Exploring the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing: a mixed methods study with a diverse sample of university students

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Ph.D.

Exploring the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing: a mixed methods study with a diverse sample of university students

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Abstract

The level of civic engagement within a society is said to be a clear reflection of the health of that society's democracy (Barrett and Zani, 2015). Despite the growing global interest in civic engagement, especially in the context of higher education, UK-based empirical research is lacking, and applications of life history perspectives to the growing civic engagement phenomenon are especially sparse. The concept of civic engagement carries definitional ambiguity, is subjective, and does not hold a universal understanding. For the purpose of this thesis, definitions of civic engagement, wellbeing and early life can be located in the 'definitions table' (page 8) and are explored throughout.

It has been found in the past that disadvantaged and ostracized groups are less likely to part-take in civic engagement than affluent groups (Beetham, 1994). All primary data were collected in East London, a culturally diverse and disadvantaged borough. Data were collected from a multifarious sample of students from international educational backgrounds at a widening participation university. No similar research was found in this context. As a result of this gap in the literature, the aim of this study was to explore the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing among this under-represented population.

Three separate and unique empirical research studies were designed and conducted, including: a series of focus groups; a 3-part quantitative survey; and a series of in-depth life history interviews. Interview participants were sampled based on their survey responses. All three elements of research were influenced by the vast, multi-disciplinary literature landscape. This thesis includes a unique adaptation of a collaborative life calendar method for qualitative interviews to collect civic engagement data.

Findings demonstrated a relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing. Impacts of socioeconomics and childhood adversities on civic engagement and wellbeing outcomes were highlighted. The survey component offered a plethora of data and findings, and these were explored further within the interviews. Findings

demonstrated students to be civically engaged - although further echoed the aforementioned definitional ambiguity and underlined the ongoing challenges in universally measuring civic engagement. The survey demonstrates factors such as family stability and positive family relationships in early life may predict higher levels of civic engagement, wellbeing, and self-esteem. The qualitative elements explored the complex concept of civic engagement at depth, and the recognition that bringing together a diversity of voices and ideas that can better reflect and shape society is key. Motivations behind civic engagement were at times a pursuit of protecting others, or of personal development and wellbeing.

Overall, the data demonstrates the relationship between early life, civic engagement, and wellbeing is a fluid, reciprocal and inter-linked relationship, where civic engagement may play a mediating factor between early life experiences and health and wellbeing.

Within this thesis, the predetermined notion of what it means to be civically engaged was challenged and broadened to include hidden, daily, informal, potentially unmeasurable yet valuable acts of engagement in the civil society. Future research in the area may seek to capture these daily civic behaviors. Life histories are vital for better understanding civic engagement, and civic engagement has a strong relationship with wellbeing. Further studies are needed to better understand the inequalities of civic engagement within marginalised groups in the UK, and how these are associated with life trajectories. This thesis demonstrates the need for policy makers to better understand and respond to the role that socioeconomics and early life may play in generating civically engaged citizens and could help to improve uptake of political engagement by supporting educational initiatives that are able to collaboratively reach underrepresented groups, build trust, and ensure more voices are heard across all categories of civic engagement.

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Abbreviations

WHO	World Health Organisation
WEMWBS	Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale
SISE	Single item self-esteem scale
FDQ-CE	Frequency, Density and Quality of Civic Engagement (section 2 of the survey)
SEM	Social-economic model
SD	Standard Deviation
UEL	University of East London

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Definitions

Civic engagement: please refer to section 1.6 titled *defining civic engagement*

Wellbeing, please refer to section 1.7 titled *defining wellbeing*

For the purpose of clarity within this thesis, this summarised definitions table has been developed inclusive of terms that are integral to this research.

