Everyday student mobilities: Exploring the relationship between wellbeing, inclusion and sustainability

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Contents

Acknowledgments

Summary

- Students who commute experience travel and mobility in far more diverse – and often enriching – ways than the literature on inclusion and belonging in HE suggests.

- Travel time – either alone or with others – was understood by students for its therapeutic purposes and was a means through which they could manage their sense of emotional wellbeing and engage in co-present (i.e. through car-shares, and co-mobility) and virtual practices of intimacies (such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger groups).

- Choices about mode of transportation thus reflected the careful negotiation of concerns about comfort, affordability, affiliations to friends and kin, and efficiency, rather than single-issues such as cost reduction or green issues.

- Car use emerged as a key mode of transportation and it was clear that there is some tension between aims to recruit from the region and widen participation of underrepresented groups (first generation entrants, student-parents, etc.), and 'green' initiatives such as limiting the number of car parking spaces on campus.

- Everyday travel and mobility was experienced as integral, rather than as a barrier, to students' feelings of belonging and inclusion at university.

- The more students felt their mobility needs, and rhythms, were understood and responded to (in both practical, pedagogic terms), the more they felt a sense of belonging to the university.

- Staff and students agreed that better signposting of services designed to facilitate everyday mobility (lockers, showers, car parking, overnight accommodation) would enhance feelings of belonging and inclusion and present commuting as one of several modes of participation, rather than as 'other'.

- Staff and students agreed that provision for students who commute is patchy; this group is often hidden, falling within and between other minority groups i.e. mature students, students with mental health/access concerns, student-parents.

- The university is keen to set up a working group to consider how best to understand and respond to the needs of the emergent group of commuter students in the sector.
  N.B. Due to space, not all summary points are discussed in this report.

Introduction

When the government talks about issues of mobility in the context of Higher Education (HE) they frequently reference two types: social mobility and international mobility. Within the specific field of UK HE scholarship, another dualism persists: students who move away (domestically and internationally) and students who stay at home (local students). Indeed, student mobility is generally understood as 'the semi-permanent move associated with leaving home and migrations over distance rather than mobility and everyday-life' despite the fact that students are 'constantly on the move' in all manner of ways (Holdsworth 2009, 1849). This limited perception of mobility endures, even though the sector has changed significantly over the last three decades. Such changes are evident in the growing number of students choosing to remain at home and eschew the 'boarding school' model of participation. Moreover, given the emphasis on 'flexible options: a two-year accelerated degree; studying part time; in modules; from a distance; or in a Degree Apprenticeship, embedded with an employer.' (BIS 2016, p.13) in the recent HE White Paper, the kinds of mobilities that underpin university participation are set to become even more diverse and wide ranging in the coming years.

Although several academic studies have examined the experiences of 'local' students and how they navigate the decision to remain at home (i.e. Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Holdsworth 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005), there is an absence of research which foregrounds the practices and performances of everyday mobility for this significant minority of students whose experienced are most often framed as 'immobile' (Christie 2007) or 'local' (Reay et al. 2001), regardless of the distances they may have to travel in order to participate in HE. Indeed, much of the research in this field has focused on 'live-at-home' students' ties to home and the ways they 'stay' in place rather than move through and connect different spaces (e.g. Thomas 2012; NUS 2015; Pokorny, Holley and Kane 2016). Moreover, and related to the ways this literature fixes live-at-home students in place, there is a tendency to see these students (and their mode of participation) as the antithesis of feelings of belonging (see Thomas 2012), as though this idealised experience is bounded both to the traditional spaces of HE and particular modes of interaction and engagement. Thomas, for example, argues that students who do not participate in clubs and societies, or inhabit the traditional spaces of the student union and shared halls of

residence 'i.e. students who live at home, are part-time, older and/or on courses with extended contact/workplace hours' (Thomas 2012 p. 5) find a sense of belonging at university most difficult to come by. This central argument has been both noted and significantly challenged by Kate Thomas (2015) who maintains that such a notion of belonging is problematic in relation to live-at-home students, particularly those who are mature and studying part-time, because of the ways they are positioned on HE's periphery, restricting access to those practices of belonging' that are defined in the literature as so important.

Thus, following Kate Thomas' critique of the belonging in HE literature, and responding to the relative neglect of local students' lived mobilities, the aim of the *Everyday Student Mobilities* project is to explore the experiences of live-at-home students by focusing explicitly on their everyday travel and mobility encounters, rather than their apparent fixity in place. This was done through a mixed methodology that is based on the principles of visual and sensory ethnography (Sunderland et al. 2012). It is pressing to take seriously the mobility practices of students who commute, given that the numbers of those choosing not to move away from home to attend university in the UK are growing. Current figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA] (2015) reveal that for UK-domiciled undergraduate students, around 25 per cent live with parents or guardians and a further 15 per cent live in their own residence. In light of the recent announcements by some of the more prestigious universities to increase tuition fees for the first time since they trebled, it is likely that this trend will continue to increase as students seek to exercise a more consumer choice-oriented approach to HE participation.

