in the survey results. The data showed a wide range of institutions responding to the survey and many staff roles represented. Alongside a healthy return and population sample, this provided a level of confidence that the survey provided insight into the phenomenon at an institutional and sector-wide perspective.

In order to understand more about both the Residence Life programmes offered at the institutions and their development and priorities, information on the institutions was used and a data set created. The institutional data was sourced from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2020a). HESA works with the UK providers of higher education to collect data on a range of areas covering university students, staff and estate information and provides open data which is published under the Creative Commons licence.

#### **4.2.1 Job role**

An analysis of the individuals who responded to the survey shows that the majority - just over thirty percent of participants - had the term 'Residence Life' in their job titles (see fig 23). Although the survey had been circulated widely across higher education sector through policy, teaching and commercial networks, those roles who had direct experience and understanding of their university's Residence Life offer were the ones who responded to the survey. This may indicate that the survey link was forwarded onto the appropriate staff supporting Residence Life activities in the institution.



*Figure 23 - The respondent's role by job title*



Analysis of the respondent's level of management responsibility (see figure 24) showed that the majority of survey entries were completed by managers or directors, at fifty four percent. The survey also confirmed the variety in roles and role titles across the sector in the area of Residence Life (see figure 23). In some institutions, Residence Life and the accommodation offer more generally, is considered to be part of the estates department of universities, for others it is part of the student services directorate. This distinction in reporting, processes and 'how Residence Life is seen', may contribute to a variation in the overall approach and priorities for these programmes.

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Manager                        | 16 |
| Director/Deputy Director       | 12 |
| Co-ordinator/Assistant/Officer | 9  |
| Head of/Deputy Head            | 8  |
| Other                          | 4  |
| Senior Warden/Warden           | 3  |
| TOTAL                          | 52 |

*Figure 24 - The survey respondent levels of responsibility by job title*

Thirty institutions were represented in the research from across a broad geographical location, date awarded university title and percentage of residential estate.

#### **4.2.2 Location**

The geographical spread of responses was reviewed to ensure that the data was distributed from across England and did not simply focus on one particular city or part of the country. The former Government Office Regions (GORs) (ONS, 2020) classification was used to assess the institution's location. These regions are shown in Figure 25.



Figure 25 - The former Government Region Offices map

The allocation of the respondents to these nine regions (figure 26) provides a degree of anonymity for the participating institutions and an understanding of the geographical context. It should also be noted that there is not an even distribution of higher education institutions within these allocated regions and no statistical analysis has been conducted to assess whether the replies provide a representative sample within that region. This analysis is an exercise to ensure respondents came from a diverse geographical spread of institutions with a wide range of locations.

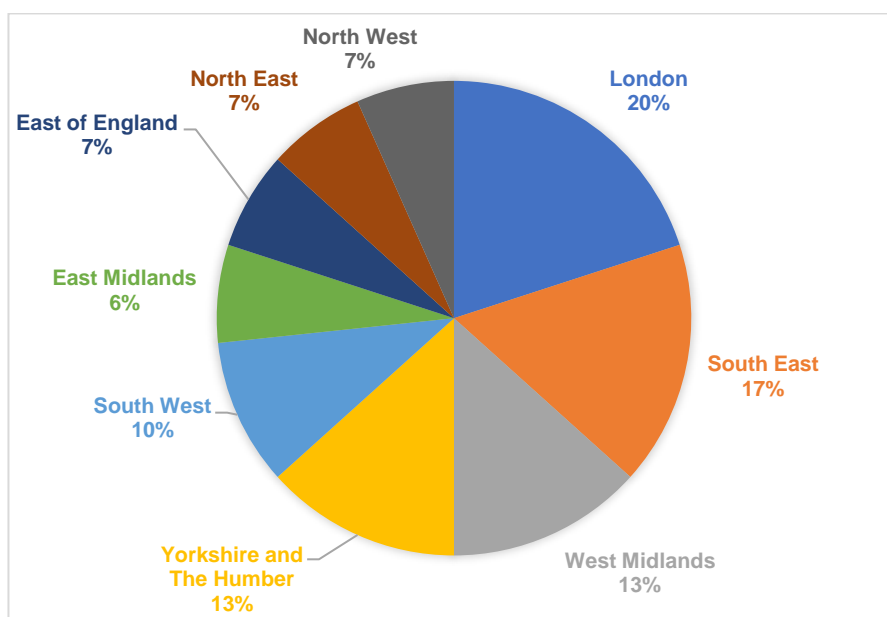


Figure 26 - The geographical spread of respondent institutions by former GON designation

### **4.2.3 Award of university title**

As discussed in previous chapters, there are a range of labels and groupings given to universities. Some of these groupings are historical in significance e.g., Russell Group, rather than entirely metrics driven. This section considers the 'age' of the institution, or more formally, the date the university was awarded its title or charter which enables the award of degrees. Four groupings were created from the following dates and legacies:

- In 1920 and before - this includes the ancient universities set up by Royal Charter, the nineteenth century universities and first wave of civic or "Red brick" (Whyte, 2015) universities.
- Between 1921 and 1970 – this includes the second wave of civic universities, or "plate glass universities" (Beloff, 1970) and the universities created after the publishing of the Robbins review (Robbins, 1963).
- Between 1971 and 2001 – this includes the 'new' universities created in 1992 following the Further and higher Education Act (HMO, 1992).
- Between 2001 and present – this includes the second wave of universities, many previously university colleges and a number of universities created from mergers of established institutions and separation of others.

The allocation of the respondents to these four groupings (figure 27) provides a degree of anonymity for the participating institutions and an understanding of the historical context. It should also be noted that there is not an even distribution of higher education institutions within these allocated groupings and no statistical analysis has been conducted to assess whether the replies provide a representative sample within that region. This analysis is an exercise to ensure respondents came from a diverse historical spread of institutions with a range of historical context.

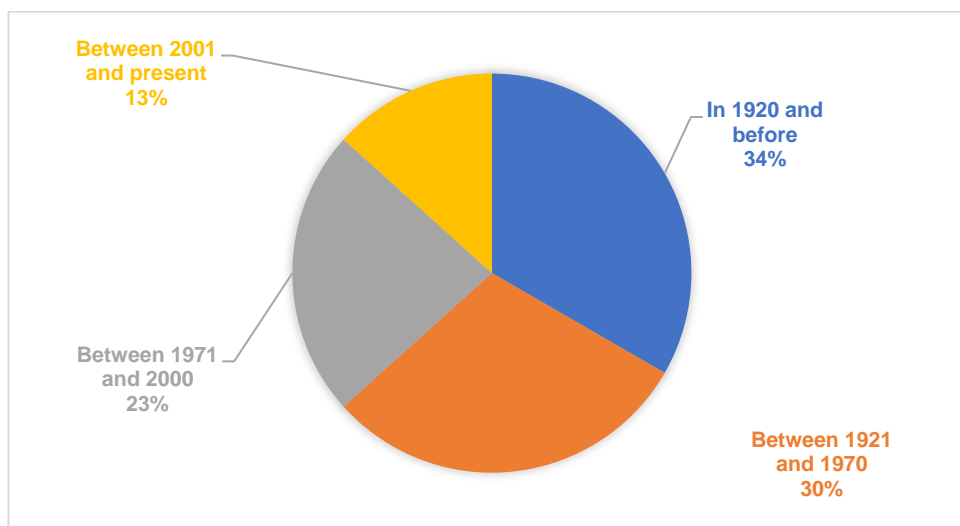


Figure 27 - Awarding of university status amongst respondent institutions shows the historical distribution of respondent universities

#### 4.2.4 Student accommodation provision

Another interesting measure which may be influential in the development of Residence Life programmes in English universities is the perceived importance of university-owned residential accommodation. Although there are a number of models used by universities to provide residential accommodation for their students, discussed earlier in this chapter, if a university has a large residential stock this may affect the perception and strategic importance an institution places on a complementary residential offer.

However, there are a number of anomalies to this measure such as institutions who have university accommodation partnerships with operators. The operator owns and manages some/all of the university's student accommodation for thirty years or more. In this case, the student accommodation is on the university campus and the operator works with the institution to market the bedrooms but the space is not reported in the university estates data return as legally the building belongs to the accommodation operator until the concession is returned to the university at the end of the contract.

Taking the above anomaly aside, the ratio of university-owned residential accommodation to university-owned non-academic accommodation provides an understanding of accommodation ownership and may be an indicator of the priority of the residential experience to the institution.

The HESA 17/18 Estates Management Record (EMR) table 1 titled 'Buildings and spaces' (HESA, 2019) shows the estates data for all higher education providers in the UK. Looking at the two fields relating to (1) non-residential – the volume (m<sup>3</sup>) of non-residential accommodation i.e., Academic spaces, social and office space and (2) residential - the volume (m<sup>3</sup>) of residential accommodation i.e., student bedrooms. Analysing this data for the universities that responded to the survey shows an almost equal distribution of residential accommodation as a percentage of estate (Figure 28).

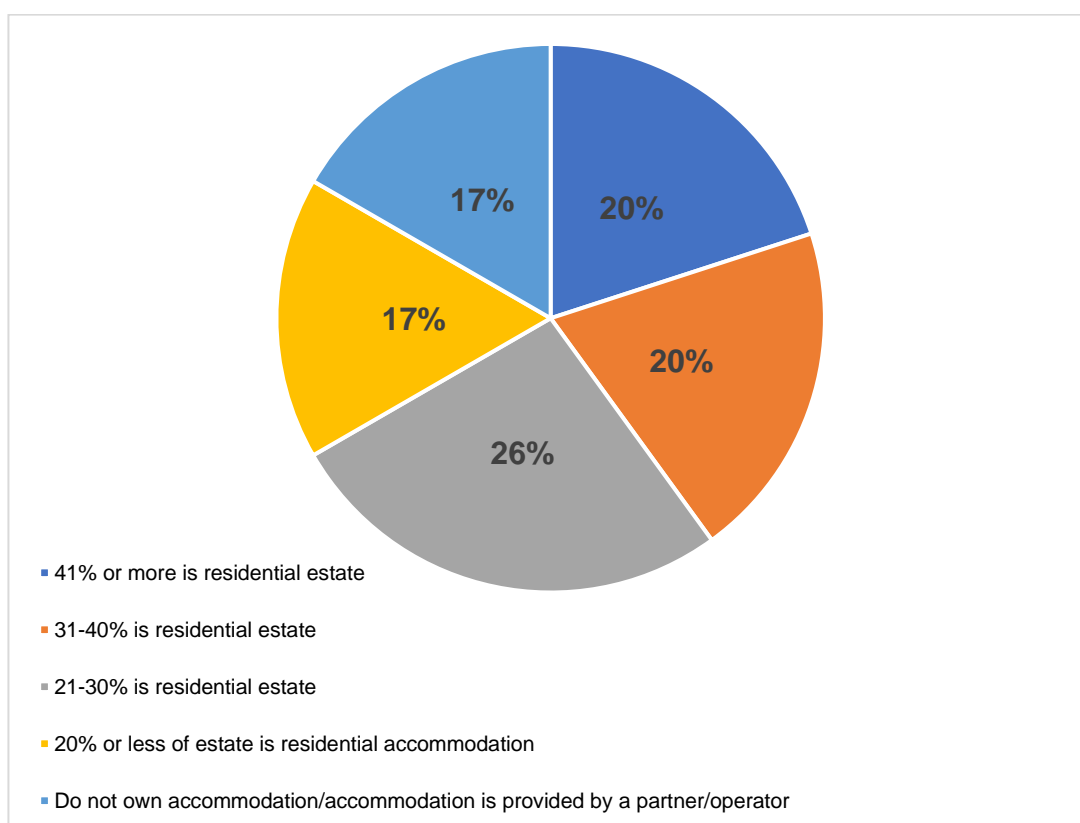


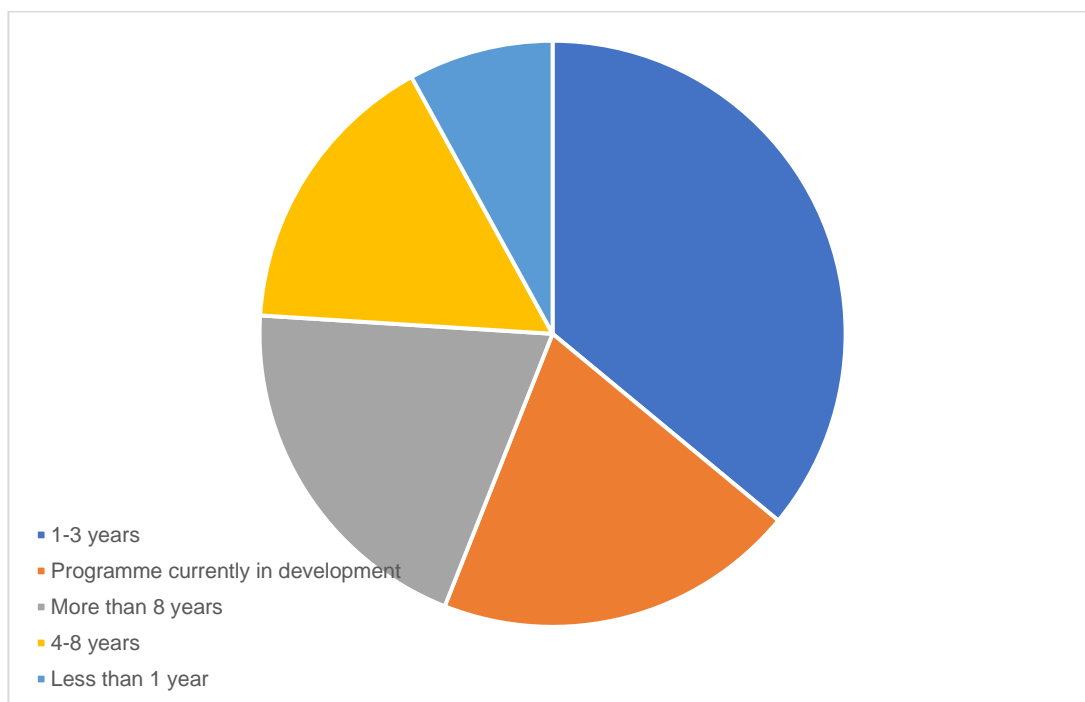
Figure 28 - The accommodation as a percentage of total estate

### 4.3 How long has the Residence Life programme been in operation?

In order to understand more about the Residence Life landscape, a number of questions were asked in the survey about the programmes. Firstly, to get an indication of the development and implementation of the Residence Life programme, the question: "How long has the Residence Life programme been in operation?"

Figure 29 shows the distribution of the responses to this question. Almost two thirds (sixty four percent) of survey participants responded that their university

Residence Life programmes had been in operation for less than three years or were currently in development. However, twenty percent of survey participants responded that their Residence Life programme had been in operation for more than eight years. Looking at the institutions that selected this response, all were awarded their university title before 1970 and include institutions following a collegiate approach. These institutions are predominately campus-based residential institutions.



*Figure 29 - The number of years respondent programmes have been in operation*

#### **4.4 How is your Residence Life programme funded?**

The next question looked at the funding mechanism for the institution's Residence Life programme (see figure 30). The results showed that nearly half of the institutions funded their programme centrally, with a fifth of institutions using the student accommodation rental fee to pay for the development and delivery of the provision. For other universities, the funding was a combination of central funds and a contribution from the accommodation rental fee. Other sources of funding for the programme included surplus from commercial income, contribution from the student union and /or the accommodation operator.

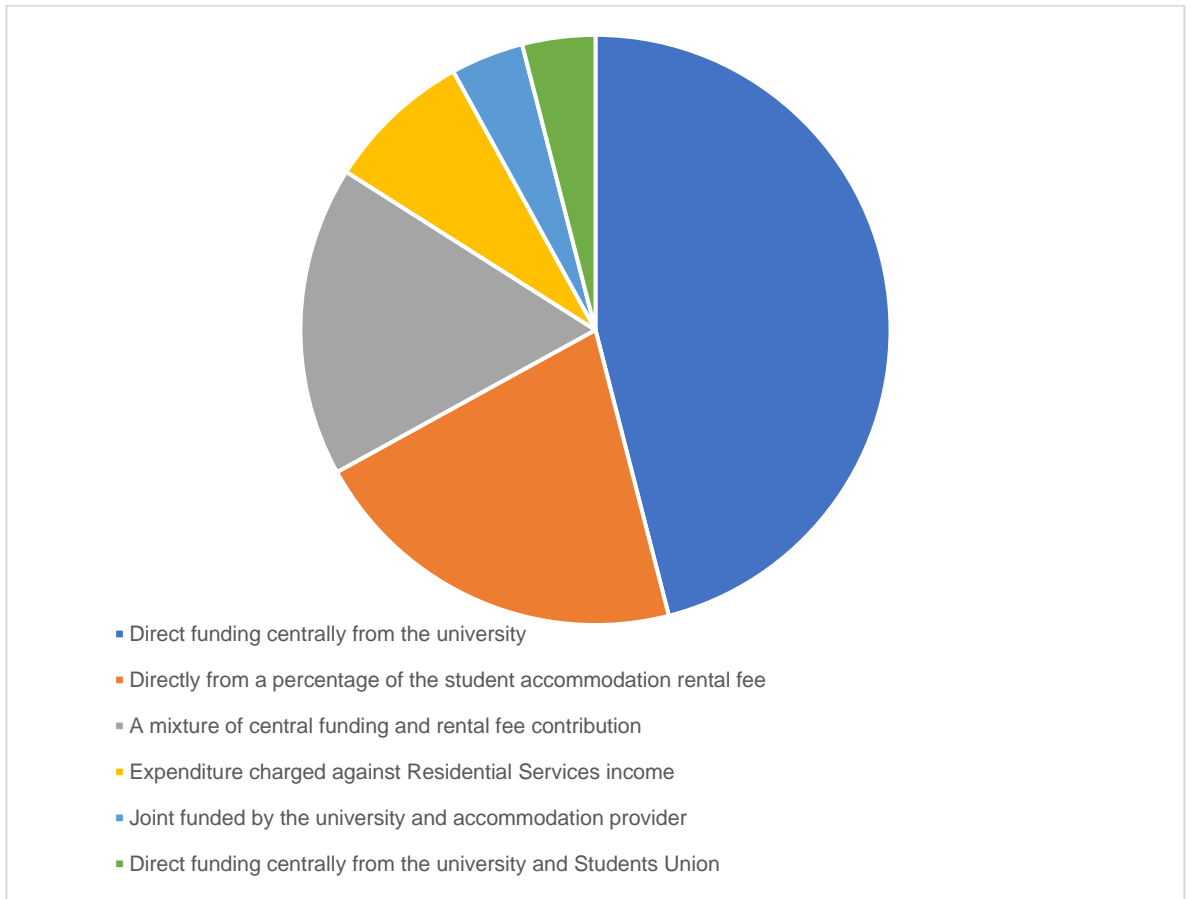


Figure 30 - The responses on how Residence Life is funded in their universities

#### 4.5 Is the Residence Life programme linked directly to your university strategy?

The next survey question inquired whether the Residence Life programme was linked directly to the university’s strategy. Nearly two thirds of respondents (see figure 31) said ‘yes, the programme is linked to the institution’s strategy’. In the comments field, one university responded that: *“when [the programme was] implemented it was, and now it meets the university strategy however, is no longer as a direct result of the university strategy”*. Another university responded that: *“[the] student experience is not specifically mentioned in the University’s strategy however, it underpins the key messages (such as inclusion)”*. These statements could be interpreted that the programme isn’t necessarily a current strategic priority for the institution, however it is aligned to the strategy and supports a number of strategic aims.

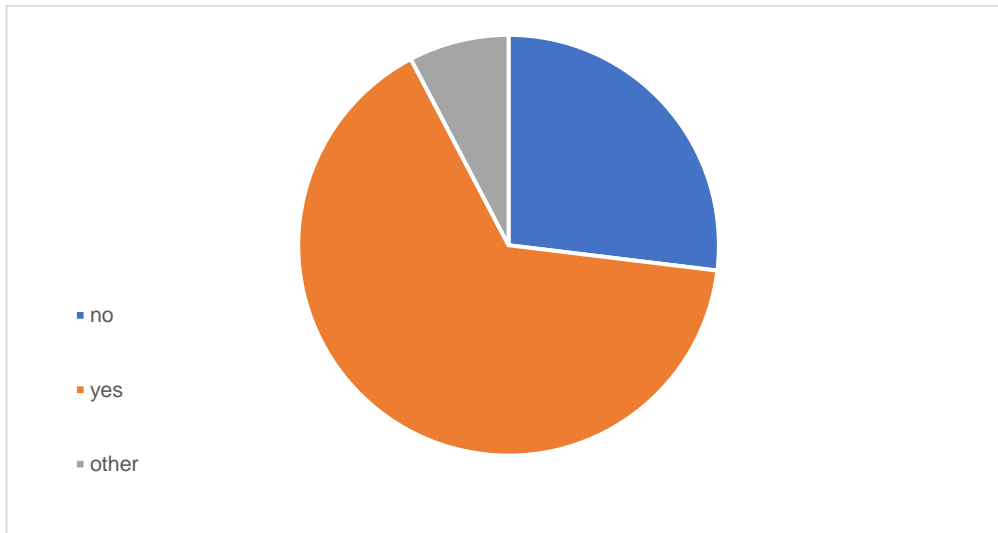


Figure 31 - The responses on whether the Residence Life programme is considered to be directly linked to the university strategy

#### 4.6 Has the importance of Residence Life programmes increased over the last few years, and why?

The next survey question focused on whether the importance of Residence Life programmes had increased in the last few years, and if so, what was the reason for this. Overwhelmingly, the respondents to this question (see figure 32) considered that the importance of Residence Life programmes had increased in the last few years (sixty four percent).