Term	Definition
Civic engagement	**Civic engagement is active participation in civil society, on some level in an action for the common good of a communal group or for society.** Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to voting. It can include efforts to support others, directly address an issue, work collaboratively to solve a problem. Civic engagement encompasses a range of activities.
Wellbeing	The term wellbeing has evolved over time and is subjective, but for the purpose of this thesis, it gives value and significance to many things such as mental health, feeling valued, work–life balance, the notion of inner harmony, positive relationships with loved ones, happiness, kindness, fun and safety (Jarden et al, 2023). The term wellbeing is concerned with optimizing health rather than just preventing ill health or disease (Scaria et al, 2020). We cannot distinguish wellbeing from health as a separate entity, as the two concepts are heavily intertwined. Wellbeig includes positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Kern et al, 2014).
Quality of Life	The concept of the term Quality of life aims to capture well-being, regarding both positive and negative elements within the entirety of their existence, including physical health, education, environment, social status and relationships, security and safety, freedom, autonomy in decision-making, social-belonging and relationships, physical surroundings (Teoli & Bhardwaj, 2022)
Early Life	The term 'early life' refers to childhood, including ages 0-10, before adolescence (National Research Council, 2000).
Widening participation university	This term refers to the actions taken by educational institutions to increase the number of young people entering higher education, and addresses patterns of social inequality and underrepresentation in higher education (Harrison et al, 2017)
Non-traditional student	A non-traditional student is a broad term, and encapsulates a range of individual and social elements, such as age, ethnic group, country of birth, educational background and more. A non-traditional student is a student who and has not accessed higher education directly from school or via traditional mechanisms. The term non-traditional student means something slightly different in almost every study on the subject and takes note of the institutional and / or financial barriers experienced by minority ethnic students (Bowl, 2001). This term also includes mature students, students who have taken time off before returning to school, students who are married, and students who work at least a part-time if not a full-time job in addition to attending college (Tilley, 2014).

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

1. Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Overview and Originality of study

The growing need to encourage civic engagement and 'civic knowledge' was highlighted by Putnam in 1999, and this realization became a catalyst for promoting civic engagement - and its increasing significance and popularity in America (Brammer and Morton, 2014). Since then, policies and educational institutions have followed suit globally, adopting civic engagement as a key element within their work; thus, making students a focal point within the movement for increasing civic engagement.

Civic engagement refers to individual actions towards a collective good (Ehrlich 2000). The concept of civic engagement and measuring civic engagement in an educational setting is a growing area of interest among scholars and educational institutions alike. This is likely because it is acknowledged that civic engagement 'contributes to student's academic and personal development' (p31, Turrentine et al, 2012). In 2000 it was shown that institutions that emphasized 'character development' as a priority were more successful than those that did not (p86, Meredith et al, 2011). In 2012, the White House put pressure on American universities to 'reclaim and reinvest the fundamental civic and democratic mission of schools and of all sectors of higher education'; further highlighting the significance of civic participation within the educational setting (p142, Weerts et al, 204). It is, therefore, becoming increasingly urgent for universities to not only provide an environment that enhances civic engagement, but to also measure the levels and impact of civic engagement among students and staff as a means of evidencing and promoting the university's success.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between civic engagement and wellbeing among a cohort of students with a life history perspective, drawing on wider literature and utilising three components of empirical research, each with their own

design, data collection process, analysis, and findings. Life histories are significant when considering engagement levels and wellbeing (Mehay et al, 2021) and are able to provide an account into 'how cultural values and traditions influenced development across the life cycle' (Atkinson, 1998, p. 4). There is a paucity of empirical studies that seek to understand the influence of life history on civic engagement (Flanagan et al, 2010) thus it is hoped that the findings of the new empirical research conducted as part of this thesis can strengthen current literature regarding how early life experiences influence civic engagement behaviour, and, in turn, wellbeing.

Further, despite the growing pressure and use of the term civic engagement in higher educational institutions, there is little research available in the context of widening participation universities. Few empirical studies are available that seek to better understand and explore civic engagement in the context of a widening participation university, especially whereby the student population is diverse across ethnic background, life experiences and age groups, and is inclusive of international students from underrepresented socio-economic groups and diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. This is therefore a gap in knowledge. Despite the acknowledgment that early life experiences are likely to impact civic identity (Rotolo et al, 2019), there is paucity of literature or empirical studies surrounding the development of civic engagement in adulthood (Zaff et al, 2010). Research is needed to better understand the inequalities of participation within marginalised groups in the UK (Mehay et al, 2021) and how these are associated with life trajectories (Ferrarro et al 2009) especially in the un-explored context of a London based widening participation university. Research conducted within this thesis with diverse student participants from a widening participation university may gain valuable insights into civic engagement motivators and barriers among an underrepresented population. The thesis context is discussed further in section 1. 2.

Civic engagement is argued by some to have dwindled in modern western society, reflected in the apparent low numbers of residents participating in community projects, attending public meetings, or in the falling number of citizens who vote in the general election (Putman, 1995). Studies focused within the United States have shown a decline in civic engagement in recent years. A study conducted in 2005 in America involving more

than 1000 young people showed that the vast majority of them reported civic engagement as something they believed they should do. However, the process of actually carrying out this act seemed to be missing, and there was a gap between what they felt they should be doing in relation to active citizenship and actually doing it (Rheingold 2008). It has been shown that acts of civic engagement in which an individual would be expected to collaborate with others had declined more rapidly than acts of civic engagement that individuals could carry out alone (Putnam, 2000) implying that collaborative tasks are less popular forms of civic engagement. Some scholars conclude that during this time of educational enhancement, we must use the ever-growing media platforms inhabited by younger populations as sound mechanisms for both educating and encouraging civic responsibility among younger populations (Rheingold 2008). It has been found that the accessibility offered by smartphones and social networking sites can lead to more civic engagement. (Cheng et al, 2015).