A study of mobility practices is important because travel and transport are closely associated with social exclusion (SEU 2003). If the student-commuter model is adopted mainly by non-traditional students seeking to manage rising costs, then it is essential to consider whether and how experiences of travel and mobility shape students' experiences and achievement in higher education and, thus, the successful implementation of social policy (Kenyon 2011). Moreover, at a time when universities are encouraged to foreground their environmental, as well as social and economic sustainability policies (e.g. *The Green Gown Awards*, Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges), an investigation into local students' travel choices can help to shed light on whether and how live-at-home students are supported to make 'green' choices and develop a sense of environmental citizenship.

The Everyday Student Mobilities Project

Research questions

The project was framed by the following research questions:

1. What does it feel like for students whose engagement with HE is underpinned by regular travel and mobility?
2. What challenges, tensions and opportunities do students experience as part of their everyday mobilities, and how does this impact upon their sense of personhood, emotional wellbeing and reflections on sustainable practices?
3. What, if anything, is being done at the institutional level to understand and respond to these challenges, tensions and opportunities?
4. What is the relationship between university-wide approaches to student inclusion and initiatives that seek to promote and encourage sustainable behaviours?

Methods

The project involved a range research techniques collectively understood as 'mobile methods' (Buscher, Urry and Witchger 2011). These include: 'go-along', in-situ, and campus walking interviews (depending upon participants' needs, preferences and mode of transport); participatory visual research; and an informal end of project feedback event with participants and representatives from Lancaster University.

Taking the body seriously is central to the mobilities paradigm and whereas traditional interviews often fall short in their attempts to capture the elusive or pre-reflective aspects of 'lived experiences', go along and walking encounters allow the researcher to witness a range of embodied and emotional practices as they are experienced and performed by those involved (Anderson and Jones 2009). The go-along interviews allowed the researcher to make the journey to/from home/university with the student; walking interviews involved walking around the campus, with students directing the tour to include places of significance. Participants were also asked to document their journeys visually, by uploading photographs or short video clips to the project website. It was hoped that images and rich place narratives

would combine to produce layered accounts of everyday experiences. Whilst the interviews were generally successful, however, the visual component of the study was engaged with to a lesser degree, raising questions about the extent to which social media is a preferred tool for students and young people to communicate their experiences (Valentine and Holloway 2002). Although it cannot be exactly determined why the visual component of the research was less successful, researchers working with young people or documenting mundane, challenging or everyday experiences, have reflected that the challenge can be as simple as not being able to think of enough (significant) images to make a valid contribution or participants not knowing what to photograph and having trouble making decisions. These challenges are largely located in the fact that documenting 'anything related to personal challenges confronts our cultural habit of using cameras to generate images of celebrations and positive experiences' (Drew, Duncan and Sawyer 2010). There is potential to explore this more in a methodologically-focused journal article. The interviews and images production were designed to answer research questions one and two.

The end of project event was conceived to address research questions three and four. It took place as an informal meeting; however, unfortunately the attrition rate was quite high and only one student attended, together with five staff from the university, including the Provost for Student Experiences, Colleges and the Library, Professor Amanda Chetwynd. Despite the low turnout form student participants, discussion was lively and engaging incorporating a short presentation of the research outcomes, feedback, questions and actions points.

Sample and location of study

The aim of the study was to locate students who self-identified as 'commuters'; that is, that they felt they had not engaged in traditional forms of residential relocation to attend university. This proved a little difficult at the recruitment stage, as I was keen not to rely on the term 'local' in posters and social media announcements because this may have deterred students who travelled a significant distance to attend university. Equally, however, asking students whether they 'travel into university' invited a broader range of experiences than required for the study, primarily because of the university's location, three miles out of the centre of the city. These difficulties alerted me to the challenges of characterising these students in any distinct way, and the ways in which labels of one kind or another often obscure the complexities of individual student experiences.

Nevertheless, through links with the Student Base, Lancaster Student Union, Disability Services, the social media accounts of the ESM project, the nine colleges and the Library, as well as personally approaching students on campus, I recruited 35 students which resulted in 21 interviews. Nine of the interviews were conducted as 'go along' interviews, using public transport; four were walking interviews around campus; and the remaining eight were carried out in-situ on campus (cafes, bars, open study spaces). The walking interviews served to explore students' use of the campus and how their daily mobility shaped the spaces they were drawn to, or which were easier/harder to engage with. Go along interviews were avoided primarily because participants were car users and, thus – due to health and safety reasons – co-travel was not possible. The sample includes a mix of undergraduate (15) and postgraduate (6) respondents, as well as young (9) and mature (12) students. Most participants were female (16) and White British (16). Seven participants said they were living with parents, others were co-habiting with a partner and/or family (10) or friends (1), and three were living alone.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. All interviews were digitally recorded and supplementary field-notes taken, adopting a semi-ethnographic style of research. Only four participants lived in Lancaster; the others were located around the North-West region, although eight participants lived over 30 miles away from the university campus. Over half of the sample stated that car travel was part of their blend of mobility options; although, whilst some relied solely on a private car, others combined public transport use with informal car-share arrangements and lifts from parents. A significant number of participants were studying Law and Social Science programmes; nevertheless, a broad range of students were recruited, included those studying mathematics, natural sciences and from the Arts centre. See Table One for full sample details.