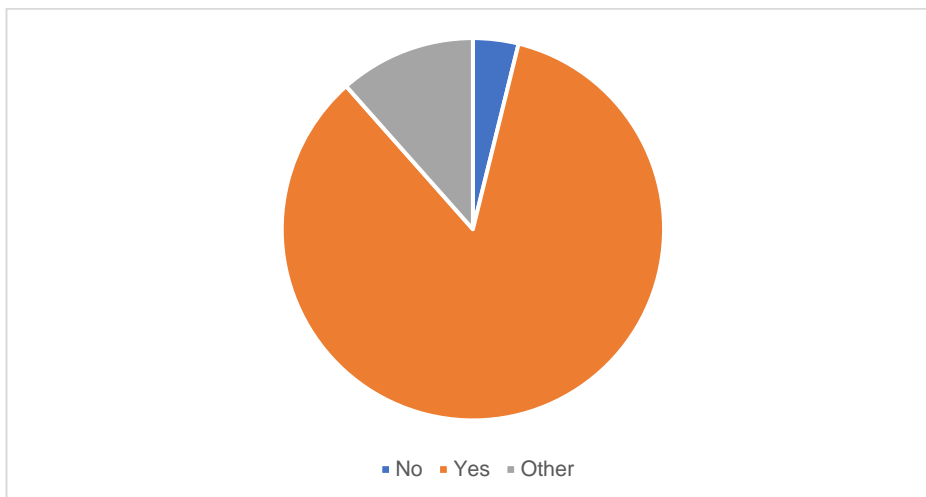


Figure 32 - The responses to the survey question 'In your opinion, has the importance of Residence Life programmes increased in the last few years?'

Those responses who selected 'other' commented that: "I think that the recognition of the importance of Res Life has increased, not the actual importance itself" and "[Residence Life has] changed in focus rather than increased as we

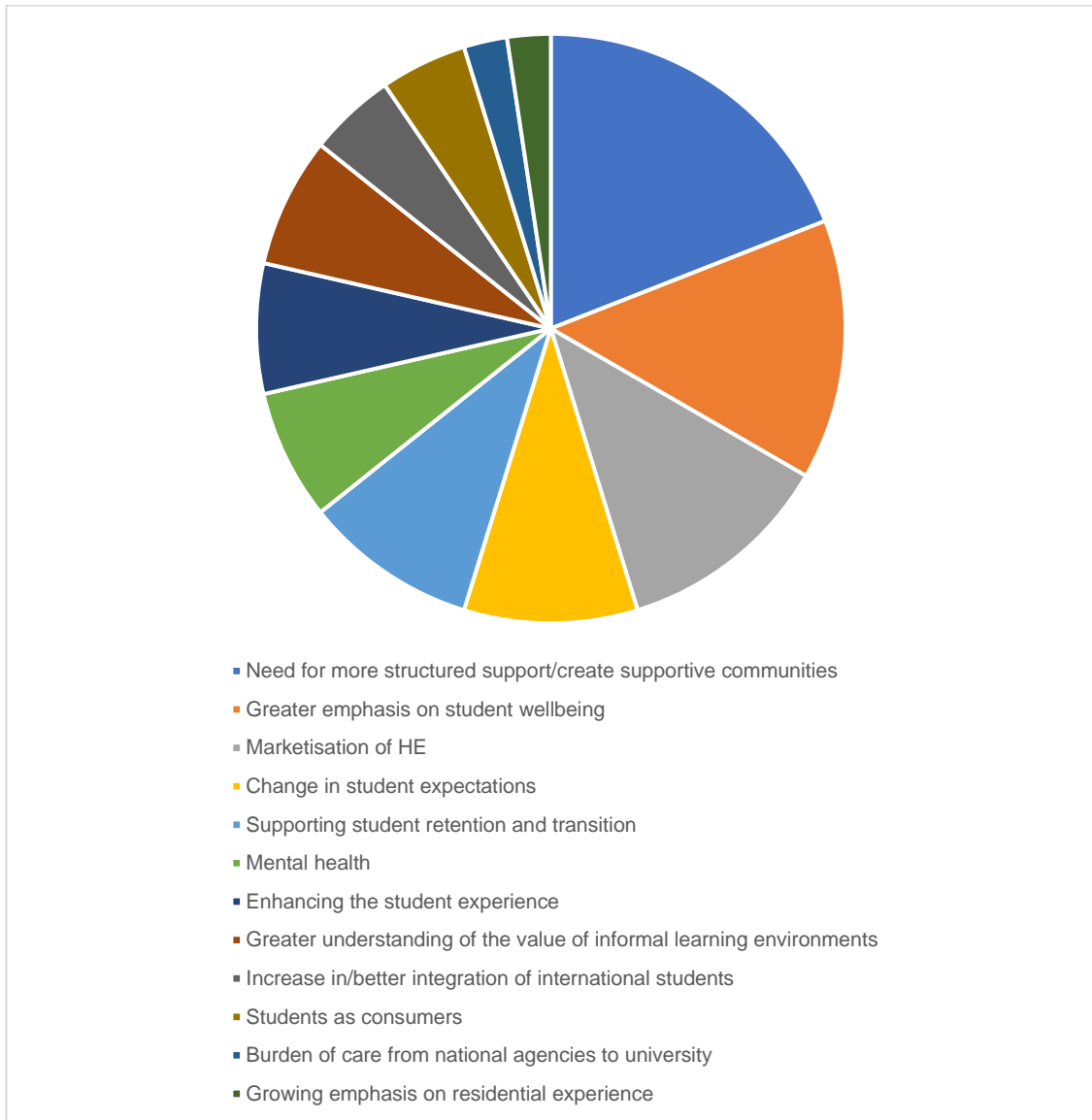


*move to supporting all students not just those in residences - especially those living at home or on placement” and “Until recently it had a really high profile and had increased, however funding is now being used for both this resource and mental health well-being, therefore reducing funding”.*

These statements indicate that Residence Life is taking on a wider remit (in some cases to include the university’s student wellbeing service) and is gaining in recognition, both internally and externally. Although the respondents gave a clear ‘yes’ in answering whether Residence Life has become more important over the last few years, the reasons given were more distinct.

When surveyed on why the importance of Residence Life has increased in the last few years, respondents provided a range of suggestions (see figure 33). The answers were categorised with the most popular reason was the: *“need for more structured support/to create communities”* with nearly a fifth (19 percent) of respondents giving this response.

The second most popular answer to why Residence Life had become more important was the *“greater emphasis on student wellbeing”* (fourteen percent). The third highest response, with eleven percent was the *“marketisation of HE”*. Other responses included the link to *“mental health”*, *“enhancing the student experience”*, *“students as customers”* and a *“greater understanding of the value of informal learning environments”*. These areas will be explored in greater detail in the interviews with universities.



*Figure 33 - The survey results to the question 'Why has Residence Life grown in importance over the last few years?'*

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter reviewed and analysed the respondents to the national survey on Residence Life. Analysis showed that respondents to the survey worked in Residence Life roles at a wide range of institutions. Analysis of the institutions showed that they represented the English university sector and covered a broad geographical mix, differing ownership of student accommodation, and university title award dates.

## **CHAPTER 5 - RESULTS: TYPOLOGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the findings from the national survey into Residence Life and provided insight into Residence Life practitioners who responded and their associated institutions.

Analysis of the data using the traditional segmentation of universities through the assessment of geographical location or university title award date provided insight into the population but was not robust in providing a framework for the development of the Residence Life phenomenon. A new classification framework or typology would need to be developed.

This chapter discusses the development of a typology for the English Residence Life phenomenon. This typology was used to assess the English institutions responding to the survey and aided the selection of institutions from across a broad spectrum of Residence Life provision for the interviews and case study development.

### **5.2 Establishing typology variables**

In establishing a new typology for Residence Life, it was important to ascertain:

1. the current use of variables when analysing the higher education sector to review whether any would provide robust analysis for the Residence Life phenomenon
2. the operating context for Residence Life and any new developments in sector thinking and research, both in the UK and United States

Desktop research was conducted, and informal conversations were arranged with practitioners in the UK and United States in advance of designing the survey (see section 3.6.1) and developing the Residence Life typology.

#### ***5.2.1 Traditional sector variables***

In the development of a new typology for Residence Life it is useful to consider the current segmentation of the higher education sector and the factors involved in differentiating between institutions. Residence Life provision is linked to the

accommodation landscape for universities, and the models and factors that influence universities' decisions.

In identifying the possible variables for developing a typology for English Residence Life provision, the traditional assessment of institutions generally involves factors based on historical decisions and legacy, rather than accommodation provision.

Traditionally, the segmentation of UK institutions has been dominated by factors such as the date a university obtains their title award or grouped together by a university's research output. UK universities can be classified in a number of ways, based on a wide range of factors (fig.34). An example of this may be a university ranking in a league table or whether the institution is part of a particular 'mission' group, i.e., the Russell Group or the University Alliance.

| <b>Classification</b>   | <b>Factors</b>  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Size                    | Number of students (Full time and part time, Postgraduate or undergraduate).  |
| Traditional or modern   | Usually, the date awarded university title e.g. before (traditional) or after 1992 (modern or post '92).  |
| Mission group           | Association with similar institutions in a group or invitation only.  |
| City or campus          | This factor can be difficult as universities can have a number of sites.  |
| Geographical location   | Nation i.e., English, region i.e., South West England or city i.e., London, Birmingham  |
| Accommodation provision | Many universities have a 'mixed economy' approach to student accommodation, where the student accommodation provision is a mixture of some university-owned, some partner accommodation and long/short term nomination agreements with private operators/landlords. |

*Figure 34 - Examples of factors in the classification of universities*

However, these factors and classifications can help inform why the development of Residence Life in a particular institution has occurred, but Residence Life, unlike research and teaching, cannot be defined solely by these factors. A more bespoke typology which encapsulates the Residence Life phenomenon is required.

### **5.2.2 Informal discussion with Residence Life practitioners in the UK and United States**

The informal discussions with UK Residence Life practitioners highlighted several areas for consideration around the mapping of the Residence Life phenomenon:

1. Reviews of student residence support structures had been conducted recently due to a noticeable shift in the requirements for the service.
2. Institutions noted an increasing number of student wellbeing concerns.

3. Parents were increasingly involved in the decision making and student support system.
4. There were significantly different staff structures and programme models within residences.
5. Residence Life programmes were open to all students living in accommodation with different models of participation.
6. The focus for Residence Life programmes was broad with some universities focusing on wellbeing, making friends and connections, whereas for others the focus is on creating a conducive environment and community for and with students.

From the discussions, it was clear that the variables selected for the typology needed to sit outside established structures and focus more on the objectives and content of the Residence Life programme.

Discussions with practitioners in the United States, Kathleen Kerr, Associate Vice-President for Student Life and James Tweedy, Director, Residence Life and Housing, provided insights into the Residence Life infrastructure in North America and the provision at their institution, the University of Delaware.

They discussed the development of Residence Life over the last ten years and the American sector shift, reflected in their institution, towards a residence curriculum model. This was a step change in thinking away from the traditional model of counting how many students attended a particular event to developing a framework that looked at student learning outcomes. They discussed a progressive approach, one similar to the academic pedagogical focus and aligned to a curricular approach. They explained that the Residence Life programme or curriculum is initiated from the question: "*what should every student learn as a result of living in halls?*".

Following these discussions, it was clear that there was significant benefit in thinking of a Residence Life programme in a similar way to a curriculum. This would mean that programme content and target audience were two important areas for consideration. Therefore, two variables for further consideration would be 1) programme focus/purpose and 2) student participation in the programme.

### 5.3 Developing a new typology for Residence Life

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, a new typology which encapsulates the Residence Life phenomenon is required. The traditional variables used for higher education sector analysis are not designed to aid the understanding of the Residence Life phenomenon. Following informal discussions across the higher education sector and as discussed in section 5.2.2, two new variables were proposed for further exploration. The next step was in developing the framework for the analysis.

#### 5.3.1 Developing an assessment matrix

A two dimensional or '2x2' assessment matrix is often used for developing policy, especially where the landscape is largely unknown, for example in future scenario planning. The technique selects two variables and develops the extremes of these situations to create four scenarios or models (Dator, 2009). These scenarios can be used for foresight planning but also provide a valuable base to consider and analyse an unknown phenomenon (Rhydderch, 2017).

These scenarios are developed from the consideration of the combination of the situations (see figure 35). In the case of figure 35, Quadrant A, for example, would represent the extremes of variable 1 and variable 2.

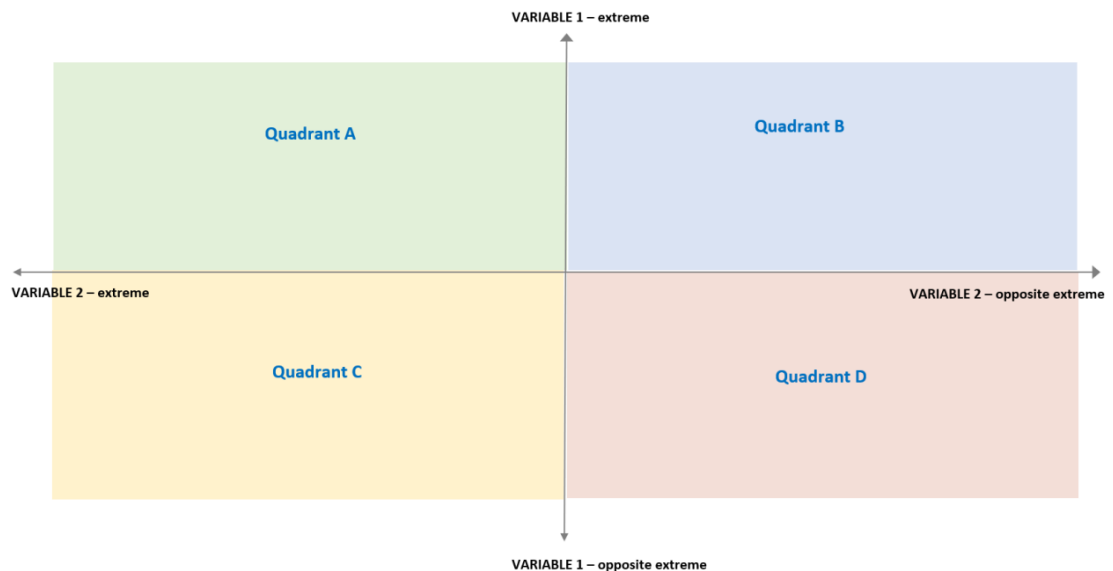


Figure 35 - An example of a 2x2 matrix framework

Using an analytical model based on a two-dimensional or '2x2' matrix developed for scenario planning and using a foundation approach (van Notten, 2006), the

factors considered to be principally important to the future of the issue are identified and developed. From this analysis the two factors considered to be the most influential in the future are selected and used to create a typology.

### **5.3.2 A Residence Life typology**

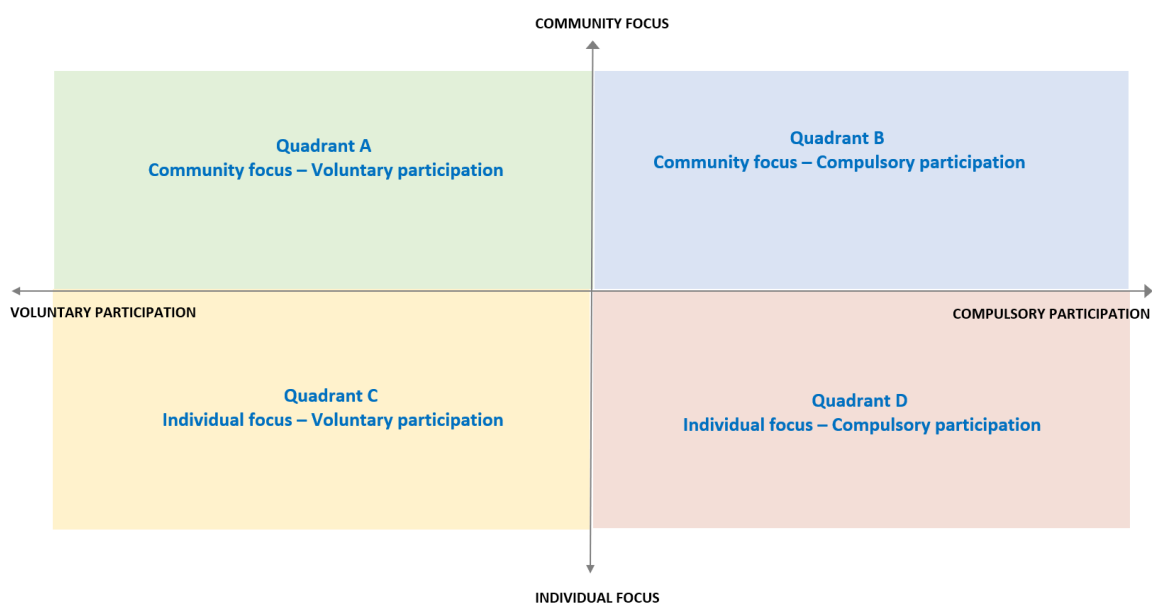
As discussed in section 5.2.2, two variables that fitted the selected for the scenario planning matrix were the 1) programme focus/purpose and 2) student participation in the programme.

This created a typology for the phenomenon through the lens of two variables across a continuum, i.e., first variable - student participation in the programme from all compulsory participation to all voluntary participation, and the second variable, the focus of the programme, whether it is individually or community building focused.

Looking in more detail at these areas or variables:

- a) What is the expectation of universities on the level of students' participation? How mandatory is the programme? Residence Life programmes in the United States have aspects that are mandatory at a particular time i.e. Welcome week, for a particular group i.e. all first year students in university accommodation. This participation expectation also helps to indicate the strategic importance of Residence Life within the institution.
  
- b) What is the focus of the Residence Life programme? In the literature and during the informal conversations with sector stakeholders there was discussion on the purpose of a Residence Life programme. For some universities, the programme was key to supporting individual students and providing them with skills to help them settle into university life and be successful through the various transitions they faced throughout their time at university. For others, the focus was on building a community and creating the setting for students to thrive. In many cases institutions aim to develop both these aspects but looking at the dominant focus for the programme provides insight into the development and rationale for the Residence Life programme in a particular institution.

The 2x2 assessment matrix is a useful tool for developing a typology for the initial sorting and classification of data. This approach is particularly useful for categorising topics that can be reduced to two simple variables. In this case, the assessment tool focused on the following variables: student participation, assessed on a 'voluntary to compulsory' scale measured along the x-axis, and programme focus, assessed on an 'individual to community' dominant focus scale measured along the y-axis (see figure 36).



*Figure 36 - An initial typology to demonstrate Residence Life*

Looking at the typology and what it means to be an institutional Residence Life programme in each quadrant of the diagram:

**Quadrant A Community focus – voluntary participation**

- Programmes focus on building communities through social, cultural and sports events.
- Residence Life programmes are optional, students are encouraged to participate but programmes are informal and not recognised either internally or externally.

**Quadrant B Community focus – compulsory participation**

- Programmes focus on building communities through social, cultural and sports events.
- Residence Life programmes are compulsory for a particular cohort e.g., all university residential students or all first years. Participation is recorded and the programme leads to a certificate or form of validation or internal/external recognition.

**Quadrant C - Individual focus – voluntary participation**

- Programmes focus on developing the individual student's skills and competencies. This may range from wellbeing topics such as resilience or study skills or citizenship courses and first aid.



- Residence Life programmes are optional, students are encouraged to participate but programmes are informal and not recognised either internally or externally.

#### **Quadrant D Individual focus – compulsory participation**

- Programmes focus on developing the individual student's skills and competencies. This may range from wellbeing topics such as resilience or study skills or citizenship courses and first aid.
- Residence Life programmes are compulsory for a particular cohort e.g. all university residential students or all first years. Participation is recorded and the programme leads to a certificate or form of validation or internal/external recognition.

### **5.4 Establishing a typology framework**

Having established the typology framework, the survey was used to ascertain each respondent institution's position on the schematic and provide insight across the sector. The typology assessment looked at an institution's Residence Life programme as a plot of two variables: the level of student participation (x-axis) and the focus of the programme, whether it had a community or individual focus (y-axis).