Using a mixed methods approach, this empirical research study has the potential to add to the evidence fields of how early life might influence civic engagement, but also from a new and unheard perspective. There is an absence of empirical qualitative data that seeks to understand civic engagement and its relationship with wellbeing with a life course perspective; it is also believed this is the first study to utilize the life history calendar approach to interviewing university participants about civic engagement and wellbeing. Each of the three studies included in this thesis provides a plethora of findings and insights in its own right. To integrate these mixed method findings, they have been explored together in the discussions section, in relation to current literature and recent relevant existing studies. Reflections and recommendations for future research have been offered within chapter eight of this thesis.

Understanding pathways to civic engagement better has been fueled by concerns in the west that civic engagement is declining (Martiniz et al, 2020). Literature surrounding the development of civic engagement in adult life is lacking (Zaff et al, 2010). Empirical research studies that hold a focus on understanding pathways to civic engagement (and thus the production of civically minded generations who have the tools, desire, and empowerment to be active citizens) are considered as 'timely' and 'enlightening'

contributions to the field by scholars (Amna, 2012, p. 611). The public health imperative, for instance, is focused on developing strategies which elicit health promotion and prevent ill health (Bowling 2009) and it could be argued that understanding what life factors may lead to or prevent forms of civic engagement, and their relationships with wellbeing, may prove to be of importance in promoting better health across all factions and sub-groups of society. There are gaps in evidence in this field, and calls for further research, despite the ever-growing demand for volunteers in today's climate (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). Theory generation relating to civic engagement, especially in the context of life course trajectories, is lacking (Flangan 2010). This paucity of theory creation in this area has resulted in an inability for researchers to properly form or test hypothesis, meaning that much of the boom in literature surrounding civic engagement has been descriptive and of little use to developing or making direct improvements to practice. The rarity of theoretically based research in this area is also accountable for the lack of progression in its collective understanding, as well as an in-ability for policy makers to apply sound research findings to practice in the area of civic engagement (Flanagan 2010).

This thesis draws on an array of perspectives ranging from sociology, philosophy, life history methods, and capability theory and uses quantitative and qualitative research methods, to design studies which aim to better understand civic engagement and its relationship to early life and wellbeing among a cohort of university students based in an inner-city East London borough, a unique geographical and socio-economic context. Primary data has been collected in the form of a quantitative survey, exploratory focus groups, and life history qualitative interviews. This thesis falls within a transformative paradigm, seeking to influence scholarly understandings and future policy maker's opinions concerning the removal of barriers and thus the creation of civically engaged generations, more specifically by learning from experiences and life histories of non-traditional international university students from a currently under-represented group.

East London is an area known for its rich socio-economic and cultural diversity (Fagg et al, 2006). All primary data has been collected from a diverse sample of non-traditional university students enrolled at a widening participation university. Civic engagement has

been described as an essential building block for establishing democracy (Flanagan, 2015). Higher educational institutions are obligated to encourage civic engagement more and more, especially as it has been argued that a civic minded environment and knowledge of democracy will increase engagement in politics and in shaping a better society. A variety of quantitative and qualitative research studies focused on civic engagement have been carried out within higher educational institutions, especially as there is growing pressure for universities and colleges to encourage civic engagement, to be transformative – to implement strategies which aim to promote civic engagement among their students. Many higher education institutions devote annual conferences to the topic of civic engagement, produce research in the area and develop extra-curricular activities to promote engagement amongst student bodies (Ostrander 2004).

Both qualitative and quantitative primary data is considered within this thesis; it is hoped that methodological plurism of quantitative and qualitative data collection may lead to stronger and richer findings. (Johnson et al 2004). Further, within this study, due to the salubrious nature of civic engagement identified within the literature review, and the results chapters, (see chapters 4, 5 and 6) civic engagement will, at times, be considered as a health behaviour, a unique reconceptualization. One that carries the potential to place civic engagement at the forefront of public health policy due to the high levels of mortality being directly related to poorly chosen health behaviours at the individual level (Umberson 2010).