Lancaster University is a plate-glass institution, built in the 1960s under the directive to create a learning community emulating the residential ideal of Oxford and Cambridge. Thus, Lancaster operates a college system – like others such as Durham, York, Kent etc. – whereby students are assigned to one of nine colleges when they enrol and these determine where students live (i.e. in halls of residence) and with which cohort they graduate. Clearly, with the increasing internationalisation of universities, the more general growth in student numbers, and alongside the privatisation of funding onto the student themselves, this residential ideal has changed somewhat and many students live both in the city itself (3 miles from campus)

or remain in their home region and commute to university. Lancaster has good mainline rail links and is located on the side of the M6 motorway that connects north and south. As a highly-ranked but relatively young institution, Lancaster attracts a diverse range of students, many of whom are 'non-traditional' and located within the local coastal region up to the more rural parts of Cumbria, and the conurbations around Preston and West Lancashire. Around 90% of entrants come from state schools and colleges with 26% coming from SEC 4-7.

Data analysis and limitations

The interviews and images were analysed thematically, that is by 'searching across a data set…. to find repeated patterns of meaning' (Braun and Clark 2006 p.86). The themes that emerged 'capture[d] something important about the data in relation to the research question[s], and represent[ed] some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.' (ibid, p.82). The themes also related to the literature on relational and mobile belonging (e.g. May 2013; Arp Fallov, Jørgensen and Knudsen 2013; Adey 2010) and wellbeing as self-care and therapeutic practice (e.g. Ploner 2016). Interestingly, when asked about the visual component of the research and when combining the place-based images and narratives, it was clear that visual data was generally produced when participants felt a sense of personal wellbeing (rather than, say stress or anxiety) and reflected the more positive dimensions of their journeys (see Appendix).

The limited engagement with the visual component of the project, the small sample size and the particularities of the nature and location of Lancaster University campus are obvious limitations to this project. However, as shall become clear in the conceptual discussion, there is no one definition or experience of 'local students' and this needs to be heeded in discussions of belonging. Through this study site I argue that there is no blueprint for examining the 'student experience', be it in terms of learning, living, socialising or developing skills. What this study does emphasise, however, is that while the campus and location of Lancaster may be exceptional, the combination of home, university and the spaces in-between will have influences upon the mobilities of *all* those involved.

Table One

GENDER	ETHNICITY	AGE	1ST GEN ENTR-ANT	DISTANCE FROM LANCASTER	LEVEL	YEAR	SUBJECT	TRANSPORT
Female	Brit-Asian (Pakistani)	<21	Y	40 miles	UG	1	Arts/ Humanities	Parents' Car
Male	White British	25-30	N	50 miles	PG	PHD	Social Sciences	Train-Bike
Female	White English	<50	N	30 miles	UG (PT)	2	Arts/ Humanities	Taxi
Female	White British	25-30	Y	55 miles	UG	1	Law	Train/ Car/Bus
Female	White British	<21	Y	33 miles	UG	1	Business	Car
Female	White British	21-24	Y	20 miles	UG	3	Law	Car
Female	White British	25-30	Y	30 miles	PG	PHD	Social Sciences	Car
Female	White British	<21	N	3 miles	UG	1	Medicine	Car
Male	White British	25-30	Y	12 miles	PG (PT)	MA	Social Sciences	Bike
Female	White British	<21	Y	13 miles	UG	1	Arts/ Humanities	Bus
Female	British Chinese	<21	Y	12 miles	UG	1	Arts/ Humanities	Bus/ Parents' Car
Male	Indian	<21	N	2 miles	UG	1	Law	Bus
Male	White British	<21	N	34 mile	UG	3	Natural Sciences	Train
Female	White British	<21	Y	19 miles	UG	1	Business	Car
Female	White European	25-30	N	3 miles	PG	2	Social Sciences	Bike/Bus
Male	White English	25-30	Y	10 miles	UG	1	Maths and Sciences	Car/Bike
Female	White British	21-24	Y	5 miles	PG	PHD	Maths and Sciences	Bike
Female	White British	25-30	Y	24 miles	UG	3	Law	Train
Female	British Asian	25-30	N	33 miles	PG	MA	Social Sciences	Train
Female	White British	30-40	N	30 miles	PG	PHD	Arts	Car
Female	White British	21-24	N	28 miles	UG	3	Law	Train/Car

Outcomes

Choosing to commute

In order to provide some context, it is important to say a brief word about students' motivations for participating in HE without engaging in residential mobility and for choosing to structure their engagement through regular commuting practices. In the main, commuting was presented as an active choice rather than a constraint or a barrier to be overcome and reflected students' desires to study at an established and highly regarded university whilst also minimising costs, staying close to friends or family, continuing to live in a more diverse city (like Manchester), or remaining in more rural locations within the Lake District.