#### **5.4.1 Assessing the level of participation (x-axis)**

As discussed in the section above, the first variable assessed the institution's expectation of a student's participation in the programme. For example, is the programme compulsory for any particular group or cohort of students? Question number 11 on the survey (see Appendix 1) asked participants to select the response that summarises their institution's approach to student participation in the Residence Life programme at their institution:

- Not compulsory for any students.
- Compulsory for all first-year students living in university halls.
- Compulsory for all first-year students (arrangements are made for students living off campus).
- Compulsory for all students living in university halls.
- Compulsory for all undergraduate students (arrangements are made for students living off campus).
- Compulsory for all students (arrangements are made for students living off campus).
- Other, please specify.

To calculate the x-axis values on programme participation i.e. where does the programme/institution sit on a 'voluntary to compulsory' continuum? The answers given in survey question 11 were analysed and a score was awarded depending on the answer. The scores allocated are shown in the table below (figure 37).

| Score | Residence Life Programme  |
|-------|---|
| 3     | Compulsory for all students living in university halls  |
| 2     | Compulsory for a particular cohort e.g. all 1 <sup>st</sup> years   |
| 1     | Some elements of the programme are compulsory (e.g. safety, welcome talks), but most of the social elements are not |
| -3    | Not compulsory for any students   |

Figure 37 - The scores given to assess participation in Residence Life programmes

#### **5.4.2 Assessing the focus of the programme (y-axis)**

The second variable for the typology assessed the focus of the Residence Life programme. A set of survey questions (see Appendix 1) were used to assess the focus of the Residence Life programme, i.e., does the programme have an individual or community building dominant focus?

To calculate the y-axis values on the programme purpose or focus i.e. where does the programme sit on a 'community to individual' continuum? The answers given in survey question 3: to rank in importance (from 1 - 10) a set of statements which outlined: "How important are the following reasons for developing a Residence Life programme at your university?" where 1 was the most important and 10 was the least. This meant the lower the score the more important that statement was to the respondent. The statements were as follows:

1. To build a stronger student community.
2. To support individual student study skills development.
3. To support the student in settling into university and retention.
4. To enhance the student's overall wellbeing.
5. To maintain competitiveness with other universities.
6. To provide a better value for money student experience.
7. To support the overall strategy of the institution.
8. To provide additional recognition of achievement e.g. certificate.

9. To support the student's cultural development and understanding.
10. To encourage healthy living and participation in sports.

The statements were then grouped into whether they were 'predominately community focused' or 'predominately individual focused', and the ranking scores for each section were totalled to get an overall score for each grouping.

| Grouping A: Predominately community focus  | Grouping B: Predominately individual focus   | Grouping C: Other   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build a stronger student community</li> <li>• To support the overall strategy of the institution</li> <li>• To support the student's cultural development and understanding</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support individual student study skills development</li> <li>• To support student in settling into university and retention</li> <li>• To enhance student's overall wellbeing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To maintain competitiveness with other universities</li> <li>• To provide a better value for money student experience</li> <li>• To provide additional recognition of achievement eg certificate</li> <li>• To encourage healthy living and participation in sports</li> </ul> |

*Figure 38 - Survey questions to highlight whether a Residence Life programme is predominately community or individually focused*

Figure 38 shows the tripartite segmentation of the statements to test whether the programme had a predominately community focus or a predominately individual focus. The analysis used the groupings A (predominately community focus) and B (predominately individual focus).

These rankings were considered to be a 'score' for each factor and a total score obtained for grouping A and B (see figure 39). The 'scores' had a limited meaning as they were the sum of the ranking but gave a relative indicator for the importance associated with each group, remembering that the lower the 'score', the more important the grouping for each institution.

As figure 39 shows, the two groupings were compared, and the difference calculated. It was also noted whether the score was in favour of a community or individual focus and annotated with a 'C' or an 'I' respectively (in column J).

| Column A                | Column B                                  | Column C   | Column D   | Column E        | Column F   | Column G  | Column H                                    | Column I         | Column J      |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|-----------------|--|---|---|------------------|---------------|
|                         | 3.1 To build a stronger student community | 3.7 To support the overall strategy of the institution | 3.9 To support the student' s cultural development and understanding | Total COMMUNITY | 3.2 To support individual student study skills development | 3.3 To support students in settling into university and retention | 3.4 To enhance student' s overall wellbeing | Total INDIVIDUAL | OVERALL SCORE |
| University respondent 1 | 10  | 5  | 6  | 21              | 4  | 8   | 9   | 21               | 0             |
| University respondent 2 | 1   | 5  | 6  | 12              | 10   | 3   | 2   | 15               | 3C            |
| University respondent 3 | 1   | 4  | 7  | 12              | 5  | 2   | 3   | 10               | 2I            |
| University respondent 4 | 1   | 8  | 6  | 15              | 5  | 3   | 2   | 10               | 5I            |
| University respondent 5 | 2   | 9  | 7  | 18              | 4  | 3   | 1   | 8                | 10I           |

Figure 39 - The analysis of survey question 3 – how community or individual focussed is the Residence Life programme

In order to create the typology framework, x-and y-values were plotted for each institution on the 2x2 assessment matrix. Basing this matrix on a cartesian coordinate system, the x-axis represented the compulsory nature of the programme and the y-axis represented the focus of the programme.

To calculate the x-value for each institution, the table in figure 40 was used, with each x-value in the table representing the corresponding number on the x-axis. To calculate the y-value the scores corresponded to community as a positive and individual as a negative number. The plot was not a reflection on the value of the programmes but a way of ascertaining the x-y plot location on the matrix. Therefore, a y-value of 3C for an institution was plotted as +3 on the y-axis, and a y-value of 2I for another institution was plotted as -2 on the y-axis. Figure 40 shows the data plot values and calculations for the first seven institutions in the table.

| University   | X-Axis | Y-Axis | How compulsory is the Res Life                | RANK 3.1 To build a stronger community | RANK 3.7 To support the student's cultural | RANK 3.9 To support the student's cultural | Total COMMUNITY | RANK 3.2 To support individual student | RANK 3.3 To support students in | RANK 3.4 To enhance student's | Total INDIVIDUAL | DIFFERENCE between total community and |
|--------------|--------|--------|---|--|--|--|-----------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|--|
| University A | 3      | 5      | 3 – All students in Halls                     | 9                                      | 2  | 5  | 16              | 3                                      | 8                               | 10                            | 21               | 5C (5)                                 |
| University B | 2      | -5     | 2 – All students living in University Halls   | 3                                      | 7  | 4  | 14              | 6                                      | 1                               | 2                             | 9                | 5I (-5)                                |
| University C | 1      | -6     | 1 – 1 <sup>st</sup> years in University Halls | 3                                      | 5  | 7  | 15              | 6                                      | 1                               | 2                             | 9                | 6I (-6)                                |
| University D | 2      | 0      | 2 – All students living in University Halls   | 2                                      | 4  | 7  | 13              | 8                                      | 3                               | 2                             | 13               | 0 (0)                                  |
| University E | -3     | 4      | -3  | 1                                      | 5  | 3  | 9               | 7                                      | 2                               | 4                             | 13               | 4C (4)                                 |
| University F | -3     | -5     | -3  | 1                                      | 8  | 6  | 15              | 5                                      | 3                               | 2                             | 10               | 5I (-5)                                |
| University G | -3     | -10    | -3  | 2                                      | 9  | 7  | 18              | 4                                      | 3                               | 1                             | 8                | 10I (-10)                              |

Figure 40 - The analysis of survey questions 3 and 11 to develop the typology plot

Figure 41 shows the results for all institutions when they were plotted on the matrix. The typology shows a group of institutions on the left-hand side of the chart. These institutions all have a voluntary approach to Residence Life programme participation. The institutions were split across the x-axis, some in the positive half of the chart showing they are community dominant programmes and some in the negative half of the chart showing they are individually focused programmes.

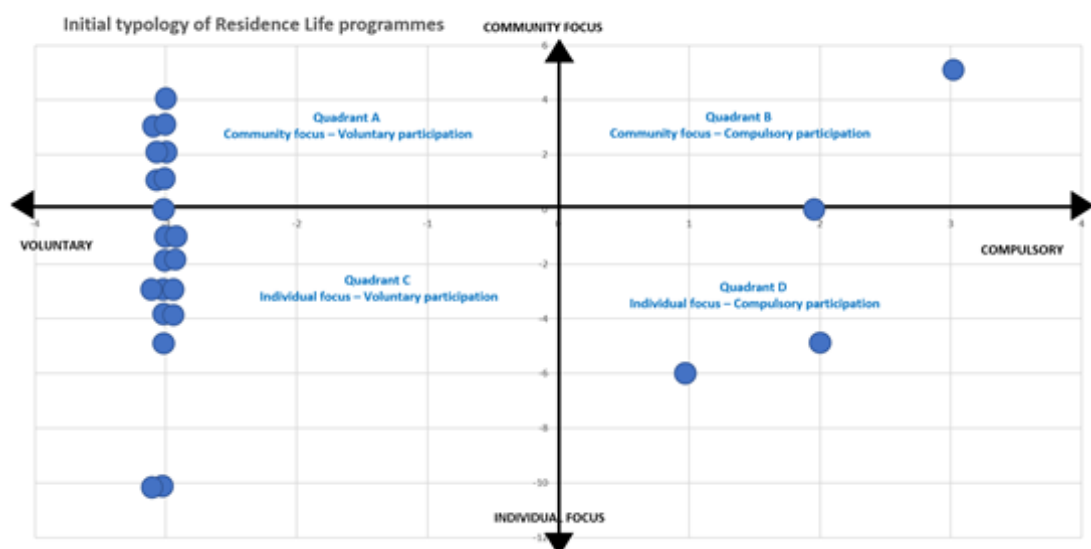


Figure 41 - An initial typology of Residence Life programmes in England

The particularly interesting plots, because they appeared to be ‘outliers’ (points outside the main group), were on the right-hand side of the chart. From the analysis, these programmes had an element of compulsory participation and again, the institutions were split across the x-axis indicating some were community focused, whereas some had individually dominant programmes. Also, looking at the chart, there was one institution programme which was neither community nor individually focused.

### 5.5 Selecting institutions for further study and interviews

In order to understand the drivers and developments of the Residence Life phenomenon across a range of universities, the three case studies needed to be from institutions located across a range of positions on the typology.

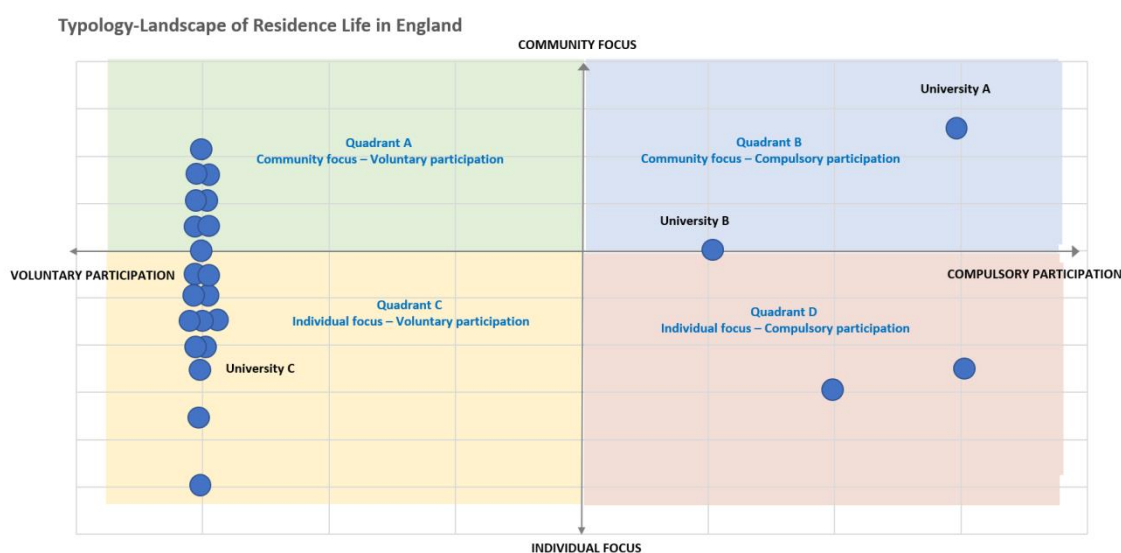


Figure 42 - The typology for Residence Life using participation and focus axes. This chart shows the location of Universities A, B and C selected for further study.

Identified as universities A, B and C (figure 42) these institutions were selected to provide a representative and broad exploration of the Residence Life phenomenon. Institutions were selected from both the positive and negative halves of the chart, as well as an institution that was neither community or individually dominant, sitting on the x-axis (University B). Institutions were selected from either ends of the participation scale i.e., University A survey results indicated a compulsory approach, whereas University C indicated a voluntary approach.

The institutions were also selected to have a variety in the programme establishment and a broad representation across the segments of universities, i.e., location, proportion of accommodation, city or campus and date awarded university title.

The institutions selected for further exploration are summarised as:

#### **University A – Community focus -Compulsory**

- Residence Life programme running 1-3 years
- Multi-campus
- 20% or less of estate is residential accommodation
- South East
- Charter awarded between 1971 and 2000

#### **University B – Neither community or individual dominant - Compulsory**

- Residence Life programme running 4-8 years
- Campus university
- 31-40% is residential estate
- East Midlands
- Charter awarded between 1921 and 1970

#### **University C – individual focus - voluntary**

- Residence Life programme running for less than a year
- City centre university
- 21-30% is residential estate
- North East
- Charter awarded between 1921 and 1970

### **5.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the development of a new typology for Residence Life and described how the framework was populated using data from the Residence Life survey. Following the mapping of the participating institutions three institutions were selected for further analysis. The next chapter presents the analysis of the selected institutions as case studies, outlining the similarities and differences between each Residence Life offer.

## CHAPTER 6 - RESULTS: CASE STUDIES

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the development of a typology for Residence Life in England based on two variables. The two variables provided an assessment on the priority focus for the programme and the student participation. Three institutions were selected for further analysis from their position on the Residence Life typology. This chapter presents the analysis of the interviews with Residence Life practitioners as case studies for each institution.

### 6.2 Case studies

Following an analysis of the interviews with practitioners from each institution, the three case studies can be summarised as:

- **University A: A partnership model for Residence Life**  
The survey assessment found that University A ran a community focused Residence Life programme with compulsory participation. The Residence Life programme had been running between 1-3 years.
- **University B: An integrated model for Residence Life**  
The survey assessment found that University B ran a programme that was neither dominant in its community or individual focus, but still required an element of compulsory participation. University B's Residence Life programme had been running between 4-8 years.
- **University C: A curriculum model for Residence Life**  
The survey found that University C ran an individual focused residence Life programme with a voluntary participation approach. The Residence Life programme had been running for less than a year.



## **6.2.1 Case Study 1: University A – A Partnership model for Residence Life (community-compulsory)**

### **6.2.1.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the first institution selected for deeper observation from the typology framework developed in chapter 5. From the framework, University A was considered to be an institution with a community focused Residence Life programme and a compulsory nature. According to the survey, the University's Residence Life programme had been running for between 1-3 years. Following the interviews and associated assessment for this university, I have considered this to be a 'Partnership model' for Residence Life provision. This case study was developed from interviews with four staff working at a university in the South East of England and a focus group with forty students currently living in university-associated accommodation.

### **6.2.1.2 Background**

This section sets the scene with a brief background on the selected university. University A was a professionally focused institution, awarded university charter between 1971 and 2000, and geographically located in the South East of England. The University had a number of campuses and twenty percent or less of estate is residential accommodation. The University was above average size and in the second quartile for UK universities by the number of total students (HESA, 2020). The University made ten halls of residence (around 3500 rooms) available to its undergraduate and postgraduate students, with one of those halls owned by the university. The rest were owned and operated by private student accommodation companies under a nomination agreement with the institution. These ten halls were exclusively rented to the university's students and the institution had agreements with the six accommodation operators.

The Residence Life programme had been running for three years and was compulsory such that all students contributed to the programme through their weekly accommodation rents. This funding model was relatively unique for universities in England, with no central funding coming from the central university budget. Each year, the Residence Life team discussed their plans with the University student union and a weekly student contribution amount was agreed

and added onto the rent for every student in university associated halls. This money was ringfenced and could not be accessed by any other department in the University. Each year the contribution funded the Residence Life programme in its entirety. This point was discussed during the interviews:

*“The students don’t have an opt out, and the reason we chose that is it’s just very difficult to manage. At the point of opt out, students might not realise the benefits they’re going to get. There’s also an element of our funding model whereby we get our private accommodation partners, they all contribute in one form or another to the programme as well. So, that’s the funding model that makes Res Life... it’s unique in that way that we fund it. But it’s also great because it gives the programme the ability to be flexible in the way that it works. We can change things and we can do things because we’re not exposed to that central university finance or requirements. We’ve got a fair bit of control over what we can do.”*

This guaranteed funding stream provided a longer-term stability to develop the programme for current and future years without a reliance on central university budgets. In order to maximise the income for the programme, demand for the rooms needed to be high and from the discussions this presented a self-fulfilling prophecy. The interest and support for the Residence Life programme across the university had grown and was part of the new student open day planning and promotion strategy.

University A kindly organised a focus group of students living in university-associated accommodation. They provided free pizza for the group participants who attended the session. In discussion with the students, all currently living in university associated halls, when asked, two thirds (sixty eight percent) knew about the Residence Life programme before they arrived at the University. When questioned, over a quarter of students said that Residence Life was very important or important in the choice of their university. This knowledge of the programme may have come through open days or in materials distributed with the welcome pack. When questioned on the importance of the programme now they have more information and can actively participate in the programme, over half of the students said that the Residence Life programme was very important or important to them.

In discussions about the compulsory nature of the programme, the students understood and valued the model, but the majority agreed that although everyone contributed financially to the programme it should not be mandatory to participate in every activity. One student suggested that the university could:

*“Possibly make it compulsory [to attend] for the first two weeks to intensify engagement and ensure the activities are about mass participation and appropriate for all”*

Students agreed with the staff interviewed about the Residence Life programme that the important aspect was not that everyone attended everything but that there were a range of different events, activities, and approaches to encourage everyone to find something they would like to participate in. From the focus group it was clear that the Residence Life programme contributed to the strong sense of community at the University, though this would need to be tested further as the students who attended the focus group were likely to be more enthusiastic about the programme, certainly those more familiar with the programme, its structure, events and activities.

One key aim of the programme was to create a supportive and genuine community that listened and understood the needs and interests of a diverse group of individuals. One student suggested that if contributing to the programme financially was not enough of an incentive, and maybe to attract the harder to reach groups, the university could:

*“incentivise attendance and target people to the right events with a coffee stamp card approach [or with] ... vouchers for the [supermarket]”*

The focus group discussions demonstrated that the students participating had a huge commitment to Residence Life, but they also had considerable expectations. It may be that these are the keen students and/or this expectation is due to the fact they have already contributed financially towards it.

One area of discussion was the need for clear delineation on the boundaries between Residence Life and university activities. Residence Life could provide an introduction to a range of clubs and activities, but it was important not to replicate an established group.

The participating students were extremely aware of the wellbeing needs of others. Some discussed in length the 'social anxiety' that fellow students have and the importance of a range of targeted activities to ensure their participation.

Overall, the students valued the programme and, when questioned, considered the range of activities provided to be broad and wide ranging. Students highlighted that they could suggest new activities or events and that all the Residence Life staff were friendly, professional and accessible. The majority of the students questioned in the group (ninety seven percent), would recommend the Residence Life programme at University A.

### 6.2.1.3 Programme development

The main driver for change in the development of the Residence Life programme was the growing focus on student welfare and the need to create a sense of community for students in accommodation. The response to the rise of the private sector student accommodation in the city was also a factor. This quote comes from the University's ResLife booklet:

*"[The] National Student Housing Survey showed that many of the students who didn't feel a sense of community within their halls of residence felt that way because they rarely met new people beyond their immediate flatmates"*

Until about 2015, the University owned and managed all its accommodation. Unlike in bigger cities, the institution had total control of the student accommodation market. The student rents were still really low and up until that point the private sector had not seen the opportunity to expand their offer to the city. This changed five years ago and over this time there had been a realignment with other cities.

In 2019, another 1,500 student beds in Private Purpose-Built Student accommodation (PBSA) came on stream. The University was in a position where they needed more student rooms than they could provide in their owned and managed accommodation and working with private operators through nomination agreements meant they could meet the demands from prospective and current students. In particular, it was important to have enough accommodation for first year students to help their acclimatisation and successful transfer to the university.