This thesis does acknowledge the social determinants of health and the existing health inequalities faced nationally. Health inequalities will be encountered and acknowledged within the literature review, primary data analysis and discussions. Life course theory and the limitations presented by an unequal society are incorporated throughout, however this thesis focuses more on the creation of health and wellbeing, seeing the practice of civic engagement as a potential route or life strategy for better health and wellbeing. This study is focused on the experiences of students and the significance of civic engagement with a focus on wellbeing and resilience, while re -conceptualizing civic engagement as a health behavior, a unique and new standing. Further, in light of the growing demand for

governments to promote specific aspects of civic engagement, such as volunteering, the opportunity to understand this area further is of importance to policy and direction at a national level (Nazroo and Mathews, 2012). It is impossible to truly achieve a democratic and healthy society without civically engaged citizens whose voices are heard, thus civic engagement in the form of education, political engagement, campaigning, group membership, volunteering is potentially a mechanism by which a society may reflect the voices of its people, as achieving this cannot be the job of just one sector.

The rarity of theoretically based research in this area is accountable for the lack of progression in developing a collective understanding (Flanagan et al, 2020). Thus, it is important to understand civic engagement in relation to life history and to health, which emphasizes the value and contribution this study could hold. Using a mixture of methods to understand the association between life histories and civic engagement among this diverse group of students, and to explore further this association and its linkages with health during in-depth qualitative interviews, this study has the potential to add to the evidence field on a variety of levels. Potential findings surrounding the facilitators and experiences leading participants to be or not to be civically engaged are included in the life history element. Barriers and obstacles of civic engagement and an individual's life history journey will be explored within this study. The process of civic engagement in its entirety and understanding pathways to civic engagement is potentially a significant dimension of human development as well as a vehicle for establishing a more equal, healthy and democratic society in the future. If civic engagement is a strategy or pathway to a better society with higher levels of health and wellbeing, and we can understand the factors behind who is likely to become civically engaged and why, this may reduce both morbidity and mortality and improve quality of life and psychological wellbeing on a macro scale.

1.2 Study aims

It is probable that similar barriers experienced or entrenched in early life will be the same for civic engagement as they are when considering health behaviors or educational attainment; hypothetically linked to marginalization, discrimination, and societal inequality. Further highlighting the significance of this study, higher education is

considered to be a prominent and pivotal time in a life's trajectory when considering civic engagement (Weerts et al., 2014). Overall, becoming a knowledgeable and active citizen is seen as a vital factor within a student's journey, which is why it has been encouraged to be taken up as a key priority by an array of educational institutions in recent years (Brammer et al, 2014).

Civically engaged behaviours and patterns are not one size fits all. They have the potential to be country and culture specific, subjective to personal experiences, and should be explored trans-nationally (Weerts et al, 2014). Younger generations previously oppressed by society due to their socio-economic situation are increasingly free to make life decisions such as higher education, career paths, travelling the world, or more (Shanahan, 2000). It has been shown that an individual's ethnicity, income, and level of education can be predictors of their uptake of civic engagement. (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004) although more studies are needed in order to better understand how and why. Taking this into account, the need for studies which provide a current understanding around increased autonomy and geographical flexibility to make lifestyle choices is a significant one for the field and adds to the growing need to understand civic engagement as an important choice in itself. Therefore, exploring the significance of life history on civic engagement at this milestone in diverse participant's trajectories carried the potential to be significant and an important contribution.

The main aim of this research is to study the relationship between early life, civic engagement and wellbeing. A life history perspective is adopted, and early life will be studied in relation to one's ability and desire to be civically engaged, thus experienced motivators or barriers of civic engagement are vital to the overall study aims in understanding who may or may not be civically engaged - and thus live healthier lives.

To achieve these research aim(s) I have addressed the following research questions based on the assumptions that 1) civic engagement can be associated with health and wellbeing, which is more often positive but may not always be so; 2) Civic engagement has life course determinants whereby individual's early life experiences, life course

transitions and life stages directly influence civic engagement; and 3) individual's life experiences, culture, and socio-economic positioning and interactions with their environment and civil society, and may either block or facilitate specific domains of civic engagement.

I translated these assumptions into the following research questions, representing the methodological components of this thesis:

- What does civic engagement mean in the context of a widening participation university?
- How is this sample civically engaged?
- How can life history influence civic engagement?
- How is civic engagement associated with wellbeing?

I attempted to answer the former identified research questions using three methods of primary data collection including:

1) Focus groups to explore the meaning of civic engagement to this diverse unrepresented sample.
2) Statistical survey data to find the prevalence of civic engagement and its relationship to early life, health and wellbeing:
3) In-depth life history calendar interviews to explore the impact of life history on civic engagement and reported wellbeing across the life course.