As they described their mode of transportation, students often revealed a mixed approach, depending upon the needs (lecture timetables or family commitments) of a given day or the changing seasons. They narrated a fine balancing act between their attachments to place and obligations to partners or children, weighing up the costs of car use, parking permits, cycle maintenance and the importance of alone time and/or time spent with others through co-mobility. Moreover, it was common for students to choose different commuting practices and living arrangements at different stages of their degrees. Whilst some were planning to move into Lancaster in the second year, others had moved out of the city in their second or third year. This reveals the flexibility with which students understood their actual and potential mobility and this calls into question stereotypical notions of the 'stay at home' student as necessarily fixed in the local and reluctant to embrace change.   The excerpt bellow from Ella, a first-generation entrant living twelve miles away from the university with her parents, illustrates this.

> "If the University of Cumbria was the only university around here, then I'd feel a bit like, oh I have to move, go away. But see I have the option to attend a really good university and live at home. It's not like I've just gone for the uni on my doorstep, like I am at a very highly ranked university. And I'm moving [into a shared house] next year anyway so it's like, the best of both worlds."
>
> (White British, Female, 19 years, UG Year 1: Arts and Humanities)

Daily mobility as the practice of self-care

The methodology provided ways for students to express what they felt about, and in the act of, daily travel. Although there were, of course, several instances in which daily mobility was characterised as an inconvenience, leading to tiredness and at times frustration, the overriding message was that daily travel to and from university had the potential to provide a therapeutic encounter and a means through which students were able to transition between the various roles and identities they had to negotiate. Where students travelled alone, they reflected on the chance to read, listen to music, or 'zone out'. Several participants reflected on the overlapping of their physical and digital mobilities, using travel time to engage in virtual 'group chat' via various messenger apps. Where they described co-mobility, car shares or shared commutes were spaces of intimacy and meaningful interaction with friends.

This therapeutic encounter was often intrinsic to students' identity work too, and Fleur and Darius provide two contrasting examples of this. Darius is PhD student living in Manchester with his partner. He described the daily commute as providing an important shift between different aspects of his identity that also served as a way to reinstate a sense of masculinist disconnection to notions of the local as a small-scale, provincial experience:

> "I don't, like, feel the liberty of coming up north into the countryside. I prefer getting back to the city. The size of the city. Feeling minuscule. It's a really good thing for me. I like that feeling when the train rolls in to the city; it just feels gritty and anonymous. More me I guess." (White British, Male, 25-30 years, PG Year 1, Social Sciences)

Thus, the act of movement provided a therapeutic space for Darius, who reflected on Lancaster's overwhelming 'whiteness' and its remoteness to other parts of the country. His means of escape allowed him to maintain his connections with Manchester which he experienced as much more international, large-scale and in keeping with his sense of urban cosmopolitanism. His everyday mobilities, thus, allowed him to move from the intimacy of his activities at university, which involved playing in a sports team and dining at his supervisor's home, to the 'gritty anonymity' of the city with its traditionally masculine notions of risk and urban life. This was both therapeutic and part of making sense of his selfhood.

Fleur is also White British and a mature student; however, she lives in a rural and fairly remote town 55 miles from Lancaster with her husband and two children. Notwithstanding the more obvious differences in their status and location, Fleur's account of switching modes does, however, share some similarities to Darius and she too reflected on the commute as a space for self-care and identity work. At 27 years, Fleur was the oldest student on her Law degree; after nine years of living in Europe she began an access course and entered Lancaster University as a first generation entrant. Fleur reiterated Darius' sentiments about the importance of daily mobility for facilitating the switch in modes of selfhood. There were differences, of course; namely that this act of switching was embedded in the need to be there for others and to be able to continue to live in a close-knit rural community rather than being independent and anonymous:

> "I like travelling. I have always commuted. Because I've got kids and I've got a lot going on, I find that my time on the train *is my switch off time*. […] Thursday is my heavy day; I have a lot of lectures and my big seminar so by the time I'm done with uni on Thursdays my brain hurts. So I get on the train and I put my head phones in and I just zone out. It gives me 40 minutes where I can just, I dunno […] I finish my lesson, I stroll into the square. I get my bus and chill out on the bus; you learn to just have your quiet time. Once I'm on the train I get my laptop out, I might revisit seminar notes or make a list of things I need to go back to later. By the time I get home it's like I've closed the chapter on uni for the day. I've wound it down. By the time I get through the door [at home] I can think straight and I'm in mum mode."
> (White British, Female, 25-30 years, UG Year 1, Law)

Fleur's narrative illuminates the ways in which her time on the move provided opportunities for her to push back against the demands of motherhood that awaited her at home. It is through her movements through public space – the stroll through the square, riding the bus – that she is able to be in student mode for a little longer, making lists and revisiting reading, before closing that chapter for the day. This functionality of movement is not simply a way to reduce the costs of HE or to limit the impact of moving her family from where they are now settled. Indeed, her comments reveal the powerfully important affective dimensions of mobility, for the way it affords time for self-care and reflection, and for negotiating the complex and contradictory

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gendered experiences of 'student' and 'mother' simultaneously. This contrasts with other studies which characterise students like Fleur as 'day students' (Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005) and lacking time to care for the self (Reay, 2003). Importantly, the experience of mobility was, for both Fleur and Darius, essential to the ways they negotiated feelings of belonging, reconciling the diverse facets of their identities.