Nomination agreements were typically long-term, often five years-plus, and provided a level of stability in planning for the University. But as the years go on, the buildings become more dated, new operators enter the market and in order to complete and ensure a good quality offer for their students and a stronger negotiating position, the university needed to have 'bargaining power'. The University wanted only its own students in each accommodation block, to be able to guarantee demand to fulfil its nomination agreement, and ensure investment in updating the stock from the private operator:

*“Res Life wants to become a unique selling point (USP) for the halls of residence so that when these other buildings go up and they’re competing with us to get first years in, the parents and the students see Res Life as a USP that they’re going to go there because it’s part of the home, part of the family, and that’s what they’re trying to achieve.”*

So, another driver for University A was competition. As the private PBSA market grew across the city, each new building was more modern and had more facilities than the last. In order for the University to remain in a competitive position within the market and with the operators, they needed to have something different to offer. Residence Life was introduced primarily to support student welfare needs, but also provided a strong platform to build a partnership approach. This in turn ensured the University could provide a high level of student support and at the same time had an element of control over their accommodation offer, despite the majority of the residences being privately owned:

*“We introduced Res Life ... we needed a USP because I saw in three, four, five years’ time, which is now the reality, we’re going to have brand new, shiny, modern student residences opening ... roof terraces, gymnasiums ... they look like hotels. So, I knew that we needed to work with our [accommodation] partners on updating our portfolio, getting them to refurbish ... but at the same time, looking at building a USP around Residential Life. So, I’m hoping that the students, but not just the students, the parents ... will see the benefits of Res Life. Res Life will give you ... it will help you make friends, help you to settle in and it will be there, if you’ve ever got any problems at university basically, to help and support you and guide you.”*

Residence Life was increasingly visible in the University's marketing, prospectuses and open days and prospective students had a strong awareness of the programme:

*“one of the big pieces of work we're going to be working on is engaging our marketing team around the offering. So, even two years ago, there wasn't really mention of Res Life in the prospectuses or open days. That has now changed completely. Res Life has now got a much more prominent space on our accommodation landing page. It's in the prospectuses. It goes in to all the pre-arrival information. They talk about it at the open days”.*

And the higher profile for Residence Life had translated into a greater appreciation of the offering from students:

*“we did some surveying of our students after week three, [and asked] have you heard of Res Life, and about 98% of people said yes, they had heard of Res Life. Then we asked, how have you heard about Res Life, the majority of people said open days. So, the idea is that we're hitting them early and firstly, it's an additional offering that the university can give”.*

This meant students and parents were aware of the welfare and support:

*“parents will feel reassured that we know what we're doing and we've got a good programme, and we can demonstrate the benefits of it and talk about it. So, it's not just some rehash of some old Wardenial system, being called Res Life”.*

Residence Life was seen as the glue between the university and the accommodation providers. This was a commercial arrangement with the operator and a welfare arrangement with the student:

*“So, students choose to live in our portfolio, and obviously the university has financial commitments to meet that we have to fill those buildings. So, as much as we want our students to come and benefit from Res Life, we also need them in our buildings”.*

#### 6.2.1.4 Staffing structure

Before 2015, the design of the accommodation team reflected the notion that students came to university to get an academic education and that was predominately the university's role. But over the last five years, the focus on student wellbeing, mental health and support had amplified in importance - both for universities and for students - and impacted on the support and organisational structures:

*“When I first came into post, residence sat within estates, so they were within the bricks and mortar and we didn't have the student wellbeing service. We had some counselling out there and that was it really. So, we had a disjointed bunch of things which is fine, but it's a bit silo'd. So, I spent all that time trying to pull all these things together and to get people to understand that the impact their area has on the rest of the university.”*

There was a recognition that student accommodation was a key part of the student experience and over the last few years, the emphasis had changed from being a service focused on buildings to one led by the wellbeing requirements of the resident students. There was an increasing linkage to the other university frontline and welfare services with the aim to be a seamless process of identification through to resolution: *“Res Life is a Broad platform”*.

An initial change in staffing provided the opportunity to review the structure in place in 2015. The Residence Life programme, delivered by the residential services team is part of the wider student services directorate. This directorate reported to the chief operating officer who had the following functions within their remit: student services, estates, alumni relations, organisational development and HR, governance and legal services, information technology, marketing and communications, and fundraising. This provided direct access to other services and a forum to discuss cross-service issues and planning:

*“We get lots of contact from people, academic staff that say, I've got this student, can you help... we triangulate the information through the services, because we work as such a close team ... and that helps us to build a bigger picture. You can do it within a couple of hours usually as well.”*

The roles of residence staff had also been changing, with more training and a focus on particular expertise, for example, a welfare advisor role in the past didn't have any formal training. Now, in the current structure, the welfare advisor had training and knows where to direct and refer students.

#### 6.2.1.5 **Current model**

The aims and priority of the programme were summarised as wellbeing and prevention (to stop incidents happening and/or to mitigate their escalation). For example, key metrics for measuring the success of the programme were the participation levels, number of reported incidents and the number of repeat incidents.

The programme focused on events and activities, but the purpose was more than simply socialising. The programme provided a framework to support students in developing their networks and making friends. This helped mitigate issues in the first year, when the student was living in halls, but also in further years providing a cohesive peer support structure:

*“the reason we’re doing what look like purely social activities is about helping students to form networks and to find those friendship groups, in order that they can have that peer to peer support that is required in order that they don’t become isolated and lonely and then the potential welfare and wellbeing related issues that can spiral from those.”*

The Residence Life programme was divided into three strands: social, wellbeing and skills. With the majority of student in accommodation in their first year of studies, the programme focused on skills such as basic cooking, how to get on with flatmates and making a cleaning rota:

*“we want students to transition from their pre university life, in to their university life, and that takes... you have to learn things to do that.”*

The community aspect of the programme was extremely important, for students to live and learn independently, but to do so as part of a community.

*“The community element comes about because we feel strongly, if we feel we can create a really strong community through a programme, then actually, the impact of that is quite broad ... collaboration and teamwork are*



*integral to the institutional strategy and are a part of the model for the Residential offer”*

The University had a unique model for funding the Residence Life activities, with all students living in the university-associated halls paying a weekly contribution which in total covered the cost of the whole programme. The private accommodation operators also contributed to the programme covering some of the costs to provide residential assistants who lived and worked in the halls. This funding mechanism provided a degree of freedom for the Residence Life team who focused the resource on their priorities without risk of the funds being removed mid-year in response to a change in the University’s priorities.

The University strategy published in 2018 runs to 2025. Although Residence Life was not explicitly mentioned in the University’s strategy, the overarching theme of the strategy was for student success and an *“integrated student experience”*.

The Residence Life focus was on first year students. This targeted the wellbeing and transition of these students and identified any early issues and welfare needs. Although there was limited local data on whether this early intervention directly supported student retention, initial analysis showed that there has been a slight drop in the number of student withdrawals in the last two years. This finding sits alongside an increase in ‘first touch points’ implying that: *“we’re getting better at either identifying and getting to these students at an early stage... because the amount of follow-ons dramatically dropped”*.

#### **6.2.1.6 Future developments**

The Residence Life team regularly assessed and reviewed how the programme could be improved, looking to institutions overseas, particularly in the United States. They have attended a number of Residence Life workshops and study tours. A new ‘self-help’ offer introduced this year, is an online ‘transitions programme’ supporting students as they move to university. Initially designed for pre-arrivals, this programme was extending throughout the year, and will cover topics such as the practicalities of moving to university and finding your way around the university to activities looking at emotional wellbeing.

This project had been developed in collaboration with an academic working in the University's psychology department. This had been a successful initiative and it is likely more ventures like this will be developed in years to come.

In the future, interviewees considered the role of Residence Life programme to be significant in a student's decision-making:

*"If we carry on the way that we're going as a society, the wellbeing support that students get at university is going to be critically important. It's already important. It's a thing that students and parents and everybody else are looking for. Whether that should be down to the responsibility of the university I think is debatable. But actually, people have a perception that it should be and I think we manage that through the Res Life programme. So, I think for the future, it's of such growing importance. It was nothing five years ago and I think it's half the choice now, not too far in the future, it's going to be the main choice, decision maker I think."*

#### **6.2.1.7 Conclusion**

This case study discusses a "Partnership model" for a university Residence Life programme. As the interviewee from University A explained:

*"Residential Life needs to deal with everything from academics to skills to counselling to dealing with... and essentially... student welfare issues, disciplinaries, and all this kind of stuff. It's about looking at the broader services and how you can bring those together and Res Life just being part of that broader offering and finding the place in order that Res Life can be most effective to get students to where they need to be."*

Residence Life brokered the relationship between the student and the University. It also brokered the relationship between the University and the accommodation providers, it was symbiotic, a "*collaborating partnership*". If the University succeeded, then the operators succeeded and vice versa. It was also reputationally important for the University because if there was an issue in the accommodation and the University's name appeared in the media, it could affect how the institution was perceived and negatively impact reputation and recruitment.

### 6.2.1.8 **Key attributes for this model**

The approach taken by University A can be summarised, with the key attributes for the Partnership model outlined as:

1. University student accommodation is predominately provided by an external or group of external operators through a nomination-style agreement. This accommodation may be managed on or off the university campus and is usually provided in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA).
2. In association with the external operators, the University designs and manages the Residence Life programme which may provide a contribution to the costs, direct or in kind e.g. staff time to support the programme.
3. There are regular meetings between the university and the external providers to ensure a comprehensive and equitable Residence Life programme across the student accommodation portfolio, despite a number of different operators, buildings and/or locations.
4. The programme is compulsory for all students in these university halls through the student programme contribution in weekly rents. Students are not expected to attend every event, but they fund the programme and in that way presume it is a compulsory element of the programme.
5. The main focus for the programme is student welfare, creating a supportive and inclusive community with a range of activities and where everyone can join in if they wish. This programme is designed to be inclusive and reach a wide range of needs and interests.
6. This model may suit newer, less established institutions that have developed without legacy funding or campus accommodation. These may be city institutions or those moving from a regional recruiting cohort to a national or international cohort where university accommodation provision is now in higher demand.

## **6.2.2 Case Study 2: University B (Not dominant- compulsory) – An Integrated model for Residence Life**

### **6.2.2.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the second institution selected for deeper observation from the typology framework developed in chapter 5. From the framework, University B was considered to be an institution with neither community or individual focus dominant Residence Life programme with an element of compulsory participation required. According to the survey, the University's Residence Life programme had been running for between 4-8 years. Following the interviews and associated assessment for this university, I have considered this to be an 'Integrated model' for its Residence Life provision. This case study was developed from interviews with four staff working at a university in the East Midlands region of England.

### **6.2.2.2 Background**

This section sets the scene with a brief background on the selected university. University B was a 'discovery-led' institution in the East Midlands region of England. The University had two main student accommodation villages, one cluster close to the University and city centre (1,900 rooms) and the other just under two miles from the academic campus providing homes for mainly first year undergraduate students (1,800 rooms). The University owned the two student accommodation sites with between thirty-one and forty percent of its overall estate footprint dedicated to residential accommodation. The University was above average size, in the second quartile for UK universities by the number of total students, and was awarded its university charter between 1921 and 1970. The Residence Life programme had been running between 4-8 years and although in the main participation is voluntary there are some elements of the programme which are compulsory (e.g. safety, welcome talks).

### **6.2.2.3 Programme development**

Initially, the University ran a warden-led system for its residential accommodation until around 2013 when it was agreed by the senior leadership team to change this approach and move towards a more professional 'residential services' model.

The residential services model involved students becoming residential advisers in return for subsidised accommodation costs.

*“The removal of the Warden/SubWarden system which happened circa 8 years ago [was a] ‘seismic change’”*

The first ever residence programme was called ‘Arts in the Village’ and started in 2011. This consisted of arts-based activities and events open to all students and offering a wide range of classes, workshops, facilities and events. The students were encouraged to get involved and develop their own interests and ideas. This was delivered by the embryonic Residence Life team which was separate in the structure to the accommodation office and for two years ran with a warden in role.

Around 3-4 years ago, the University reshaped the Residence Life/accommodation offer to include both the accommodation office (the administration function which included activities such as taking room bookings and accommodation estate facilities management) and Residence Life (mostly event organisation).

*“The next big change, circa three years ago was a reshaping of the accommodation office functions away from having a separate administrative and office function and a separate Res Life function and pull everything under the one structure so both contracting and admin and Res Life being fully incorporated”*

A study tour to Australia in 2013 provided the ‘food for thought’ and initiated the change in thinking and approach alongside the supporting structure and process.

This model developed further in 2017/18 when the students volunteering as residential advisers in exchange for subsidised accommodation became paid university employees with a wage rather than the in-kind payment regime. This step-change in employee status led to an immediate professionalisation of the role of residential assistant. It also had implications further up the management hierarchy as residence officers staff now became the line managers of the paid residential assistants rather than overseeing a group of volunteers.

The final change to create the current structure involved a broadening of the Residence Life portfolio to include oversight of the academic estate (as well as the residential estate):

*“the third change, probably slightly subtler but happened more recently, was probably about a year ago with the creation of Campus Services and our outlook being broader than just accommodation, [the Director and Deputy Director’s] remit changing to include the academic estate, [this means] they have become more involved in the academic estate and the academic services. [This change in structure looked to] merge a number of services, a realignment, ... the commercial entity had always sat aside from the service element, took all the similar services eg Facilities Management, put it into one big department”*

In the last nine years, the Residence Life offer had evolved into an integrated model which encompassed the organisation of events and activities but also the ‘operations’ side of the University’s business, managing the accommodation facilities, bookings office and now managing the wider academic estate:

*“because [operations and Residence Life] are intertwined, one doesn’t work without the other - because a lot of the checks and balances that you’ve got are the softer side of it - so a cleaner goes into accommodation sees something and is able to then escalate that through the team. You’ve got to have a holistic approach to how that actually works so, us providing ResLife which is again, it’s a bit more of a focus about a community, getting people together”*

And the changes went beyond the structural, for example, who reported to who, the job titles and the strategic approach were also physical in the way business was conducted across the departmental team. This physical change mirrored and reinforced the structural approach and change in mindset for the service:

*“We also went through that period where we decided to get rid of our accommodation office as a physical entity and we set up helpdesks as separate team in a physical entity. We lost the physical entity of an accommodation office and then embedded the team into helpdesks. So at each of the [two] sites there is a 24/7 helpdesk and that’s really the kind of*

*administrative hub as well as to where those functions that staff with in the accommodation office now take place, allocating rooms etc.”*

This integrated and professionalised approach was also considered best in promoting and selling the accommodation as the Residence Life team, although primarily the organisers of events and activities, were also the strongest advocates for the accommodation and able to engage and promote the accommodation at open days and in university marketing activities.

#### **6.2.2.4 Staffing structure**

Residence Life was part of the campus services directorate, which oversaw both revenue and non- revenue generating areas. As well as Residence Life, the directorate portfolio included campus service operations, accommodation, conferencing events, grounds and gardens, portering and cleaning, helpdesks, car parking, waste management, print services, security and special collections. This area reported to the director of estates and campus services who reported into finance and the chief finance officer (CFO). This provided a stronger relationship with the entire estate and changed the outlook and focus of the team.

The structure tried to limit staffing hierarchies, with everyone playing an important role. For example, an accommodation-wide campaign aimed to give all residence staff a quick and simple way to highlight their concerns across a range of student issues including mental health, alcohol and drug consumption and sexual health. The campaign involved all staff from porters and cleaners to managers and directors and involved the completion of small postcard-sized cards which could be handed into a team who follow up the flagged activities.

#### **6.2.2.5 Current model**

Residence Life was overseen by the director of campus services, a head of residential services and two residential service managers (one for each student village/area). There were currently 3,700 student rooms divided between the two sites.

The physical entity of an accommodation office had been changed to a series of helpdesks. These were operating 24/7 and also acting as a central administration point for the whole department.

The current Residence Life programme was primarily designed to support student transition: “*supporting the transition to university and through university*”. It was designed to support the student experience but was also about providing a commercial return to the University. Measures of success or key performance indicators (KPIs) for the programme related to occupancy (student withdrawal rate), conversations with students, residents for concern and student interactions:

*“it’s not just about how many students attended an event or how many tickets were sold, it’s programme how many students visits. How many student visits this term. What conversations have we had with individuals. How many students on our list for concern”.*

Over the last few years, positive interactions with students have increased, which may be due to the fact that these procedures are uncovering more issues and highlighting that ‘it’s ok to not be ok’. It was hoped that the early intervention and signposting to welfare would support students before issues escalate. The Residence Life team also ran a ‘breakfast club’ on Fridays to encourage students to meet with them and raise any issues:

*“earlier intervention by ‘a friendly face’ and quicker escalation can resolve problems quicker and before they get bigger”*

The residential assistant role had changed from a welfare advisor role to an explicit emphasis on peer-to-peer support. These roles were not supposed (or had the expertise) to be professional at solving the issues but provided a signposting service to other university services and agencies. The University had a multi-agency approach, working with national services such as the NHS. Both the sector and the NHS were struggling with how to administer mental health services. Awareness, rightly so, was raised through traditional and social media but this meant students had high expectations of support when they arrived at university.

In the past, the residential assistant role was a difficult balancing act between welfare, discipline and fun. Discipline, now handled by staff locally in accommodation until it contravenes senate rules, means residential assistants can focus on peer-to-peer support and building the student community.



The funding model for Residence Life at University B is a mixed economy. Funding is received from university central services, with an element of this contribution coming from the surplus from student rental fees.

#### 6.2.2.6 Future developments

The Residence Life programme was part of the University's award which was added to student degree transcripts on graduation. There was an opportunity in the future to go beyond this model and not separate the academic achievement from other informal learning and skills activities. There was also an opportunity to look more holistically at the student experience, across both the academic curriculum and informal learning to create a degree accreditation that recognises the total experience gained by students in a university setting. This would mean getting faculty staff more involved in the Residence Life programme. The University was looking to develop this area over the next few years:

*"I would love us to develop the curriculum element of it a little bit more. So, we're perhaps slightly more formal in terms of getting some academic content on to there ... I think if we get to the right people, particularly in the academic community, that actually, we could get real engagement in terms of the programme".*

The university was also looking to institutions in the United States where there was a more formalised way of capturing a student's total experience through a credit system. Another model which may capture the opportunities and learning available to students at the University was a residential curriculum approach, but the University is open to reviewing all models.

Another area for future development concerns engagement with the local community, promoting volunteering and encouraging students to identify with the local area and city:

*"We've done a lot of work to engage more to understand... to help the students again with that transition, this is your primary home now. You are a city resident. You can vote here, you are part of the community, hopefully you'll be here for three years. Hopefully, you'll stay as a graduate and get a job as well. That's obviously a bigger metric for the university but something we can help with."*

A number of years ago, some students ran a series of sessions on 'being an adult' or Adulthood (Greatrix, 2020), these looked at areas such as getting a mortgage. The sessions were very successful and might be something the University can develop more fully over the next few years.

Another area, in terms of accreditation was the role of residential advisor. These paid roles are usually second or third year students living in halls who can support the new cohort throughout the year. As well as earning a wage, these students develop and become expert in students and the university system. As such, they are a huge resource to the University and could be part of a university graduate scheme:

*“how can we professionalise this role and this job? What opportunities are there to then move across the country to be able to do a similar type of job? What are the graduate opportunities out the back of it? Because they do have a really good specific set of skills and are great employees and we do recruit a lot of our Resident Assistants in to the university staff base because they are so good and actually, I think it would be good to formalise that graduation route”.*

#### **6.2.2.7 Conclusion**

This case study discusses an “Integrated model” for a university Residence Life programme, focusing on creating a community but also in developing individual skills. Summarising the key drivers for the recent development of the Residence Life regime and structure at University B include:

- The need to professionalise the service, seeing providing accommodation as a service for students.
- A drive for the service to be more commercially focused - this is both in the process and also in the supporting structure e.g. residential assistants as paid employees.
- Transparency on the warden role, to ensure consistency and quality of service right across the accommodation portfolio and be able to guarantee that the service level is the same high quality.
- Change in financial models and new tax rules meant that 'benefits in kind' such as living accommodation were taxed.

- To reduce hierarchy in the staff structure and to empower staff.
- To ensure that Residence Life delivered an 'end-to-end' service for students.
- To ensure that the structure supporting Residence Life enabled community building e.g. the accommodation office is embedded into the team and everyone supports the promotion of Residence Life to students, parents, internally and externally.

#### 6.2.2.8 **Key attributes for this model**

The approach taken by University B can be summarised, with the key attributes for the Integrated model outlined as:

1. Student accommodation is predominately owned by the University who sees it as an integrated part of the overall student experience and service.
2. There is a holistic 'end to end' approach to Residence Life which goes from front line services to the involvement of cleaning staff in reporting student welfare concerns.
3. The programme is funded directly from university central services with an element of the funding coming from a rental fee contribution.
4. The Residence Life offer is both designed to build community but also focuses on developing individual skills. The model supports students in building peer to peer support structures.
5. The staff structure is relatively flat with everyone's role contributing to delivering the student experience. The structures are designed to be efficient and provide effective access to experts and agencies in the city.
6. The programme is predominately voluntary although a number of activities and elements are compulsory for all students in university halls.

7. The main focus for the programme is student welfare, creating an inclusive community to support a growing number of 'first in family' and international students.
8. This model may suit more established institutions that have access to their own accommodation on campus or close by. These may be institutions looking to grow their student cohort or attract a higher number of returner students into university halls.