Self-care and notions of therapy were particularly important for Hazel, a mature, part-time undergraduate student in her 50s, with complex health needs related to ME (Myalgic Encephalopathy, or chronic fatigue). She reflected on the ways in which her weekly journeys away from home (around 30 miles) – experienced as the site of her illness and recuperation and debilitation – were important to reminding her of a past life in which she was a successful business leader and mentor to colleagues.

> "Because I'm inside the house so much and I haven't got any energy to do anything when I'm there, I'm generally in or on my bed. So it can get claustrophobic. So this, university, is about getting away from home and about the brain cells rubbing together and still being able to apply yourself in an intellectual way, even though your body feels like its falling apart… its difficult in one way because I'm 51 and the people I'm interacting with are 19… But I love growing people, and helping people to see what they're good at. It's nice to be able to contribute and help again."
>
> (Female, White British, over 50 years, PT UG Year 2, Arts and Humanities)

John, also a mature part-time student, studying a Masters degree, similarly reflected upon the connections between physical mobility and the intellectual or cognitive processes and reveals how these are balanced with other concerns such as time efficiency, the environment and affordability.

> "When I have driven in, when I get home sometimes, not always but on occasion I've thought, I've felt more relaxed when I've ridden my bike home. Obviously that's a natural thing cos it's endorphins for kind of releases all that kind of stuff. But sometimes when I've been in traffic I don't feel I've left the day behind cos you're always battling to get home through the traffic and on a bike generally you're quite free flowing, it's quite nice and that's what appeals to me about it. And I wish, um I'm, as I said I'm into green issues but I wish more people could experience what I experience. […] I'm sat in

a car, I'm like chucking money out the window all the time because you're not going anywhere, you're not doing much for the environment, it's arguably faster to walk arguably sometimes across that bridge than drive."

(mature, male, White British PT PG student, lives approx. 12 miles away)

The examples discussed here demonstrate the ways in which everyday mobility not only allows these students to seam different spaces and places together, but experiences and decisions about travel and transport are often related to other practices of belonging, such as face-to-face and digital communication with peers and a sense of social and environmental responsibility and citizenship.

Choreographies of belonging: Place-making and rhythm-making through everyday mobilities

The everyday decision-making and practices of mobility emerged as central, rather than in opposition, to students' feelings of belonging. Across the sample, regardless of modes of transportation, distance travelled or personal circumstances, the act of being in motion served as a key dimension of the ways students felt a sense of (dis)connection to university and felt (de)valued. Thus, the journeys, flows, stops and starts that underpinned their participation did not threaten their feelings of attachment to the places and spaces of the university; indeed, as Adey maintains, 'a route well-travelled may over time turn into a meaningful place, just like the places or the nodes at either end of the route. Repetition is key' (Adey 2010: 73).

Students talked about repetition but also about variation in their journeys as I have mentioned. What emerged was a sense of them not quite *curating* personal mobilities (for this implies a little too much agency), but certainly *choreographing* their everyday mobilities and, in turn, their sense of belonging. Choreography is the practice of designing sequences of movements of physical bodies; agency and creativity is implied, but the room to manoeuvre and take up space may well be limited, thus structuring and at times constraining movement. Belonging thus emerged as a process involving set of varied and overlapping choreographies in which students created sequences of movements, stops,

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starts, pauses and bursts, as they connected different places through their own personalised rhythms. As shall become clear, conceptualising belonging in this way allows students who commute access to a more inclusive (but varied) experience and feeling of connection to university, than when belonging is simply attached to a set of predefined spaces and activities limited to the campus.

There is now a significant body of research on libraries and formal learning spaces in universities (see Bryant, Matthews and Walton 2009; Harrop and Turpin 2013). However, most participants described their own personalised practices of place-making and by developing their own 'spatial stories' a more authentic notion of belonging could emerge. Sennett writes of 'narrative space', space designed in ways that permit people to develop their own uses for it, so becoming 'personified places' (Sennett 1990: 190, 192). There was certainly lots of evidence of this in the data. Sometimes live-at-home students gravitated towards explicitly defined spaces, such as the colleges, which are designed to induct and support students into the institutional culture and facilitate a sense of belonging. Colleges have symbolic and cultural dimensions as well as taking up physical space on campus with their associated halls of residence, cafes and bars, and the all-important 'off campus accommodation' which was, for many students in the project, a lifeline as a place of intermittent mooring and dwelling, facilitating the stops and starts of their everyday mobilities. Rachel, quoted below, reflects on the significance of these college-based spaces for supporting her 33-mile journey.