### **6.2.3 Case Study 3: University C (Individual – voluntary) – A Curriculum model for residence Life**

#### **6.2.3.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the third institution selected for deeper observation from the typology framework developed in chapter 5. From the framework, University C was considered to be an institution with an individual focused Residence Life programme with voluntary student participation. According to the survey, the University's Residence Life programme had been running for less than a year. Following the interviews and associated assessment for this university, I have considered this to be a 'Curriculum model' for its Residence Life provision. This case study was developed from interviews with three staff working at a university in the North East region of England.

#### **6.2.3.2 Background**

University C was a research-intensive institution in England with around 25,000 students. The University was a civic institution and considered itself an integral part of its region but also a globally focused university. The University had three student villages which provided accommodation to around 3,500 students. There were also a number of private operators who had nomination agreements with the University. Students in the (two) private halls can also access the Residence Life programme offered in the University-managed residences and there was a level of discussion on student's who were not living in the accommodation and their participation in events. Residence Life aimed to develop a safe and fully inclusive community within the three university student villages:

*“ResLife aims to support all students within University-owned and managed partnership accommodation to ensure they have the highest quality residential experience as they make the transition into Higher Education, independent living and creating new friendships”*

### **6.2.3.3 Programme development**

Previously, the University’s approach to accommodation involved wardens and formal dining with a distinct difference between the catered and self-catered offer. There was inconsistency between each hall with no one person responsible for the whole accommodation portfolio and each hall ran differently. A student’s experience was based on the hall they were assigned too, creating an inequitable offer.

There were junior common room (JCR) and senior common room (SCR) events organised in halls, but despite students paying similar rates for rent there was a significant difference in the experience for the students.

In the past, the majority of the accommodation team’s efforts were spent on a small number of students experiencing crisis or those breaking the rules/requiring discipline, whereas a smaller amount was spent on the majority of the students who didn’t fall into either of those camps.

*“The ResLife curriculum offers a sense of community and aims to actively encourage integration amongst residents providing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all. The curriculum will include orientation to their accommodation, healthy eating, the impact of alcohol and illegal substances, personal security, independent living, top tips on a range of personal skills (cooking, cleaning, and laundry), lifestyle, cultural awareness, and personal resilience. This will be complemented with a range of social activities in the student villages which will include inter-hall events and competitions, film nights, Glee clubs, Quiz nights, gaming events, and a range of social events to make friends and network with those in your accommodation.”*

With an increase in first-in-family and international students, the programme provided encouragement that everyone could study at university, providing a family structure and skills sessions to help inform and support students’ decision-

making. Students appeared to be more assured in their inclusivity and principles but socially more isolated:

*“The ResLife curriculum will see the collaboration between accommodation services, student health and wellbeing, careers service, the students union, the sports centre and academic units. As such **students will receive life skills training**, support, a range of extra-curricular activities and the opportunity to ‘get the most out of’ their programme, pastoral support and academic support in their academic units, as well as signposting to student services - including finance, visa, chaplaincy, and wellbeing.”*

The change to a residence curriculum model had involved an element of change management. These internal changes, necessary for the refocus of the Residence Life offer, were slowing embedding. Some people felt their roles had been devalued as the new structure focused on specialists rather than general administration and services roles. Support from senior leaders, a sense that across the University there was quite an outdated view of what is meant by accommodation services, and a huge push to promote the change to Residence Life, i.e., what this means for students and what it is trying to achieve, aided this transformation.

The use of the word ‘curriculum’ in an academic institution had been controversial for some staff working in the University, but this change was a key part of the University’s strategic approach, integral to the University’s reputation and recruitment of students.

The rise of the PBSA market in the city had spurred the University to look at the demand characteristics and offer for student accommodation. Accommodation is seen as the norm for universities and so to compete with institutions offering similar courses and tariffs, the residence offer needed to be the differentiating factor.

Over the last five years, greater demand and identification of mental health and impact, and advances of technology, meant that students preferred structure and planned activities:

*“You only have to look at most universities’ wellbeing teams now, they’ve grown an awful lot over the past... I don’t know, five years. I think mental*

*health, inclusivity, diversity, all these issues are issues that we would never even have thought about five years ago.”*

Residence Life became a ‘buzz word’ in the UK around five years ago. There was a growing awareness within the University that other institutions were looking to develop programmes and approaches, which created a competition element but also an awareness that the traditional model was missing an opportunity to broaden student education and mitigate behaviour.

Residence Life was introduced in September 2019 following a year of planning and development. The programme was at the earliest of stages and university staff acknowledge it was in a set-up stage with ongoing review of what had worked and what hadn’t been as successful. At the end of the year, a more detailed review would be conducted and would feed into the year two programme and approach.

The development included several visits to other UK universities and exploratory visits to five universities in the United States – Iowa, Northwestern, Northern Illinois, Lake Forest College and Loyola University, Chicago. The newly appointed Head of Residence Life and the student union activities officer and accommodation manager went on a study tour to understand what the universities considered to be Residence Life and explore ways of delivering the programme.

The University was particularly taken by the residential education or residence curriculum approach to Residence Life. This model looked at the programme through a curriculum framework with a similar approach to formal education with specific learning outcomes. The residential curriculum model was about educating students and aims to provide students with the life skills needed to be independent citizens.

#### **6.2.3.4 Staffing structure**

Residence Life was part of the accommodation services team, which was situated in the corporate and infrastructure team, part of the professional services directorate that reports to the university registrar. Historically, the residences were seen in the traditional sense, as shelter, as housing. One of the biggest changes in the accommodation services team over the last few years had been

the repositioning of the importance of accommodation and movement to be integral to the student offer.

The model had moved from a warden-based system to a more informal introduction of specialist teams. This had been matched with changes in staffing to reflect the differing emphasis, for example, lower numbers of ancillary staff, such as cleaning staff, but an increase in specialist staff, including people with professional qualifications in wellbeing areas and activity planning.

There was a debate on whether being part of the 'infrastructure' team was the correct location for the accommodation services team as their focus is increasingly centred on the student experience:

*"I'm not sure if that's the best place for us. I think we're more suited to student and academic services. I think as time goes, that might change. I would see us as part of the student experience and part of the student journey and I think we're more than an infrastructure service."*

Within accommodation services, the lead for customer services and Residential Life had three Residence Life coordinators (one for each student village), a development officer and a residence support manager responsible for the direct running of the programme.

#### **6.2.3.5 Current model**

The University had adopted a residence curriculum model (pioneered at the University of Delaware (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006)) and was in the first year of delivering this model. The programme (figure 43) was delivered through themed sessions and was intended to "*create the right environment*" for students and the community. Developing resilience and supporting student to become independent citizens were the key priorities of the programme.

As well as the development of skills, one of the features of the newly introduced Residence Life approach by the University was new discipline procedures. These were based on similar procedures seen at a number of American universities visited on the study tour, with the procedures redesigned to fit an English university context.



| January 2020 | Res Life Coordinator session held at each student village                       | Res Life Student Adviser session held at each student village  |
|--------------|---|--|
| Monday       | 1-2pm How do I prepare for revision and exams and top tips                      | 6-7pm How do I (open forum) It's good to talk<br>7-8pm How do I Prepare for revision and exams and top tips<br>8-8.30pm In need of help? Where to go   |
| Wednesday    | 1-2pm Find A Flatmate<br>2-3pm Fire Safety Awareness                            | 6-7pm How do I (open forum) It's good to talk<br>7-8pm How do I prepare for revision and exams and top tips<br>8-8.30pm In need of help? - Where to go |
| Friday       | 1-2pm Consent and Report and Support<br>2.30-3.30pm Drugs and Alcohol Awareness | 6-7pm How do I (open forum) It's good to talk<br>7-8pm How do I prepare for revision and exams and top tips<br>8-8.30pm In need of help? Where to go   |

Figure 43 - An exemplar programme for the residence curriculum at University C

The programme was supported by reslife student advisers (RSAs), second/third year students who worked on a rota basis (after training) to provide day-to-day mentoring and support for students and signpost to the relevant university services:

*“responding to the needs of the students in the accommodation for which they have responsibility for, as well as to provide opportunities for education, personal growth and social interactions. As such, RSA’s will be experienced students who have lived in the student accommodation and are able to draw upon their own experiences to help with emotional issues, missing home, academic worries, building personal skills to live independently, having challenging discussions with flat mates, or simply to be available in drop-in session’s where a student needs to talk to someone.”*

An additional step in the established university discipline structure was added to support the new Residence Life programme. The new discipline structure follows an ‘IBA’ (Identification, Brief, Advice) model based on an initiative by NHS Scotland to reduce alcohol and substance abuse: *“A short, evidence-based, structured conversation about a substance with a client to motivate and support the individual to think about and/or plan a change in their behaviour in order to reduce their consumption”* (NHS Scotland, 2010).

This procedure was followed by Residence Life Coordinators with the IBA meeting following the format:

1. Assess current and past behaviour – ASK.
2. Provide information on consequences – ADVISE.
3. Provide options for later/additional support – ACT.

For a first offence, depending on severity, Residence Life coordinators had three options: an apology from the student; participation in a mandatory workshop session; or a seminar to understand more about the offence and reflect on the implications e.g. drugs/alcohol misuse. The emphasis was on (re)educating students on their behaviour, providing a chance for students to reflect and understand the impact of their actions. However, if the offence was severe then the discipline process goes straight to the established university framework.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the University's strategy, the focus of the programme was to support students to become 'good citizens' and to mitigate 'studentification civic issues' faced by local residents. To this end, civic engagement was a key part of the University's identity. At the operations end of university business there was a community relations group with representatives from the University and the city council. Community groups worked with the University and students and this was an area the Residence Life team aims to develop in future years.

#### **6.2.3.6 Future developments**

The Residence Life programme was currently in the implementation phase, but over the next year the Residence Life team are looking to develop a suite of success indicators that enable a robust, but manageable review of the programme and impact on student success. Early ideas on these measures included a decrease in civic issues and an increase in retention for students living in accommodation.

As accommodation becomes integral to the whole recruitment process, Residence Life is growing as part of the University's holistic (education, accommodation, sport etc) offer to students, aiming to provide the: "*best inclusive package*" and for students to say: "*the package offered by the University is excellent and just what I want*".

The Residence Life programme is now widely understood across the university and is embodied as 'the norm'. There was a shared understanding that as well as the academic community, the University can make communities in other ways. Residence Life plays a key role in mitigating student issues through "*modifying behaviour*", an example of this is fire safety education. Many students did not understand the implications of false alarms so through Residence Life and a programme of education they aimed to raise greater awareness across the student population, reduce false alarms and call-outs for the Fire Brigade and eliminate costs. In the future, more areas like this can be supported through an education programme.

The programme was flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of students as their support and demands change but regular review would be required to ensure the currency of the programme. In the future, there could be more focus on understanding the incoming cohort, e.g. outreach to prospective students who are currently 15-years-old to understand the support they have in schools and understand the programme they would need to support their success.

Another area for the future is in developing stronger links with faculty staff. The Residence Life team had good links with the university teaching and learning directorate, but greater faculty involvement was an area to develop over the next few years. Alongside this is a piece of future work to review ways to extend the Residence Life offer to students not currently in university accommodation, for example commuter students living in their family home.

An idea developed from the study visit to the United States saw Residence Life teams liaise with their own 'in-house' wellbeing team. This could be used initially for 'out of hours' issues where currently the team used the university security teams from 6pm on a weekday and at weekends. There were university duty managers and if any incidents required emergency action, then security involved external agencies such as the Health Service. However, this was a possible area to explore in the future.

A final area concerned external accreditation opportunities for students and whether these could be developed as part of the programme, for example, first aid training and/or mental health training. This was particularly relevant for

students who worked as RSAs, as there needed to be a recognition of Residence Life careers and training opportunities that are relevant for the English system.

### 6.2.3.7 Conclusion

This case study discusses a ‘Curriculum model’ for a university Residence Life programme. The focus of the programme is very much on the individual, as part of their overall learning journey and development. A curriculum approach is seen as an informal extension of the academic programme and is based on developing an individual’s skills and knowledge during the time spent in university residences.

Although originally from the survey, student participation was considered to be voluntary. On deeper questioning, the interviews found that there was a small element of compulsory participation during the discipline ‘IBA’ procedure. This is a change to the original framework (see figure 42) and now corrected in figure 44.

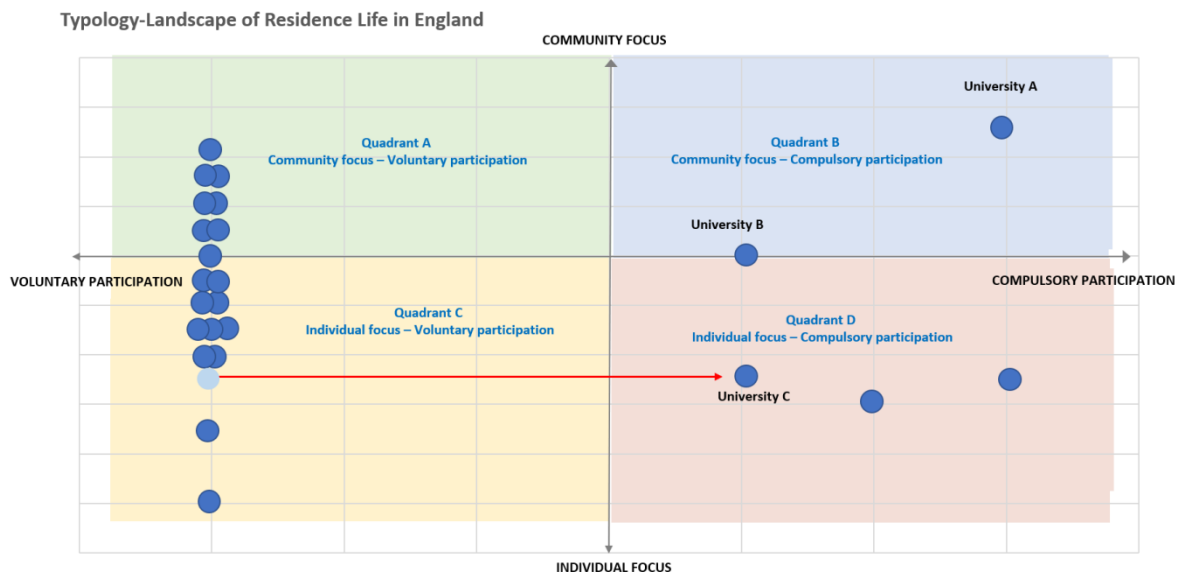


Figure 44 - An updated typology - landscape of Residence Life in England

This chapter discussed University C, an institution with a strong individual focus for its Residence Life programme. This new Residence Life model had led to the restructuring of student behaviour and welfare services at the University, as well as developing the broader programme offer. Although originally from the survey, student participation was considered to be voluntary. On deeper questioning, the

interviews found that there was a small element of compulsory participation during the discipline procedure. This is a change to the original framework (see figure 42) and now corrected in Figure 44. Following interviews and analysis, a “Curriculum model” of Residence Life provision was highlighted and a set of key attributes for this model were distilled.

#### **6.2.3.8 Key attributes for this model**

The approach taken by University C can be summarised, with the key attributes for the Curriculum model outlined as:

1. Student accommodation is predominately owned by the University which sees it as an integrated part of the overall student experience and service. However, there may be situations where a curriculum model could be run across the partnership of private operators.
2. Residence Life is seen as an accompaniment to the academic offer with both focusing on developing the individual’s skills. It supports student progression, wellbeing and is delivered within a learning discipline framework.
3. The programme is predominately funded from university central services. In this case the funding comes from residential services.
4. The Residence Life offer supports the wider learning community but is primarily geared toward the individual student and skills development.
5. Alongside this model sits a review of services and supporting structures. This model needed a number of new roles to develop the residence curriculum and be responsible for this in each student village. This meant a number of generic staff roles were lost in order for specialist residence life coordinator roles to be established.
6. The programme is designed for voluntary participation, however if a student conducts an offence assessed to be of low to medium severity then they must attend a mandatory workshop or seminar.

7. The main focus for the programme is supporting individual students but there is an awareness that students also form part of the wider civic community. The programme highlights the importance of ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to live side-by-side with city residents, especially once the student is living in student housing in the second/third years of study.
  
8. This model may suit more established institutions that have access to their own accommodation on campus or close by. These may be institutions looking to grow their student cohort or attract a higher number of returner students into university halls. These institutions may also have a high number of international students or be looking to promote Residence Life to grow this cohort.

### **6.3 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the three case studies developed from interviews with Residence Life practitioners at three universities. Each case study has been summarised as a model for Residence Life provision, reflecting the development and specific set of circumstances which lead to the offer. A set of key attributes was developed and discussed for each model. The next chapter looks at an analysis of all the interview text to derive a set of key sector themes for the development of the Residence Life phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER 7 - RESULTS: KEY THEMES**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses an analysis of all the interview text to derive a set of key sector themes for the development of the Residence Life phenomenon. In order to ascertain the perceived systemic drivers for the Residence Life phenomenon, the transcripts of the practitioner interviews were analysed for emerging key themes. This method of thematic analysis is outlined in section 3.9.3.

### **7.2 Interview text analysis**

The extraction of codes, associated sub-themes and themes generated from the interview texts, are summarised below. These themes are discussed further in section 8.5 and are indicative drivers for the development of Residence Life programmes in England.

#### ***7.2.1 Theme 1: Residence Life is a response to the professionalisation of accommodation/residence practitioners and service delivery***

The first of five themes developed as a result of transcript analysis was that Residence Life is a response to the professionalisation of accommodation/residence practitioners and service delivery. This theme summarised the practices outlined in the transcript which included the increasing professionalisation of processes and protocols and using more evidence based non-clinical interventions to develop and enhance the student's residential experience.

This overarching theme incorporated three sub-themes (ST), namely ST1: Staff process and procedures; ST2: Business practices and commercialisation; and ST3: Recognition and accreditation. Where ST1 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of a shift in the philosophy and service delivery which included changes to staff titles and roles, an increase in the level of staff expertise and qualification, a change in structures and reporting lines and an overall emphasis on increased transparency, consistency, and quality of service. ST2 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of a greater commercial focus for staff, needing to be 'more business like' and the introduction of performance indicators such as occupancy, student interactions and referrals. ST3 was evidenced by

examples in the transcript of improvement in status of accommodation staff, a greater recognition of accommodation staff role in student success and the beginning of bespoke training for staff alongside the emergence of a nationally defined career path.

### ***7.2.2 Theme 2: Residence Life is a response which reflects a pedagogical shift from 'Student services' to 'student development'***

The second of five themes developed as a result of transcript analysis was that Residence Life is a response which reflects a pedagogical shift from 'Student services' to 'student development'. This theme summarises the shift in redefining the student experience to recognise the importance of both academic and informal (residence) learning in transitioning, student retention and success.

This overarching theme incorporated two sub-themes, namely ST4: Building a supportive community and ST5: Extending the sphere of learning. Where ST4 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of Residence Life being used to create a sense of belonging for the student and where practitioners recognised the importance of the student journey, transitions, and drivers for retention. ST5 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of practitioners maximising the opportunity for students to learn in their residences, making the informal learning distinctive from the academic offer and building the development of life and 'soft' skills, especially those relevant to particular transitions, into their planning.

### ***7.2.3 Theme 3: Residence Life is a response to the increasing demand on universities to meet the welfare needs of their students***

The third of five themes developed as a result of transcript analysis was that Residence Life is a response to the increasing demand on universities to needs of their students. This theme summarised the increased focus on minimising risks to students, staff and institutional reputation and in meeting student wellbeing and mental health needs. Identified in the transcripts was a strong narrative that there is increased pressure on practitioners and institutions due to the wide range of backgrounds and expectations regarding the student experience.

This overarching theme incorporated four subthemes, namely ST6: Mitigating and attenuating risk ST7: Multiagency support, ST8: Changed and increasing pressures and ST9: Societal expectation. Where ST6 was evidenced by



examples in the transcript of student induction and safety compliance, an emphasis on prevention and early intervention through education and minimising incidents, and a clear structure for discipline and misconduct procedures. ST7 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of the increased pressures and perception of a collapse of national support agencies, the need for institutions to have in place a complete package of support with reach across the university and into the community. In particular the transcript pointed towards a need for experts and professional practitioners to support increasing and complex mental health issues within student cohorts.

ST8 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of increased pressures due to fees, both in raising student expectations but also the associated financial concerns of the fees regime. It was highlighted in the transcripts that student look for help in forming networks and want help in creating friendship groups to stop isolation and loneliness. ST9 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of student expectations and demands being greater and different to previous cohorts and the range of backgrounds students come from is increasing and bring with them a range and wealth of additional issues and students need support in managing their own wellbeing.

#### ***7.2.4 Theme 4: Residence Life is a response to the increasing competition (competition and collaboration) within the higher education marketplace***

The fourth of five themes developed as a result of transcript analysis was that Residence Life is a response to the increasing competition (competition and collaboration) within the higher education marketplace. This theme summarised the response of institutions to the marketisation of Higher Education and the impact on university strategy to focus on recruitment, reputation and distinctiveness. The theme also acknowledged the growing pressures and opportunities in responding to the rise in PBSA across the country.