> "It is called off campus accommodation but anybody can use it. I have a locker there; I use it all the time. I've got my books in there so instead of carrying them all the way to my lectures I just leave them there. I have, I keep like bottles of cordial and things cos I suffer really badly from migraine so if I don't have drinks all the time I get a bad migraine and like a coat in there and I put my lunch in there sometimes if I need to, or my bag, yeah it's quite useful.
>
> (Female, White British, 20 years; UG Year 1, Business)

However, at least five participants were less knowledgeable about these spaces and felt more could be done to communicate this resource to off-campus students, others felt they

were simply designed for the purposes of residential students. Faheema, a British Muslim woman, expressed the strongest sense of disconnection to her college, illuminating the ways these predefined student spaces can actually negate feelings of belonging.

> **"**I don't feel any sort of attachment [to her college] to be honest. My lectures are up [in this part of the campus] and I don't live [in college halls of residence] so I have nothing there that attaches me to it. It's designed for people who live on campus, definitely. Absolutely. Which is why it annoyed me a bit that I had to pay this, what was it, a college admin fee or something that I was quite confused about. I don't use any of the facilities, there was literally nothing for me to do at freshers' week because lots of it was like drinking, and late at night, so I didn't understand that. It's like £36 just a one off I think. I think more could be done for students who live off campus, to make them feel a bit more part of things at university and particularly at the colleges. "

> (Female, British Asian [Pakistani], 18 years, UG, Year 1, Arts and Humanities)

More often, students described seeking out and creating their own favourite spaces for learning, meeting friends and peers, or simply taking a break.

> **"**On campus – I have my little favourite areas… [I use] the off-campus student support so I have a locker and I can go and sit there. I use it fairly regularly. It's so useful it means that obviously, I can keep stuff there that I don't have to traipse back and forward all the time. Also sometimes you don't want to be in the cafes and bars. But generally, I like to bagsy a space somewhere quite quiet and get on with my work before I head home."

> (White British, Female, 25-30 years, UG Year 1, Law)

Fleur, cited above, highlights the practical value of mooring in the off-campus rooms but also reveals the ways she finds her own sense of place on campus, away from the cafes and bars that she and many other participants found expensive or noisy. Having rather differently amalgamated peer groups (i.e. not college-based), the participants were often ambivalent about using central student spaces like the library and preferred instead to make a space for themselves close to their lecture halls, car parking spaces or the bus stop to

facilitate smooth transitions and flows of mobility. As Fleur reflects, 'traipsing back and forward' was avoided by these students who sequenced their movements relatively strategically.

Sequencing – or choreographing – was a particular issue for car users and cyclists who talked about the importance of finding a place to dwell, shower and change, and park their car or bike for their feelings of belonging and recognition on campus. Eleven participants cited car travel as the main or a component part of their mobility. Amongst these car users, parking emerged as a central concern and it was noted that there was both a shortage of spaces and penalties – financial and in terms of missed lectures – for mis-timing arrival. Several participants, like Rachel cited below, felt that priority should be given to commuter students rather than the spaces being filled by those staying on campus or in the city.

> **"**I have a permit for the student parking, but I always find that if I time it wrong, so if I get here too early, there's literally nowhere to park. but if you get here sort of five, ten minutes before the lecture starts, the car park's full, if you get here a bit late, five, ten minutes after, there's usually quite a few spaces cos people who don't have the permits move […] People who have their cars here tend to be on campus students or they're living in town, sort of coming in [short distances]. It's not the same as like being off campus, like to me off campus is kind of commuting from home which is my case but for a lot of people off campus is like living in town and driving in five minutes or ten minutes if that makes sense."
>
> (Female, White British, 20 years; UG Year 1, Business)

A similar sentiment, about having their mobility needs understood and prioritised, was expressed by cyclists, like John, who lived 12 miles from campus.

> "I think the only challenge is the facilities like, not being 100% geared up for cycling for students and staff… I can store toiletries, odds and ends. [But] I think [Lancaster] could do more, I think um, you know, I'd like to see it do more, more incentives to cycle in. Because there's always that thought when you're planning your ride, it's an added stress for the day, where am I going to put my stuff, where am I going to put this, where am I going to put that."

(White British, Male, 25-30, PT PG, Social Sciences)

Participants like John and Rachel invoked notions of the temporal as well as the spatial for managing their own personal mobilities and feeling a sense of belonging; indeed the concept of choreographing itself chimes with ideas about beat and rhythm. It has been argued that humans are rhythm-makers as much as they are place-makers (Edensor 2011 citing Mels 2004: 3) and that the meanings generated through rhythms and routines shapes the relationship between mobile commuting practices and belonging (Arp Fallov, Jørgensen and Knudsen 2013: 476). In the analysis of the data, a focus on mobile rhythms helped to elucidate the relationship between imposed and individual rhythms, and how these are negotiated to produce personalised choreographies of belonging.

Lefebvre (2004) argues that power underlies the regulation of mobile rhythms leading to common sense notions of appropriate timings which then inhere in normative ways of understanding and experiencing the world. We can see this here in the two quotations which reveal the need for timetables to correspond with institutionalised notions of the working day and how a commitment to impractical nine o'clock lectures endures, even when that means sitting in heavy traffic.

> "I don't have an issue with nine am lectures I really don't. I think if someone is committed to getting an education then they will make those lectures. What I find difficult though, is the randomness of the weeks and days. If I knew I was just going to be on campus for set periods it would make life easier. I feel like my dad is always like, what time are you finishing today what time are you finishing today? And there's different times every day. There's no pattern."
> (Female, British-Asian [Pakistani], 19 years, UG, Year 1, Arts and Humanities, 40 miles)

Achieving a pattern, sequence or choreography of personalised mobility, and weaving the various aspects of life together – lectures and study, part-time working, parents, children, hobbies and sports – was integral to feeling a sense of belonging for students who commute. This combination of rhythm-making and place-making made for highly individualised experiences in one sense, but this is not to assume that this group of students is alienated or acting in isolation from students who participate in more traditional ways.

Indeed, across all the interviews, whether students were studying arts, business or sciences, there seemed to be some component of group work as part of their teaching, learning and assessment practices. Most participants generally enjoyed the chance to interact with others and make friends though these working groups. Fleur, as a mother and mature student explained that through the *Innocence Project* in which Law students work on real, historical cases together to look for miscarriage of justice, she has been able to mix with first and third year students which helped her to meet like-minded people. Nevertheless, working in groups is dependent upon different rhythms and mobilities coming together and, as Rachel reflected, when working alongside students who resided on campus, and who often worked to a different timetable, this aspect of learning and teaching had the potential to disrupt and destabilise the flow of mobility for commuter students.

> **"**a lot of people who are on campus, especially international students in my groups, don't like getting up in the morning. They're not used to the buzz, they work through the night sort of thing, they do all-nighters, they get up at like two in the afternoon and they'll work til two in the morning. But for me it's not convenient in the sense that when I finish at 6 o'clock on a Tuesday I don't get home until half seven and then if I've got work to do, I have like washing to do, general things that you have to do when you're at home than what you do here, it's just hard to arrange time to do things with people on campus."

When learning and teaching is contingent upon the synchronicity of rhythms of other students, particularly international students or those who operate on a different temporal register, feelings of belonging can be challenged as personalised sequences are compromised through colliding choreographies. Thus, group work might be planned as a way to help students make friends and gain a sense of belonging; however, these interactions, in the ways they disrupt personalised rhythms, can often and have the opposite effect.

Institutional feedback

The last stage of the project involved a feedback event with student participants (1) and university staff involved in understanding and managing student experience and wellbeing (4). It was during this session that the outcomes around car parking, showers, sites of mooring and

place-making, and student wellbeing were reported and discussed. It was agreed that the university could do far more to understand and respond to the needs of commuter students, but also that there are currently lots of things in place that are not well signposted. For example, Philip Longton, of the university's transport team, informed the group that there are in fact over 100 showers in non-residential areas around campus.

It was also discussed that parking permits, whilst very good for students driving in each day, are less cost effective for those like Fleur, who choose to drive just once a week. The issue of colleges was the main focus of the discussion, particularly the ways in which students who commute do not identify with their colleges and the challenges that these students face when graduating because the institutional policy is that this is organised by colleges, rather than students graduating with peers from their programme of study. This clearly has a significant impact upon feelings of belonging and inclusion.

It was agreed that more needs to be done to accommodate and understand the experiences of students who commute, considering things like online submissions, group working, travel and the availability of accommodation for overnight stays (for evening events or two consecutive busy days on campus). Moreover, it was expressed by the student present, that as much organising and synchronising is done 'on the move' via mobile devices, it would be helpful to ensure all university booking systems and access-related sites are mobile and user friendly. As the feedback event closed it was proposed that a working group be set up to take these issues forward.

Conclusions and implications

Addressing research question one, this study has revealed live-at-home students who commute into campus experience their mobilities in complex ways and not simply as a barrier to overcome or as a way to connect home and university. Mobility performances, and the practices that are established and reproduced routinely as part of these performances, can feel at once therapeutic, providing important ways in which these students engage in self-care and identity work, but can also be frustrating and difficult to manage if institutional support for mobilities, moorings and transitions is lacking, invisible or opaque.