This overarching theme incorporated four subthemes, namely ST10: University strategy (reputation, recruitment and distinctiveness), ST11: Marketisation of higher education, ST12: Greater parental engagement and ST13: Rise of PBSA. Where ST10 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of the importance of accommodation as integral to the recruitment and position of the university, an

integrated student experience that differentiated from the competition, the need to attenuate the impact of student behaviour and encourage deeper engagement with the city/region and the opportunity to maximise the learning gains as student residences provided an area of innovation and creativity that is currently less regulated than the academic offer.

ST11 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of competition for students, including a greater emphasis in university marketing and recruitment with an emphasis on the student as customer and 'value-for-money' student experience. ST12 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of marketing pitching to both students and parents and programming that provides reassurance to parents and students. ST13 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of increasing competition from PBSA providers in the city and the need for university's accommodation to be able to compete for students and to manage the consistency of student experience. The transcript analysis also highlighted the opportunity afforded by student accommodation as a vehicle for increased competition or collaboration with private accommodation providers.

#### ***7.2.5 Theme 5: Residence Life is a response to the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education in England***

The final theme developed as a result of transcript analysis was that Residence Life was a response to the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education in England. This theme summarised the emphasis on internationalisation and the pressures and opportunities of welcoming a diverse student cohort alongside an increased awareness of alternative residency models across the world.

This overarching theme incorporated two subthemes, namely, ST14: Diverse student cohort and ST15: New models of residence/education. Where ST14 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of the need to provide a broad and balanced set of activities (not just drinking related) to encourage participation and engagement, the importance of helping students to form networks and create friendship groups, the differing expectations and demands from international students and the renewed focus by institutions to support the integration of home and international students. ST15 was evidenced by examples in the transcript of

and increased awareness of alternative global residence models e.g. US, Australia and the greater experience of global residence models e.g. international staff, visits.

### **7.3 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed five common themes arising from the interviews with Residence Life practitioners. Each theme provided insight into the development of the Residence Life phenomenon at a sector level. The next chapter explores further what this means for the sector and for individual institutions.

## CHAPTER 8 - DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings from the study and relates them to the research questions and review of literature. The chapter also considers the impact of these results on the development of institutional strategy.

### 8.1 Introduction

Despite the onset of digital provision, a global pandemic and the UK government's increasing emphasis on locally delivered employer-based qualifications, student accommodation continues to play a fundamental role in the English higher education sector. It is still the case that a large majority of students travel away from their homes for university level study (Tight, 2011, Hilman, 2019). This makes student accommodation a source of income generation and a key strategic tool for universities in advertising and recruitment.

*"[student] accommodation becomes integral to the whole recruitment and position in the university."*

Being able to offer a 'first-year guarantee' of accommodation has become instrumental in universities building residential estate and/or developing partnerships with external accommodation providers.

*"One of the biggest examples of that is the accommodation guarantee. So, we guarantee all students in their first year of study, a place in university accommodation if they apply before [a certain date]."*

This study set out to explore the phenomenon of Residence Life and understand its developmental and manifestation in an English context. Using the data from the interviews with university practitioners, three models of Residence Life were developed. These models were labelled Partnership, Integrated and Curriculum. Each model developed within the university from a set of circumstances, such as availability of student residential accommodation in the city or region, and particular priorities for each institution.

Further analysis of the practitioner interviews found five key themes that university practitioners perceived as pertinent in the development of the Residence Life phenomenon. These included: the gradual professionalisation of accommodation and residence roles in their institution and across the HE sector;

the pedagogical shift within institutions focusing on a student development model; greater focus on the welfare needs of students; increasing collaboration and competition at both an institutional and sector-wide level and finally the growth of internationalisation and globalisation in institutions.

The next three sections discuss these findings in more detail, with section 8.5 focusing on the implications of these findings for institutional strategy.

## **8.2 Impact of theory on data**

The student development theories (Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Yorke, 2000; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Briggs et al, 2012) strongly suggested a framework for supporting students through the transition from enrolment to graduation. From the research conducted, this was a key aspect of Residence Life design in the institutions interviewed.

In all cases, the Residence Life programme developed at each institution was bespoke to meet the specific priorities of the location and student cohort. Whether the programme design was based on published research, observation and experience, or a mix of both, the Residence Life programme articulated by the practitioner detailed a strong link to the relevant theory. This included, creating conditions for integration (Chickering, 1969; Higbee, 2002), supporting transitions and adjustment (Bridges, 2011; Burnett, 2007, Briggs et al, 2012), understanding student persistence and retention (Tinto, 1975; Richard et al, 2012; Wilcox et al, 2005; Zeller, 2008) and the importance of instilling a sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012).

Those interviewed had a good understanding of the pressures and challenges experienced by first year students (Yorke, 2000) and the opportunities for activities and frameworks to support them fitting into their new surroundings. In some cases, community-building was the sole focus, in other, creating a sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012) with a focus on the individual contribution was dominant.

In general, the Residence Life activities discussed by the practitioners in the interviews, linked closely to the phases of the student journey (Burnett, 2007). For example, Fresher's week activities were focused on friendship-making and setting out expectations for the community. In January, after returning from the

Christmas holidays, activities to support students facing a period with increased stress (Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Stefanov, 2014), the same around examination times.

In the interviews, the recognition that Residence Life played a key role in the retention and success of students was a strong theme and one understood by the wider university community. However, the link to the strategic and financial sustainability of the institution and the role of accommodation and Residence Life was not so well recognised.

Those practitioners interviewed understood the link to the marketing and positioning of the institution (Mogaji and Yoon, 2019), but many expressed that this hadn't permeated across to the wider university community, where for many, the academic offer was still the institution's priority. It is likely as the government launches a renewed focus on student outcomes and the possible link to receiving student finance (OfS, 2022), the emphasis on student retention and success will be an even stronger driver for institutional leadership teams.

Findings from the research, linked to the literature, though not as explicitly discussed by the practitioners interviewed, included the emphasis on particular student groups. Interviews with practitioners suggested that these cohorts had accelerated the developments surrounding Residence Life due to the group's different demands and expectations,

One of these cohorts were international students, whose numbers have increased dramatically over the last ten years, were less likely to participate in the traditional student bar-based student activities and have an enhanced focus on attainment and networking (Peelo & Luxon, 2007). Another cohort, growing in number across the last ten years were those who were 'first in family'. Many of these students joined the institution without the knowledge of previous cohorts and/or lack preparation for the transition to university.

A gap in the academic literature, although discussed in grey literature and trade publications, centres around the role of student accommodation and the link to strategic and financial sustainability. A number of sector organisations such as the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE) or the British University Finance Directors Group (BUFDG) had run members sessions, but

more analysis would be beneficial for institutional leaders navigating the increasingly complex environment of accommodation and the associated areas such as Residence Life.

### **8.3 How does the phenomenon of Residence Life manifest at an institutional level?**

From the study data three models of Residence Life were identified. Each of these models exhibited particular characteristics that reflected the approach and priorities of the institution. These models were labelled as Partnership, Integrated and Curriculum. For University A, a modern institution who owned a very limited supply of university accommodation, a partnership model was necessary for the financial sustainability of the institution. For University A it was imperative to maintain accommodation standards and be able to offer a first-year accommodation guarantee for students applying to the institution.

The University had developed a model of Residence Life that provided the oversight and mechanism to broker relationships between the University and external accommodation providers, whilst ensuring a level of quality control and reputation management. The reputation of the institution was strongly linked to the attractiveness of the university and the ability to recruit students.

Section 2.5.3 in the literature review discusses the strong link between accommodation and recruitment. Research found that Residence Life was becoming an increasingly important part of the student offer and was used in marketing the institution alongside the academic provision in promotion activities such as prospectuses and at open days. In the interviews with university practitioners Residence Life was seen by the senior leadership as an important tool in promoting the offer to students and their parents. In the future, university strategies may reflect the growing priority of this area to students and their families more strongly:

*“So, parents will feel reassured that we know what we’re doing and we’ve got a good programme, and we can demonstrate the benefits of it and talk about it.”*

This case study also highlighted the role of private accommodation providers and the opportunity for universities and external providers to work in partnership

and/or be a source of competition. The building of brand-new accommodation near to aging university residential stock could have a large impact on the university's long-term strategy and sustainability. Residence Life can provide an additional service or unique selling point (USP) to attract and support students and backs up the findings in the literature review (Zeller, 2008).

University B developed an Integrated model for its Residence Life programme, focusing on creating a community but also in developing individual skills. The University owned a substantial amount of housing stock and therefore a partnership model was not so applicable in this case. However, from the interviews, the challenge was in integrating accommodation across the whole student offer.

*“One thing we talk about a lot is the transition, supporting transition into university and through university. There’s obviously a big transition at the start when move from home but also at the end encouraging people to go out into the community ...”*

This reflects the literature and emphasis on the student journey with oversight of one transition to another (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Braxton et al, 2000; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Zeller, 2008; Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Briggs et al, 2012; Blimling, 2015; Student Minds, 2016; Greatrix, 2020).

For University C, the academic offer of the institution is paramount, and this was realised in the manifestation of the Residence Life phenomenon. University C followed a Curriculum Residence Life model where the focus of the programme is very much on the individual, as part of their overall learning journey and development. A curriculum approach was seen as an informal extension of the academic programme and was based on developing an individual's skills and knowledge during the time spent in university residences (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Kerr et al, 2017; Kerr et al, 2020).

*“[Residential] curriculum, again, thinking about the academic side, I’m very clear when I talk to people, I say it’s not an academic curriculum, ... I’m not teaching ... But it uses the framework of a curriculum. It’s an informal curriculum ... [based upon] learning outcomes”*



The literature review highlighted (section 2.6) the growing interest from institutions to consider and develop a range of living-learning communities and interest in extending the curriculum outside the traditional lecture theatre or workshop. As discussed earlier in section 1.7, the impact of Covid has blurred the boundaries between academic and social spaces, for example in many cases during lockdown, students 'attended' lectures online from their study bedrooms.

As well as the 'blurring of the spatial boundaries' there was also a blurring the boundaries between the roles of academic and professional services staff. The skills required by accommodation staff are likely to change further if an emphasis on learning communities in residential halls continues to grow. Initiatives such as these and the development of Residence Life in general is bringing closer working between faculty and professional staff in the accommodation space and more broadly across the student services portfolio.

Although for many, Residence Life is in its infancy, universities are seeing the opportunity of the residence space in creating an enriched student learning experience. In the future, this may be an opportunity to embed an educational offer and closer academic links with the Residence Life programme. Indeed, it may be a catalyst for deeper collaboration between academic and professional staff, a 'blurring of the traditional boundaries' of what is teaching and learning and what is a student support service. This movement may end the 'education dichotomy' within universities i.e. the separation between academic and student/pastoral affairs (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). For universities this could be an opportunity to develop multifaceted staff roles able to operate across the institution.

#### **8.4 A Residence Life model matrix**

The Residence Life phenomenon manifested in a number of ways across a range of institutions, localities and situations. These models reflected the operating environment and the particular pressures experienced by that institution. Using the data collected in this study, a useful tool was developed for institutions to be able to gauge and compare their provision with others.

This matrix summarised the journey for institutions and identifies the Residence Life model most applicable to their situation.

Figure 45 presents a foundational model demonstrating how a decision matrix can help practitioners and institutions to select or identify a possible model for their Residence Life provision.

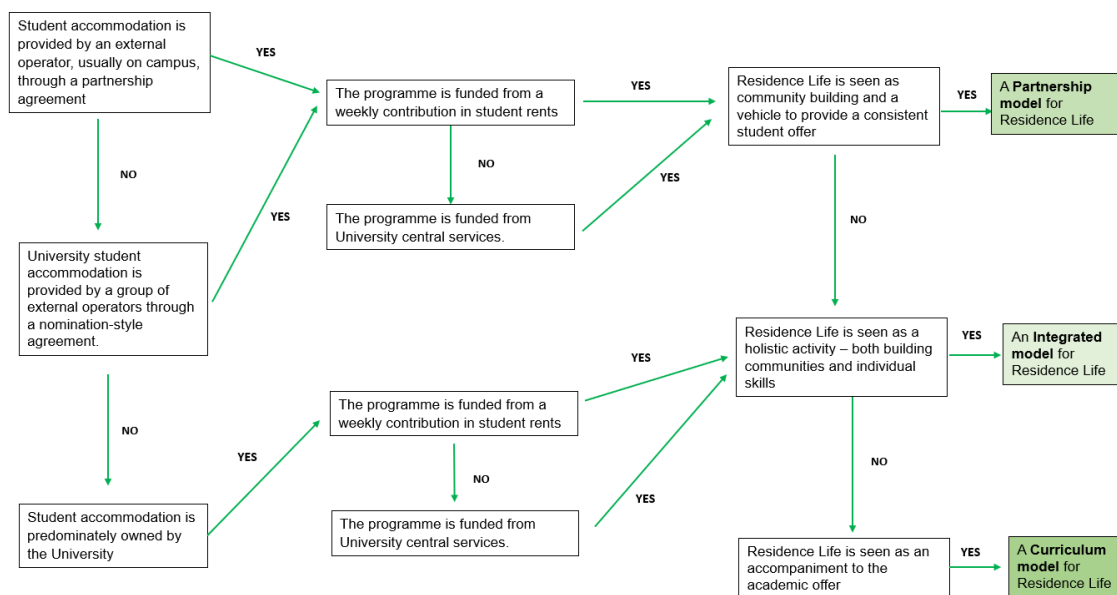
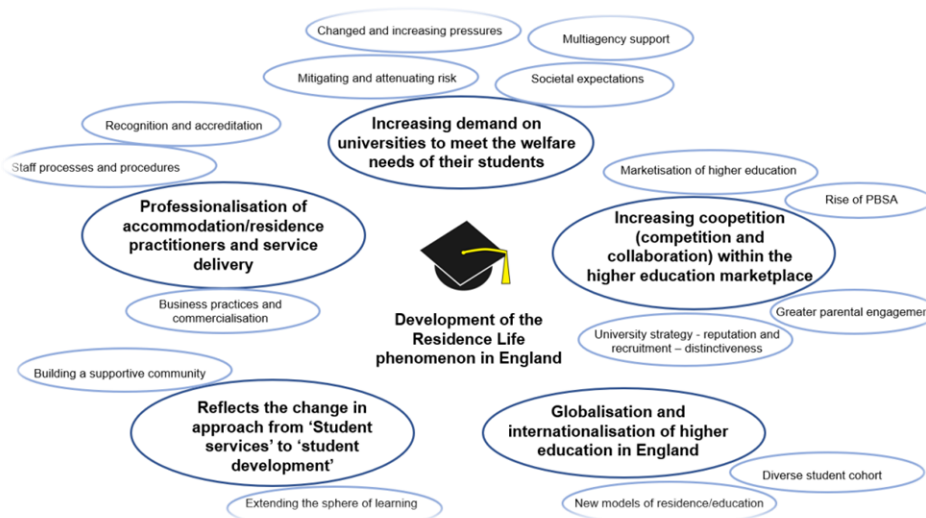


Figure 45 - A Residence Life model decision matrix

### 8.5 What do Residence Life practitioners perceive are the drivers that have led to the Residence Life phenomenon in England?

The analysis of practitioner interviews suggests five main areas, or drivers, that have led to the growth of the Residence Life phenomenon over the last ten years in England. These factors suggest that the development of the Residence Life phenomenon is a sector-wide response to both external sector wide pressures and internal institutional constraints. These are summarised in Figure 46 and discussed in further detail below.



*Figure 46 - The drivers leading to the development of the Residence Life phenomenon in England*

The literature review suggested and reinforced many of the themes identified in fig 46 as indicative of the growth of the Residence Life phenomenon. However, it is interesting to note that the ‘student as customer’ narrative was not seen as a major standalone theme as had been suggested by the literature review. The narrative was more of an overarching influence that threaded throughout all the themes and implicit in the discussions with practitioners.

There was a strong link running across all the themes that student expectations had changed and the increasing need for consistency in service quality. The finding that the shift in focus from a service to development model was also related to the ‘student as customer’ narrative, with the focus on transition, retention and instilling a sense of belonging, linked to the individual student wellbeing but also to the financial importance attached to each student. Over the last few years the student fees model has become part of the modus operandi for English universities and is, embedded in the planning and operations of the institution.

One area arising from the analysis that was not a clear theme in the literature was internationalisation. The expansion of the higher education system in England and the increased reliance on the recruitment of international students has been seen as a strength to the sector, allowing particular subjects to be supported and thrive and to have a global mix of cultures and experiences in an institution. Operationally, this had reinforced the importance of accommodation

and the ability of institutions to house students who are studying far from home. As a system already supporting a majority of home students studying outside their area, this was a gradual and natural step.

However, one impact of increasing numbers of international students studying in English universities was the requirement for an increased level of support for these cohorts. Greater emphasis had been placed on the need to understand different cultures, make friends and support students to integrate in order to be successful academically. International fees are generally much higher than home fees and students may feel that they are making an even greater investment than home students in their future through international study. International student expectations may also be different or higher around the support and social programme provided.

Another issue for an increasingly diverse student cohort was the choice of social activity. In England there is a stereotypical image of a student in the Student Union bar, where socialising is focused around alcohol-based activities. For many students this was no longer the choice of activity whether this is for cultural, religious, health or social reasons. It is clear that an alternative set of activities was needed therefore in order to integrate students, instil a sense of belonging and support them in developing friendships and integration into the university community. A Residence Life programme enhances all these areas and could be seen as a support mechanism that underpins the 'onboarding' of both home and international students.

The five key themes arising from the research are discussed below.

#### ***8.5.1 Residence Life is a response to the professionalisation of accommodation/residence practitioners and service delivery***

This was seen as a key driver in the development of Residence Life by the university practitioners interviewed and was indicative of the development across English institutions. This response can be summarised as a change in three areas:

- a. Staff processes and procedures.

All practitioners interviewed explained that their institutions had reviewed their staff structures and changed their approach due to the implementation of a new and/or enhanced Residence Life offering. Two out of three of the institutions had moved from a warden system to a residential services model. A warden is usually a member of academic staff who conducts the role as a small part of their overall employment. Wardens are not usually experts in student welfare, rather a representative of the university and administrator.

b. Business practices and commercialisation.

An area discussed in the interviews was the need for consistency and quality of service. In many cases, the professionalisation of the residence delivery was in response to the increasing complexity of student support which needed qualified experts rather than relying on peer and/or voluntary support. Particular areas of expertise and additional support highlighted in the interviews included: Mental health, sexual violence and first aid.

c. Recognition and accreditation.

This could be considered to be an internal driver or response to external (societal) forces and also reflected a pedagogic shift in delivery in accommodation from a services to development model. This is highlighted in the literature (session 2.4), with theories first developed from an academic perspective being translated and developed across the institution into pastoral areas. This mirrored the shift in seeing the accommodation as a holistic part of the student experience and is discussed further in section 8.5.2 below.

***8.5.2 Residence Life is a response which reflects a pedagogical shift in approach from 'student services' to 'student development'***

This was seen as a key driver in the development of Residence Life by the university practitioners interviewed and was indicative of the development across English institutions. This response can be summarised as a focus in two areas:

a. Building a supportive community.

The literature highlighted that there has been a shift from a transactional service delivery to one where student development theories are at the fore.

This is reinforced in the interviews with practitioners where there is a strong emphasis on student transition and the need to create a supportive community to enable students to thrive. This suggested a strong link between wellbeing and success and ultimately student retention.

An area discussed in the literature and shown clearly in the interview data was the importance of creating a sense of belonging for the student and the role of Residence Life in building a stable and secure environment for students to flourish. A point reiterated throughout the study was the importance of engaging students in the development of the activities and programme and being responsive to feedback.

b. Extending the sphere of learning.

A second part of the pedagogic shift was in the recognition that learning and education were no longer the sole domain of the lecture theatre or workshop. Even before the pandemic, a range of initiatives in a number of universities were starting to stretch the definition of a learning space and the purpose of residential accommodation. The student accommodation environment provides an ideal space for learning ranging from soft skills such as teamwork, communication, citizenship to encouraging academic learning and support to run in residential areas. Alongside this sits the idea of a residential curriculum and the importance of Residence Life in creating formal and informal, living-learning communities.

A number of universities are looking to develop experiential 'living-learning' communities which take the faculty (people and resources) into the accommodation space. For example, the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering at Arizona State University (ASU, 2020), has an Engineering Residential Community called Tooker House. Working with university faculty and researchers there is an opportunity for students to extend their learning and develop their research skills outside a traditional teaching space. This approach demonstrates that accommodation provides a natural extension to the academic student experience, providing additional learning that may be included in the formal curriculum or as an addition and detailed on the student's final degree transcript.

In the future, more emphasis is likely to be placed on a curriculum-led approach to residence Life and the associated but broader field of student affairs. The translation of an academic curricular approach into the sphere of residential education is growing in stature with many universities and colleges in the US adopting this approach alongside at least one English university interviewed for this study. This “revolutionary shift for learning outside the classroom” (Kerr et al, 2020) is likely to be reflected in university strategies as the realisation of the opportunities this affords becomes clearer.