This report has argued that it is not by commuting or living at home that this group of students are challenged in accessing a sense of belonging, but rather that their feelings of connection to the university are dependent upon their particular experiences of mobility and mooring and how they are supported to choreograph and personalise their experiences (on and off campus) in fluid and effective ways. This answers research question two, regarding the opportunities and tensions that these students face in their daily mobilities and how they are able, through their mobilities, to feel a sense of wellbeing and engage in important identity work. For some, this identity was grounded in family and care, for others cosmopolitan urban life, and for a very small number, social responsibility and environmental citizenship. In truth, however, and despite the many green initiatives rolled out at Lancaster University, very few participants stated that they felt able to prioritise green or sustainable practices in their decision-making about travel and transport, even though they were aware of these issues. Choreographies of belonging rely on personalised place- and rhythm-making; however, the complexities of the public transport network, and the location of the university outside the city, means that car use was regarded as the most effective way to personalise mobilities and establish sequences that suited students' busy lives. Whilst it is clear that the university, through various student-focused services, is trying to mitigate these tensions and promote green awareness at the same time as widening participation, there are clearly underlying issues that prevent some students from being able to develop the kinds of practices and civic awareness around environmental sustainability that many HE institutions hope to promote. These outcomes address research questions three and four.

Taken together, these are important outcomes which challenge dominant theorising in which feelings of belonging are understood to be located within the discrete spaces and activities of the campus. Thus, this report demonstrates that it is possible to distinguish between different modes of belonging at university, which involve varying 'centring' processes and different combinations of mobility and immobility (Arp Fallov, Jørgensen and Knudsen 2013: 468). These outcomes have important implications for the future of research into student experiences of HE and the role and significance of different modes of mobility (social, international, everyday, virtual and digital) within these. The project thus signals an important shift in conceptualisations of student mobility as either moving up (socially) or away (geographically) towards more nuanced understandings of complex, overlapping and multiple mobilities. This engenders new and important questions about the student experience and belonging as existing in multiple spheres and the processes by which these are linked together in everyday (inter)actions, flows and pauses. Given the context and direction of HE policy (BIS 2016) the future of research into student mobilities must attend to the diversity of movements, absences and presences in order to fully understand and represent students' experiences of participation.

Outputs

Presentations

1. Moving the boundaries? Undoing the home/away dichotomy in higher education research. *British Sociological Association Annual Conference*, 6-8 April 2016, Birmingham, UK.

2. Caught In/Between: Everyday Student Mobilities, Wellbeing and Belonging in a UK University. *Social Justice in Times of Crisis and Hope: Young People, Well-being and the Politics of Education*, 6-8 July 2016, Barcelona, Spain.

3. From 'Mobility Capital' to 'Mobility as Capability': Imagining new frameworks for research into student mobilities. *Higher Education Close-Up 8*, 18-20 July 2016, Lancaster University, UK.

4. Contested (im)mobilities: Gendered experiences of 'staying local'. (Invited Speaker) *Enduring Inequalities and new Agendas for Widening Participation in Higher Education: Student Access, Mobilities and 'Success'*. 27th July 2016, University of Leeds, UK.

5. Students in Cities: performing everyday mobilities in and around term-time locations. Paper co-written with Mark Holton (Plymouth), presented at *Understanding the Contemporary Higher Education Student – One-day seminar*, University of Surrey 21st September 2016.

6. Re-thinking student geographies: Going beyond the im/mobility dualism in HE research. Presented at the *Society for Research into Higher Education Conference*, 7-9 December 2016, Wales.

7. Holton, M. and Finn, K. *Inhabiting Student Mobilities: Performing, transforming and disrupting mobile dwelling*. presented at the AAG Conference, Boston, MA. 5th April 2017

Journal Articles

Finn, K. (forthcoming) Multiple, relational and emotional mobilities: Understanding student mobilities in Higher Education as more than 'staying local' and 'going away'. *British Educational Research Journal* (DOI: 10.1002/berj.3287)

Holton, M. and Finn, K. (forthcoming) Being-in-motion: The everyday (gendered and classed) embodied mobilities for UK university students who commute. *Mobilities* accepted 3rd March 2017

Planned outputs

Journal articles

Finn, K. Student belonging as choreography: Re-framing debates about student mobilities in Higher Education. To be submitted to *Studies in Higher Education*

Finn, K. Rhythm-making and Place- making in higher Education: New directions for theorising students' sense of belonging. To be submitted to *Sociology*

Books

Finn, K., Holton, M. and Thomas, K. (2018) *Everyday student mobilities: Understanding identities, belonging and place-making for contemporary UK higher education students*. London: Bloomsbury Academic

Book chapters

Finn, K. *Choreographies of belonging: Student mobilities and the spatio-temporal process of feeling 'at home' in higher education*, in Stahl, G., Habib, S. and Ward, M. (eds.) Youth, Place and Theories of Belonging. BSA Sociological Futures Book Series. London: Routledge

I also have a dedicated project website and Twitter account:

www.everydaystudentmobilities.co.uk

@finn1_k (student_mobilities)

Kirsty Finn

April 2017

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Appendix

Examples of visual data and participant annotations

"Beautiful countryside"

"open road ☺"

student_mobs

♥ student_mobs

~~████████████~~ The slope 😅 My least favourite part of the ride 🚲 #cyclepathtouni #onmywaytouni

student_mobs

student_mobs "Spring means babies everywhere"

18 APRIL 2016

student_mobs

student_mobs The joy of bus lanes 😄
25 JULY 2016

student_mobs

"more road works ☹"