### ***8.5.3 Residence Life is a response to the increasing demand on universities to meet the mental health and welfare needs of their students***

This was seen as a key driver in the development of Residence Life by the university practitioners interviewed and is indicative of the development across English institutions. This response can be summarised as focusing on four areas:

a. Mitigating and attenuating risk.

As discussed in the section 7.2.3, the interviews with practitioners highlighted the increasing complexity of cases and the need for the residential support structure to reflect the ability to deal with these issues. Practitioners noted the significant increase in students identifying and accessing mental health support and that often the local agency provision was not always able to cope with the demand in cases. Residence Life can be seen as the ‘bridging department’, working across the institution and external agencies, providing a key service for students but also as a way of attenuating risk for institutions.

b. Multiagency support.

Student wellbeing and welfare had been a focus for the UK higher education sector which saw the launch of the Student Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2019), an initiative lead by the UK government and sector umbrella group - Universities UK. Over time, universities developed a welfare infrastructure, but often that was a small provision tasked with signposting students to external sources of provision and support. Increasingly, the university, particularly residential accommodation is seen as a location for delivering student support, working with external agencies

and stepping in where the provision cannot meet demand. Discussions with practitioners demonstrated that Residence Life was the link to external agencies such as the police, social services and health organisations.

Many practitioners discussed the underfunding of mental health and social care services as an ongoing concern for them and their students. This is likely to be a key area for universities and students post pandemic as society grapples with the impact of successive lockdowns and disruptions to normal/post covid normal patterns of life.

c. Changed and increasing pressures.

Interviews with practitioners highlighted the increased pressures on students and the change in expectation around the support they need. The reasons for these societal changes are not clear or proven, but the research on Generational theory (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) suggested there may be a number of factors influencing current student cohorts. Generational theory research suggests that Generation Z students rely on technology and communicate across a range of digital platforms and are particularly influenced by social media. This may fuel a change in the demand for support in making friends in person, mental health concerns and the need for support in building physical communities. Looking at those students living in residences from 2013, this certainly fits within the timescales for the emerging Residence Life phenomenon.

d. Societal expectations

The Generational theory research also suggested that Generation Z students have parents who are deeply involved in their decision making, see their parents as good role models and have a close relationship with them. This is reflected in the interview data where practitioners reported that parents' influence and decision making is growing in importance and a Residence Life structure that mirrors in part, the family set up and support within a home.



#### ***8.5.4 Residence Life is a response to the increasing coopetition (competition and collaboration) within the higher education marketplace***

This was seen as a key driver in the development of Residence Life by the university practitioners interviewed and was indicative of the development across English institutions. This response can be summarised as focusing on four areas:

- a. University strategy - reputation and recruitment – distinctiveness.

Universities are in a crowded marketplace, presenting themselves as high quality and promoters of excellence in education. However, in order to attract students, the institution needs to convey a way of separating themselves from others, highlighting their distinctive features. Some institutions are starting to look to their residential offer, and in particular, the Residence Life element, as a differentiator in the marketplace. This area is not currently subject to the quality regulations of the academic curriculum and could be seen as a key area for innovation.

- b. Marketisation of higher education – student as customer.

Throughout the interviews and reflected in the literature, the marketisation of higher education was referenced. In particular, Residence Life being increasingly used as a marketing tool to promote the university and the student experience. The rapid acceleration in take up of the phenomenon across institutions also demonstrates that keeping up with competitor institutions was important. From the research, some universities had started to develop the area of Residence Life as a differentiator element in student choice.

- c. Greater parental engagement.

From the interviews with practitioners and a strong theme in the literature, parents were increasingly supporting students' decision making on higher education institutions and their accommodation offering. Many parents were resourcing the accommodation and have a view on the safety, location and residential support provision provided.

- d. Rise of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA).

The research found that the higher education student accommodation marketplace had become competitive, with increasing numbers of PBSA providers operating in cities across England. In many cases though, as well as the competitive nature of the market there was also an element of collaboration. The private operators relied on the local university to attract the students to the town or city, while many universities relied on the private accommodation operators to provide the rooms to attract the students to the institution. As new private PBSA facilities were built, they compete for students and universities may find that their accommodation - often older and of a less modern design - has difficulty filling each year. Residence Life may offer the student an enhancement to their experience that goes beyond bricks and mortar, providing the university with an additional mode of attractiveness.

Residence Life may also be a response, not just to the rise of the model of PBSA, but to the increasing trend for students (and parents) to select the type of room that PBSA provides. The research found that the number of students living in purpose-built accommodation was increasing, with around thirty percent of full-time first year students in the UK living in private Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA), up from twenty two percent five years ago (Housing Hand, 2020). This accommodation often has greater privacy and less shared facilities e.g. en-suite bedrooms and/or studio flats. Referred to earlier as the 'residential paradox', students may be choosing more privacy in their physical environment but the flip side to this is the risk of suffering more isolation and loneliness. Residence Life programmes can provide activities and opportunities to support students in making friends and feeling less isolation.

The study found that Residence Life could also be an integral part of the university's community engagement strategy, and for city-based institutions a key contribution to their civic agenda. As discussed in one of the university interviews, the Residence Life team coordinated a student – community volunteers programme. In the future, universities may develop integrated community engagement strategies that build on the student residential community and the relationship with local residents.

### ***8.5.5 Residence Life is a response to the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education in England***

This was seen as a key driver in the development of Residence Life by the university practitioners interviewed and was indicative of the development across English institutions. This response can be summarised as a change in two particular areas:

a. Student cohort diversity.

Student cohort diversity was not just a reference to increasing numbers of international students in the sector but also students who came from a range of backgrounds including lower socioeconomic households and 'first in family' students. These students had lower rates of retention, often struggle academically and may need greater support (O'Shea, 2015). As 'first in family' student numbers increase, they may 'experience a steep learning curve' (Etherington, 2020), Residence Life plays a key role in supporting students on arrival and throughout the transition to a life at university. By supporting students in this way, their completion and success rates are better and university retention statistics are more positive.

b. New models of residence/education.

Although the literature discussed that the globalisation of higher education was a growing development, it was a more unexpected theme to emerge from the analysis and interviews. Universities are attracting a wide diversity of students to their campuses. International student numbers have been increasing gradually in England over the last few years. These students are looking for enhanced support in building peer-to-peer connections and networks and need information and guidance as they arrive both in a new institution, and fundamentally, a new country.

From the study, the institutions interviews highlighted that Residence Life was a key part of the international student support framework. In many cases international students were major participants of the activities and support mechanisms.

Looking to the future, Residence Life could play a part in innovating the education model. With the increased drive for blended and/or digital programmes, a virtual Residence Life offer may provide support (and a sense of belonging) to students learning remotely either nationally or internationally.

Residence Life also provides a bridge between the formal and informal curriculum, with exciting new models of living-learning communities, an emphasis on closer academic involvement, and flexible 'real-to-life' provision may spark new developments in these areas.

## **8.6 Impact on strategy**

Although the themes have been distilled from a range of institutions, each has been developed in response to a set of individual circumstances. For example, a city centre campus may put more emphasis on civic responsibility, being good neighbours, and student safety, whereas a more rural campus may focus on student integration, mental wellbeing and combatting loneliness.

It is clear that the emergence and growth of the Residence Life phenomenon has created both **a tension and a strategic opportunity for institutions**, with a greater awareness of the broadening learning environment outside laboratories and lectures theatres, alongside the increasingly competitive sector. As a university respondent from the survey summarised:

*“Residence life has become a key consideration for universities across the UK. It has arisen at a time of intense focus on students' informal living-learning environment. The influence of students' informal living-learning environment is now treated as a key consideration rather than a peripheral concern. This is, however, in direct tension with the marketised approach to higher education and students' residential accommodation in the UK over the last 25 years.”*

Looking closer from the commercial perspective, Residence Life has a role in ensuring a university's financial sustainability, as a survey response highlighted:

*“the marketisation of education in the UK, has seen universities become more competitive as they try to secure more and more student numbers.*

*With that, is the pressure to ensure that all those entering university, actually graduate and do well. Residence Life departments and models, when run well, understand the multiple transitions that students face in university and develop frameworks which can support a university's wider retention goals”.*

Institutions acknowledge that Residence Life programmes are likely to help students gain the most positive experience of living away from home whilst attending university. Some universities have developed a brand-new Residence Life programme whereas others have pulled together a number of different activities and/or services under the banner of Residence Life.

Extensive use of the term across the English sector has encouraged universities to consider redefining their programmes and calling them Residence Life programmes. Some universities might have been concerned that they would be judged to be less adequate to their peer institutions without a clear Residence Life offering. However, there is no consistency across England in what is included in a Residence Life programme, how it is delivered and what a student should expect. As a survey participant responded:

*“The content of Residence Life programmes seem to vary quite a lot between institutions such that the term doesn't really define a common standard and it is possible that prospective students will find that confusing when they try to make comparisons between residential offers.”*

Survey participants also highlighted the important role of residential accommodation staff and the way these jobs have changed over time. This is particularly important when developing the university's strategy and underpinning operational structure. There also needs to be a greater awareness of the training and skills required for these new roles and the professional accreditation

*“Many are also realising the role that accommodation staff play, in that they wear many hats. They are not just facility managers who look after buildings, but often shoulders to cry on, welfare officers, a friendly face and more. Residence Life encompasses and supports the many roles that these individuals do play and acknowledges that the holistic student experience is just as important”.*

Over the last few years there seems to have been a renewed focus on the student experience. Initially this was linked to the academic offer, but increasingly, the student experience is seen as a broad area including wellbeing, mental health, community building and informal education such as skills development. This is key in the revising and ongoing development of an institutional strategy. A survey response emphasised that:

*“With the introduction of TEF, the reduction of student numbers, the rise of the private sector and the increase in student expectations, universities are having to look at every aspect of the student journey/lifecycle. Accommodation is a hugely important differentiator when selecting university, accommodation and importantly retention. I believe this will only increase the demand for reslife in the future as universities will be expected to provide more than academia.”*

A university’s Residence Life offer is increasingly highlighted in prospectuses and open days. One student interviewed at University A said:

*“I selected the university after the open day when I met the Res Life team and decided this was the institution that would support me best in getting to know people”.*

In times of environmental uncertainty, whether this is in regard to the funding model or the competition, Residence Life could play a role in mitigating and driving forward the university’s strategy. As discussed in section 2.7.3 organisations respond to challenges and their environments in a variety of ways. These responses can be classified as particular models such as ‘Prospector, Defender, Analyser or Reactor’ (Miles & Snow, 1978). Depending on the type of organisational model the university follows, Residence Life could be articulated to align with that approach. For example, if a university had a Prospector strategy, generally predicated on growth of student numbers, then the partnership model of Residence Life may be an approach to consider. Whereas, if the university had an Analyser strategy, then a Curriculum model of Residence Life may be the most appropriate approach.

Residence Life provides an opportunity for universities to differentiate their offer and define a strategy and authenticity outside that of teaching and/or research

excellence. For some institutions, Residence Life provides the umbrella for the whole range of student service which can be mapped to reflect the institution's values and purpose. As discussed in one of the university practitioners interviews, the established academic regulations can be quite restrictive, whereas the area of Residence Life provides a 'creative space' for innovation and the opportunity to develop new approaches and ways to engage students.

As the focus on accommodation shifts towards a Residence Life approach, staff working in these areas are developing their expertise and professionalism. In turn, this is creating a career path for many Residence Life professionals who may start their career as a student residential advisor whilst still studying in university and through a number of subsequent roles become responsible for the Residence Life provision or oversight of the institution's student services.

In order to develop these professionals, a recognised career pathway alongside training and/or external accreditation is needed, one that is dedicated to the models and delivery of Residence Life provision. In the future, similar to the US, Residence Life professionals are part of a recognised professional body. Currently, the American Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I) has seventeen thousand members who are campus housing and residence life professionals.

As recent events have demonstrated, Residence Life can play an important role during extreme events. In England, many Residence Life programmes 'went online' (CUBO, 2020b) immediately after the lockdown response to the Covid-19 pandemic was activated. Residence Life programmes, whether delivering in person or online are positioned to provide both community and 'continuity' for students. In the future, as uncertainties affecting institutions may increase, Residence Life provision may be used by universities in their strategy to provide a consistent and quality student experience.

Over the last year there has been discourse conducted in the media and within the sector (Hillman, 2020; Hack, 2021; Hewitt, 2021) on the impact of Covid 19 and what is meant by a higher education now and in the future, especially post-pandemic. Across the globe, university teaching has been conducted digitally, however, many students have felt this is not what they signed up for and were

obviously expecting more than just lectures via Teams, Google Meet or Zoom. Meanwhile students accessing online learning providers increased exponentially during the pandemic (Ewing, 2021) which shows, under particular circumstances, this has the potential to become a real threat to the traditional university.

What is particularly poignant in these discussions is when students have continued to be taught, albeit online, they have felt they haven't received the whole university experience. It is clear from this that the university experience is more than lectures and tutorials and the Residence Life programme can be a more traditional institution's strategic antidote to the online provider competition.

Wider than this, Residence Life can provide both a point of differentiation for universities and also a toolbox for collaboration and closer working between universities and third-party organisations. In the future, university strategy may be to work even more closely with external partners sharing the delivery of the student experience and extending the operation of these partnerships.



## **CHAPTER 9 - CONCLUSION**

This chapter concludes the study into the development of Residence Life in England and offers a set of recommendations for universities and Residence Life teams, some final reflections on the limitations of this research and offers a short colloquy on the possibilities for future research in this area.

### **9.1 Introduction**

Over the last ten years, the growth of the Residence Life phenomenon in English universities has been meteoric. This growth has seen a range of Residence Life models adopted by English universities in response to their particular requirements and challenges. As a sector there has been a shift towards Residence Life as a response, to a changing landscape, new pressures and priorities. This can be considered as a way of attenuating risk for institutions, whether this is to ensure students continue to apply to the university or to ensure they are competitive and positioned well in the marketplace.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study and introduced the rationale for the research, highlighting the observed phenomenon of Residence Life emerging and developing in universities across England.

Chapter 2 highlighted the gap in literature concerning the rise of the Residence Life phenomenon in England. A broad body of literature was reviewed and the historical context for residential education in the UK was discussed. A number of research fields including student development theory, students as customers and generational studies were discussed and found applicable to the study of the Residence Life phenomenon development.

Chapter 3 introduced the methodology for the research and presented a Mixed Methods approach, with an exploratory sequential design. This would allow for initial exploration of the Residence Life phenomenon and subsequent inquiry through case study and thematic analysis. A survey of Residence Life practitioners was conducted and in order to select three institutions for case study, a typology was developed. This chapter also discussed the research sample and population and the ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 explained the results of the online survey to investigate the phenomenon landscape across English institutions. The results of the survey were analysed, and a typology developed.

Chapter 5 discussed the development of the typology in detail and the rationale for selecting two variables – programme purpose and student attendance as the framework for the model. From the sector typology three institutions were selected for interviews and deeper analysis through the form of case studies.

Chapter 6 discussed the case studies and how each institution had a bespoke model of Residence Life which had developed to fit the university's strengths and challenges. Each model was labelled to describe and summarise the institutional approach, ie, Partnership, Integrated and Curriculum.

Chapter 7 discussed the analysis of the interview text data to distil five key themes from across the institutions to provide a sector wide understanding of the development of the Residence Life phenomenon.

Chapter 8 discussed the findings of the research, both at an institutional and sector level and presented what the findings may mean for strategic decision making in universities.

Chapter 9 provides a summary of the research and a set of recommendations for the sector and residence practitioners. The chapter outlines the limitations and implications of the investigation and concludes with a discussion on areas for future research on Residence Life.

## **9.2 The term Residence Life in the context of the English HE sector**

As discussed in earlier chapters, the term 'Residence Life' is not standard across England and can be loosely defined as: "A programme or informal curriculum designed to support a university student's social and cultural development, coordinated and delivered in a predominately residential setting". The study found that in the interviews and throughout the research, the term Residence Life could mean the programme (of activities), the process and/or the delivery framework.

The research found that Residence Life can be delivered through a variety of organisational structures. In the majority of cases, the Residence Life delivery team was situated within either the student services department or the estates

department. In the past, 'all things accommodation' was part of the estates department, as accommodation was generally seen as providing the physical service of housing. However, in many institutions there had been a shift, reflected in the interviews and the survey, to house the Residence Life team within the student services team, and in some cases the Residence Life team deliver the whole student services offer. This transition reflects the recognition that accommodation was integral to student experience and student success and was more than 'just' housing provision. For many institutions, this shift in mindset resulted in a change in the organisational structure, staff reporting lines and the professional training required.

The survey found there were only a few institutions who offered an element of compulsory participation in the programme. Universities interviewed highlighted that this compulsory nature could be due to student participation through a mandatory rental fee or as part of a discipline framework.

### **9.3 The extent of the Residence Life phenomenon in England**

The results from the survey (see section 4.2) showed that Residence Life was geographically distributed across England with nearly two-thirds of institutions programmes being established for less than three years or currently in development. Residence Life provision was distributed right across the strata of institutions and is not dependant on an institution's estate, size, reputation or age.

From the survey, a Residence Life typology was developed. By analysing an institution's Residence Life provision through the lens of two variables: the level of student participation (from compulsory to voluntary) and the focus of the programme on a community to individual continuum. The typology assessment found that the majority of institutions offer a programme which is voluntary in nature, with a broad distribution of institutions delivering a community to individual focus, although a Residence Life programme with an individual focus dominated the numbers.

There were only a few institutions who offered an element of compulsory participation in the programme. Universities interviewed highlighted that this compulsory nature could be due to student participation through a mandatory rental fee or as part of a discipline framework.

The study found that Residence Life had become a key consideration for universities, coming at a time of intense focus on students' informal living-learning environment. Student accommodation was now treated as a key consideration rather than a peripheral concern. Residence Life had a role in ensuring a university's financial sustainability and reputation, both as an attractive proposition for students and at the same time providing an environment that supports students and provides early intervention in wellbeing, health and discipline concerns.

#### **9.4 The Residence Life phenomenon manifestation at an institutional level**

The investigation found that Residence Life programmes were developed by individual universities and in most cases were bespoke to each institution. Good practice in this area was shared across networks but in the main, Residence Life was defined and developed within that individual institution. Despite the unique nature of the approaches by the institutions, many sought to address a number of common topics throughout the year. These areas included: induction, health and wellbeing, building a community, social activities and events and reflected the transitions and mitigations throughout a student development model (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Perry & Allan, 2003). In some cases, a student discipline structure was also part of the Residence Life offering. Analysing interviews with individual universities found three distinct models of how the Residence Life phenomenon manifested at an institutional level. These three models were named after the properties of the Residence Life approach in each institution: Partnership model, Integrated model and Curriculum model.

#### **9.5 The perceived drivers that have led to the Residence Life phenomenon**

From the analysis of practitioner interviews, five main themes or perceived drivers for the growth of the Residence Life were found. These themes could be considered to be a response to a range of external and internal factors, including: the professionalisation of accommodation/residence practitioners and service delivery; a shift that reflects the pedagogical shift from 'Student services' to 'student development'; a continual and increasing demand on universities to meet the welfare needs of their students; the increasing competition (competition and

collaboration) within the higher education marketplace; and the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education in England.

## **9.6 Recommendations**

Following the enquiry and research from this study, the following recommendations were extrapolated to support the development of university Residence Life plans and strategies.

### ***9.6.1 Recommendations for practitioners and universities***

These recommendations provide a summary of findings for university staff and practitioners:

**Recommendation 1:** The development and provision of Residence Life programmes should be authentic to the institution, closely aligned to the university strategy and reflect the student offer and purpose.

**Recommendation 2:** The Residence Life offer should be used to complement but not replicate the academic curriculum. It should be seen as a less tightly regulated learning space for innovation and collaborative working between academic and professional services staff.

**Recommendation 3:** Institutions should be encouraged to review the opportunities for partnership through the Residence Life provision, for example, to work with partner organisations and private accommodation providers.

**Recommendation 4:** Residence Life provision should provide activities and support for students from all backgrounds, nationalities and through all modes of study and extend the offer to support students living at home, through weekend stays or associated membership of a residence hall.

**Recommendation 5:** Institutions should be encouraged to use Residence Life as a mechanism to create a sense of belonging and the building of communities within residential halls.

**Recommendation 6:** Institutions should be encouraged to use Residence Life as a mechanism to extend relations and engagement with the wider community through volunteering activities and civic events.

**Recommendation 7:** The sector should be encouraged to develop a recognised career pathway with training and external accreditation for Residence Life staff.

### ***9.6.2 Recommendations for future research***

As discussed throughout this thesis, the Residence Life phenomenon is emerging and therefore there are a large number of possible research areas both indirectly and directly associated with the field of Residence Life.

#### **Recommendation 1 – To investigate metrics and measures of success for Residence Life programmes**

One of the areas that provided discussion during the interviews with practitioners was regarding the measurement of the Residence Life programme's activities and interventions, for example, 'how do you measure success?' and 'what does success look like?'. Many of the universities surveyed had programmes that were new in development and so would need to run through a number of cycles to test and develop. Those practitioners interviewed were starting to review the impacts of their programmes though early metrics such as the reduction in incidents, and/or the reduction in repeat incidents. A possible area of further research could be to review the measures of success and the purpose of the programmes, to look for possible new areas of assessment and measures of success.

The practitioners interviewed mentioned that it is easy to count the numbers of students attending an activity, but while participation can be a good indicator to measure the success of a programme for some activities it should not be a sole indicator. If the Residence Life programme was considered in the same way as a curriculum, then each activity would have a set of learning outcomes and associated performance indicators. As universities develop their programmes, there is an opportunity to research the indicators for student success and the role Residence Life, activities and programme play in meeting these.

#### **Recommendation 2 – To investigate further models for Residence Life**

This study proposes three models for Residence Life developed through the survey and interviews with universities. Further research is needed on whether these are the only three models for Residence Life or whether there are additional models. Figure 41 showed the typology of Residence Life when considering the

variables of programme participation and content. The plot shows a group of universities on the left-hand side of the chart, spread across the y-axis. Further research could look to investigate these institutions more deeply to explore additional interviews and/or metrics to separate out this group. For example, interviewing University C revealed that on closer observation this university moved across the chart to the compulsory element of the schematic (see figure 44).

### **Recommendation 3 – To investigate the role of Residence Life during extreme events**

During the Covid pandemic lockdown, Residence Life was found to support students' wellbeing and to continue the association with the institution. Further research on the role of Residence Life during extreme events would help understand the levers and activities available to universities and provide an additional tool in their emergency planning toolbox.

### **Recommendation 4 – To investigate Residence Life models outside England**

This piece of research looked at English universities and the Residence Life models for universities within this nation. Further research could look at the approaches within the other constituent nations of the UK - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - to see if different factors have impacted on the development of programmes in these nations.

### **Recommendation 5 – To investigate Residence Life participation and academic success**

As discussed earlier in chapter two, there was a link between academic success and strong friendship groups. Residence Life provided a framework to help students socialise, make connections and develop friendships. Further research could explore further this link between Residence Life participation and academic success, with the aim of creating a holistic university and accommodation environment that supports students socially and academically. This has renewed credence following the announcement in February 2022 of a series of Office for Students consultations on student outcomes (OfS, 2022) and a Department for Education on higher education policy and reform (DfE, 2022). These documents

place a renewed emphasis on student completion and success and asks whether courses performing poorly on these metrics should have access to the student finance system.

### **Recommendation 6 – To investigate Residence Life programmes for non-resident students**

Another area of future research could consider embedding a Residence Life programme with commuter students and those living outside purpose-built student accommodation. The survey and interviewees highlighted the importance of filling this gap for those students to support their integration into university life and to support intention and student success.

This research could be extended to look at the impact of Residence Life programmes on a broad range of student experience including socially disadvantaged cohorts or Residence Life and employability. Importantly, this study contributes to understanding the direction and priority of student experience in the future. Research in these areas can support the provision of an inclusive and 'fit for purpose' university experience.

### **9.7 Implications of this research**

The recommendations set out in section 9.6.1 highlight the opportunity that the Residence Life phenomenon can provide for institutions and the sector. In response to a number of external factors including professionalisation, pedagogy, societal, marketisation and globalisation, the sector has used Residence Life as a tool to mitigate risk and to deliver and enhance the student experience. The meteoric rise of the phenomenon may indicate that institutions have simply replicated a Residence Life model from another institution without fully comprehending the challenges of implementation and the missed opportunities for developing authentic Residence Life that could be the distinctive offer to attract students and staff. As discussed throughout the thesis and highlighted in the practitioner transcripts, Residence Life provides an innovative learning space for testing new ideas and is far less regulated than academic delivery, however, if accommodation is simply seen as residential estate and outside the bounds of learning this is a missed opportunity.



Residence Life provides a vehicle for students and universities to support the development of community. Research showed (section 2.4) that creating a sense of belonging is imperative in supporting the integration and settlement of students, especially in the first term. This community could be hall or university based but may also extend the definition of community to encompass the surrounding civic population and landscape. Civic organisations can play a role in working with institutions, perhaps through the Residence Life team, to encourage students to participate in civic events, volunteering and activities and develop a sense of belonging and identity that extends into the city or region. These students are not just alumni of institutions but also alumni of their city and region and connections, through the Residence Life offer could go on to build national and global connections with individuals, businesses, and other civic organisations.

As I write this thesis the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic provides a lens for the interpretation of the findings in this study. The current societal discourse surrounding the impact of the pandemic focuses on way the pandemic magnified and brought to the surface a range of underlying issues. Writing for The Kings Fund, albeit focused on social care, their Director of Policy, explains that the pandemic has “*shone an uncompromising light on the sector*” (Bottery, 2020). The consensus for higher education is similar that, the pandemic accelerated established trends, for example, the growth of online provision and the focus on student welfare.

In many cases, Residence Life was seen as a mechanism to support students and for those institutions who had invested in the structures and underpinning were able to use Residence Life instantly to support students who were self-isolating or needed to highlight if they had covid, or in providing activities to support student wellbeing and engagement. Recent figures show record numbers of students applying to English universities (UCAS, 2021). Further analysis is needed on whether these students are selecting institutions outside their local area and whether they are selecting the traditional UK-wide model of a residential higher education experience. However, institutions should not be complacent. There are a number of competitor providers developing new offers and especially, post pandemic students may decide studying locally for two or three years to be

more acceptable in the future. Residence Life provides a possible, close to future-proof solution that can be a defining area for institutions. It can provide both physical, face-to-face activities and yet support alongside an online or digital framework with information, booking activities, calendars, and a student forum.

Student welfare will be an even more important area for institutions and again, this is at the heart of a Residence Life approach. However, institutions design their residential offer, again post pandemic, this area is likely to be key in attracting students to study and in gaining the trust of family and parents if their child wishes to go away to study.

## **9.8 Limitations of this research**

The research was conducted between April 2019 and February 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic took hold. Excluding the subsequent effect of the virus and the impact on the higher education sector and accommodation, the limitations of the research include the following aspects.

### ***9.8.1 The number of institutions and people interviewed***

The typology was developed from the fifty-two survey responses, from this analysis three institutions were selected for further investigation. Although the selection of these institutions was not performed on a statistical basis, the universities in the survey and interviews were widely distributed throughout the different geographical locations and represented differing missions, status and estate designs. Time restrictions would only allow this number of interviews, and if time or resources allowed it would have been interesting and useful to interview more staff working at universities in different points on the typology to see whether they operated different or similar models to those proposed in the case studies.

### ***9.8.2 Fast moving nature of this aspect of the higher education sector***

This area of higher education adapts on a yearly cycle and is responsive to student and sector demands. The Residence Life phenomenon is emerging and therefore likely to be developing and dynamic in nature. It may be that approaches have changed in the last year since the surveys and interviews, so

any research findings presented in this thesis should be interpreted within this context.

### ***9.8.3 Research on the phenomenon of residence life is emergent in the UK***

Much of the literature surrounding the term Residence Life is written within a North American context. For example, the Journal of College and University Student Housing, a publication edited and published by the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), regularly contains articles, but the majority are US provision-focused. This may be difficult to interpret for an English institution due to the following differences: students in the US are considered to be minors until the age of 21; there are significant differences in size and scale between North America and UK; there is a huge variation in funding and investment in higher education; there is a distinct difference in fees and the policy landscape between the two countries; in the UK, students are not usually in university accommodation for the whole course (although there seems to be a change in this model in the UK) and there is a difference in housing models between North America and UK, particularly in the area of private operators.

### ***9.8.4 Residence Life is a broad term and can have a number of meanings***

I provided a term for Residence Life at the beginning of this study based on early research and observation. Despite this definition, Residence Life is not a standard term throughout the higher education sector and so there may be some ambiguity on the use of the term throughout. In some cases, the term places emphasis as a programme of activities, in others it refers to a broad range of services which may encompass some to all student service functions.

## **9.9 Contribution to knowledge**

This thesis has investigated and modelled the phenomenon of Residence Life. The study has contributed to knowledge in the higher education system in the following ways:

Firstly, the articulation of Residence Life within a paradigm shift in the consideration of residential accommodation from that of a material building,

housing students, to one where accommodation is a community with a wellbeing and learning focus

Secondly, the recognition of the uniqueness of the English model of residential higher education, with eighty percent of students studying in English institutions following a residential mode of learning, and the integral role accommodation plays in the university experience and student success. Alongside this, an acknowledgement that despite the commonality of the residential model in England, the Residence Life phenomenon manifests in institutions differently due to several factors including the ownership and availability of student accommodation, the strategy of the institution, the staffing structure and how the programme is funded.

Thirdly, the strategic decision making that comes from Residence Life and the impact of the key strategic link between the availability of student accommodation, recruitment and the financial stability and sustainability of an institution. Recruitment, retention and student success are key to an institution's financial stability, the Residence Life phenomenon is a part of the toolbox in attracting and maintaining students and the mitigation of risk and in developing opportunities for partnership and managing reputation.

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## **Appendix 1 – Survey questions**

### **ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS**

*Hello*

*Thank you for participating in this survey. All responses will be kept confidential. The survey is made up of around 20 questions and should take no longer than 10 -15 minutes to complete. I am currently pursuing a Doctorate in Higher Education Management at the University of Bath. This survey is part of my doctoral research which focuses on the development of Residence Life programmes in England and the impact and trajectory of these programmes. As well as your answers to the questions below, I welcome your comments and ideas on Residence Life programmes – please contact me on C.D.Chipperfield@bath.ac.uk if you would like to discuss this area further.*

*Many thanks and best wishes*

*Caroline*

### **Background**

Question1 - Does your university have a Residence Life\* programme?

*\* 'Residence Life' is a term developed in the US and Canada to describe the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme that surrounds the student's experience of living and learning at a university. In this survey Residence Life is defined as an extra-curricular programme delivered primarily in student accommodation and associated spaces.*

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify:

Question 2 - How long has the Programme been in operation?

- Programme currently in development
- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-8 years
- More than 8 years

### **Purpose**

Question 3 - How important are the following reasons for developing a Residence Life programme at your university? Please rank these statements

from 1 -10 in importance (where 1 is MOST important and 10 is LEAST important)

- To build a stronger student community
- To support individual student study skills development
- To support student in settling into university and retention
- To enhance student's overall wellbeing
- To maintain competitiveness with other universities
- To provide a better value for money student experience
- To support the overall strategy of the institution
- To provide additional recognition of achievement eg certificate
- To support the student's cultural development and understanding
- To encourage healthy living and participation in sports

Question 4 - Is your residence Life programme directly linked to the strategy/mission of the university?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify:

Please explain your answer in more detail

Question 5 - Do have sessions/events to target the following areas: Please select the areas you have within your programme.

- Employability
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Health
- Stress management
- Citizenship
- Resilience
- Study and learning techniques
- Community building
- Internationalisation - understanding other cultures
- Academic/Faculty lead support sessions
- Finance management
- Other, please specify:

### **Delivery**

Question 6 - Who delivers the Residence Life programme? Please select the people involved in this area of your programme

- University accommodation staff
- Non-university accommodation staff
- Trained University staff (professional)
- Faculty staff

- Students
- External experts eg First Aider
- Other, please specify:

Question 7 - Do you work with off-campus halls eg private providers, to deliver the Residence Life programme?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify:

Question 8 - Do students who take part in the Residence Life programme receive formal recognition?

- Yes - students receive a university certificate of participation
- Yes - students receive an external certificate of participation or qualification
- No - students do not receive formal recognition
- Other, please specify:

### **Design**

Question 9 - Who is responsible for the design of the programme?

Question 10 - Are students involved in the design of the programme?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify:

### **Participation**

Question 11a - Is participation in the Residence life programme compulsory for any particular students?

- Not compulsory for any students
- Compulsory for all first year students living in university halls
- Compulsory for all first year students (arrangements are made for students living off campus)
- Compulsory for all students living in university halls
- Compulsory for all undergraduate students (arrangements are made for students living off campus)
- Compulsory for all students (arrangements are made for students living off campus)
- Other, please specify:

B - Why has your university made this decision ?

Question 12 - How many students participate in programmes every year?

### **Funding**

Question 13 - How is your Residence Life programme funded?

- Direct funding centrally from the university
- Directly from a percentage of the student accommodation rental fee
- A mixture of central funding and rental fee contribution
- Other, please specify:

### **Summary**

Question 14 - Overall, which paragraph best describes the Residence Life programme offered by your university?

- Residence Life programmes are compulsory for a particular cohort and participation is recorded. The programme focuses on building social communities through social and cultural events, it leads to a certificate/recognition.
- Residence Life programmes are optional and programmes focus on building communities through social and cultural events.
- Residence Life programmes are compulsory for a particular cohort And participation is recorded. The programme focuses on developing the individual student's skills and competencies. This leads to a certificate/ recognition.
- Residence Life programmes are optional. Programmes focus on developing the individual student's skills and competencies.
- Other, please specify:

### **You and your university**

Question 15 - What is your role in your university?

Question 16 - What is the name of your university? NB: Your institution name will remain confidential in the reporting of this project. Aggregated data based on region/institutional type will be reported instead.

Question 17a - In your opinion, has the importance of Residence Life programmes increased in the last few years?

- Yes
- No
- Other, please specify:

b What are your thoughts on the reason for this?

Question 18 - Is there any further information or comment you would like to input into this research?

Question 19 - As part of this research I would like to develop a number of detailed case studies which look at different approaches and aspects of

Residence Life programming. This would involve visiting your institution and holding short interviews with a range of roles within a university. If you are interested in participating in this aspect of my research, I would be most appreciative. Please could you add your email address below and anything else you think would support this project.

**Final page**

A huge thank you for your participation in this survey



## **Appendix 2 – Questions for University staff interviews (Case studies 1,2+3?)**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE - UNIVERSITY STAFF**

Note time/day/place/person interview conducted:

#### **1. Introduction**

- Sign ethics form
- Introduction to the topic
- Structure of the interview and its aim
- Mention that: interviewees will be anonymous and all feedback will be treated as confidential.
- Inform that interviewees do not have to answer each question

#### **2. Role questions**

- a. What is your role at the University?
- b. What are your areas of responsibility?
- c. Who do you report to?
- d. How many people report to you?
- e. How long have you worked in your role?
- f. What is the biggest change in your work in this time?
- g. Suggested reasons why?

#### **3. Background discussion on the University**

- Please can you describe your University in terms of recruitment, subject mix, philosophy and values.

#### **4. Current Residence Life offer**

- a. Please can you describe the current Residence Life offer at your University?
- b. What are the aims or priorities of the programme?
- c. What are the reasons or factors for establishing a programme?
- d. How long has it been running in this way?
- e. Did you have a programme in operation before?
- f. How was this different to the current offer?
- g. What was it called?
- h. What influences the contents and programme?
- i. Who participates in the programme?

- j. Does this include students living in non-university accommodation?
- k. How do you work with other accommodation operators?

### **Strategy**

- Is the Residence Life programme aligned to the Strategy of the University?
- Does it feature in any strategy documents eg teaching and learning policy, informal curriculum? Sustainability?
- How does it contribute to the strategy of the University?

### **Teaching & Learning – curriculum**

- a. Would you consider the Residence life programme to be a curriculum?
- b. Are there schemes of work/learning outcomes etc?
- c. Are there links with the teaching and learning department or faculty staff?
- d. Which universities and/or individuals are leading the thinking in the area of Residence Life?
- e. Who is responsible for the Residence Life programme?
- f. Are any of the University's senior management team involved in the development and/or sign off?
- g. What is the role of students in the development of the programme?

### **The future**

- How would you like the Res Life programme to develop in the future?
- How important is the programme in comparison to the academic curriculum?
- What are the blockers to your aspirations?

### **Any other comments/thoughts**

## Appendix 3 – Questions for University students (Case study 1)

### Introduction

- Sign ethics form
- Introduction to the topic
- Structure of the focus group and its aim

### Discussion questions

1. Did you know about the Res Life programme at the University before you came?
2. How important was Res Life in choosing your university?
3. How important is Res Life now you are at your University?
4. What do you want from a Res Life programme?
  - i. Social
  - ii. Skills
  - iii. Community
  - iv. External recognition ie First Aid Cert (?)
  - v. Welfare / wellbeing support
5. Should it be compulsory for particular groups, ie all first years?
6. How would you feel about a Res Life curriculum with learning goals, certificate of achievement (informal)?
7. How would you feel about a Res Life curriculum/programme that contributed to your degree credit (formal)?
8. What do you think about the Res Life Programme at the University?
  - a. Good aspects ...
  - b. Need to improve on aspects ....
9. What three things/activities/aspects would you ensure was in the Res Life programme for you?
10. Any other comments/thoughts?

## **Appendix 4 – Participant Information Sheet**

### **DBA thesis – Case studies**

#### **What has led to the development of Residence Life programmes in England and how will this impact on the future strategy of English universities?**

Name of Researcher: Caroline Chipperfield

Contact details of Researcher: C.D.Chipperfield@bath.ac.uk

This information sheet forms part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please read this information sheet carefully and ask one of the researchers named above if you are not clear about any details of the project.

#### **1. What is the purpose of the project?**

This is a piece of Doctoral research looking at the development of Residence Life programmes in English universities.

#### **2. Why have I been selected to take part? [or Who can be a participant?]**

I would like you to take part in order to inform the development of a case studies for the thesis. I would like to feature the approach that your institution has adopted in order to highlight good practice and innovation.

#### **3. Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. Before you decide to take part I will describe the project to you and talk through this information sheet. If you agree to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form. However if at any time you decide you no longer wish to take part in this project you are free to withdraw at any point up to and including the interview.

#### **4. What will I have to do?**

Participation will comprise a short, 50 minute interview in which I will ask questions about the approach your institution has taken towards Residence Life programmes and associated activity.

#### **5. What are the exclusion criteria? (are there reasons why I should not take part)?**

You may wish to decline participation if you have concerns about the extent to which the approach in question can be described as 'best practice'.

#### **6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Participation will help to raise the profile of innovative approaches to learning and teaching, in turn helping to improve university strategy and student outcomes.

#### **7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no disadvantages to you taking part in the project. If the interviewer asks a question that you do not want to answer for any reason, you can choose not to answer.

**8. Will my participation involve any discomfort or embarrassment?**

I do not expect you to feel any discomfort or embarrassment if you take part in the project. If however you do feel uncomfortable or appear upset at any time, the research will stop the interview right away and may direct you to approach an appropriate support service.

**9. Who will have access to the information that I provide?**

Only the research team (myself and two University of Bath supervisors) will have access to information that you provide. All records will be treated as confidential.

**10. What will happen to the data collected and results of the project?**

All data collected during the project including personal, identifiable data will be treated as confidential and kept in a locked cabinet in a locked room or on a password protected file on the University of Bath's secure server (X drive). This storage of data will be done in accordance with GDPR. Recorded data will not be kept for any longer than 10 years. Your name or other identifying information will not be disclosed in any presentation or publication of the research.

After the project has finished, I will also provide participants with a summary of the project results if they would like that. This summary will not include any identifiable information and will show the overall findings of the project.

**11. Who has reviewed the project?**

This project has been given a favourable opinion by the University of Bath, Research Ethics Approval Committee.

**12. How can I withdraw from the project?**

If you wish to stop participating before completing all parts of the project you can inform one of the above identified researchers in person or by email or telephone. You can withdraw from the project at any time, up to and including the interview. without providing a reason for doing so and without any repercussions.

**13. What happens if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of the project you should ask to speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer any questions. If they are unable to resolve your concern or you wish to make a complaint regarding the project, please contact my supervisor: Dr Andrew Pitchford, Head of Learning and Teaching, University of Bath

**14. If I require further information who should I contact and how?**

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this project. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you would like some more information.

## Appendix 5 – Consent Form

### DBA thesis – Case studies: What has led to the development of Residence Life programmes in England and how will this impact on the future strategy of English universities?

Contact details of Researcher: C.D.Chipperfield@bath.ac.uk

**Please initial box if you agree with the statement**

1. I have been provided with information explaining what participation in this project involves.
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this project.
3. I have received satisfactory answers to all questions I have asked.
4. I have received enough information about the project to make a decision about my participation.
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent to participate in the project at any time, up to and including the interview, without having to give a reason for withdrawing.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw my data within two weeks of my participation.
7. I understand the nature and purpose of the procedures involved in this project. These have been communicated to me on the information sheet accompanying this form.
8. I understand and acknowledge that the investigation is designed to promote scientific knowledge and that the University of Bath will use the data I provide only for the purpose(s) set out in the information sheet.
9. I understand the data I provide will be treated as confidential, and that on completion of the project my name or other identifying information will not be disclosed in any presentation or publication of the research.
10. I hereby fully and freely consent to my participation in this project.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant name in BLOCK Letters: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher name in BLOCK Letters: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have Any concerns or complaints related to your participation in this project please direct them to the Chair of the Research Ethics Approval Committee