The findings from these three elements are discussed in across the results chapters of this thesis, and in chapter 7.

A health behavior refers to actions carried out that may influence health and prevent disease (Bowling 2009). It may also refer to an action which promotes or sustains health, including elements of self-care. Potential pathways and barriers to civic engagement are an integral element of understanding the concept comprehensively. Akin to all health behaviors, for example healthy eating or taking physical exercise, it is considered within

this thesis that civic engagement has the same predictors as other health behaviors, which may reflect existing structural inequalities as chosen behaviors do. Therefore, the social determinants of health, such as economic stability or access to food and education, are a vital consideration within this piece of research, and this is reflected in the literature review and throughout the components of the methodology. It is argued that the two are not unrelated and that greater civic participation is likely to go hand in hand with increased wellbeing, and thus stronger health both physically and mentally (Barret and Zani, 2011).

1.3 Context of Study

Geographical context

All participants who took part in the empirical work undertaken for this thesis are University of East London students who study, and may also live in Newham, a vibrant London borough which has undergone and continues to experience regeneration, especially due to hosting the Olympic Games in 2012. East London has been described as a laboratory for community health research, and this particular area of London was chosen for testing new policy ideas specifically aimed at reducing health inequalities due to the poor health experienced by local communities, highlighting the synergies with the focus of this study and the paradigm in which it is situated (Cattell 2001). This is due to its socio-economic disparities, social exclusion, and the close proximities of polarised residents living in extreme poverty or in extreme wealth (Imrie et al, 2009). Multi-level studies conducted in East London previously have suggested that the social stressors and the inequalities faced by residents may be a direct indicator for mental illnesses (Kirkbride et al, 2012). Further, qualitative research carried out in two housing estates in East London has shown that local communities benefit from participation in organisations and regeneration work opportunities, as these can act as pathways for residents in terms of building relationships, and, in turn, resulting in improved social inclusion (Cattell 2001). Enjoyment of life and hope have also been found to be beneficial for health and wellbeing for those living in this area. Ethnic minority groups living in East London who have strong harmonious family relationships report being in better health than those living in the same

area but with less support networks (Fagg et al, 2006) thus highlighting the potential benefits of civic engagement behaviours within this unexplored context.

Educational context

According to the University of East London (where this data is collected) 201-16 census report conducted at the time of data collection, the student profile was dominantly female, with a large proportion of mature students from low socio-economic class and diverse educational backgrounds. Individuals from disadvantaged areas have limited opportunities and poorer educational attainment (Vignoles and Murray 2016). Higher levels of are associated with civic values, while parental values, participation and civic beliefs can be influential in children's uptake of engagement, although the mechanisms of which are not fully understood and there are calls for further research (White and Misty 2015). A relevant study showed that 90% of undocumented Mexican students reported to have been civically engaged, and it was noted that those showing higher educational and academic attainment than others were more likely to be civically engaged, highlighting the importance of knowledge and education in relation to civic engagement. Females also showed higher rates of civic engagement (Perez et al, 2010). Following this, in addition to this research study being carried out in a known hotbed for public health research, all primary data has been collected from students enrolled at a culturally diverse 'widening participation' university based in the London borough of Newham. Although when initially introduced, the concept of widening participation in higher education was concerned with opening opportunities to the particularly high-achieving and intelligent poor, or to women, this wider reach and inclusivity has progressed to including a multitude of students from disadvantaged, diverse educational backgrounds, ages and nationalities (Vignoles and Murray 2016). Therefore, the population of students included within this study is not typical of those conducted in what may be considered as traditional higher education institutions.

Politically engaged young people are more likely to come from higher-income backgrounds in which politics are discussed and are likely to be involved in social media

usage online (Wicks et al, 2013). Education can produce lifelong benefits, including the ability to thrive, the ability for creativity, and critical reasoning. Participating in creative activities and gaining knowledge in the humanities can be a route for developing consciousness about the world we live in but also its governance, potentially increasing bonds in today's global community. (The heart of the Matter, 2013). Such engagement in arts, humanities and critical consciousness is an example of civic engagement behaviours, and equally of the outputs of that civic engagement practices can lead to and produce at the individual level.

Universities are being urged to deal with mainstream and topical issues in order to continue to serve a social purpose practically and directly. There is a call for all universities to encourage civic participation and doing so is understood to be a role of higher education institutions. Following this, it has been found that local communities and the geographic locations of university campuses are actually critical factors in encouraging or creating obstacles for civic engagement. Deprivation and conditions which may impact on resident's quality of life are known to be factors associated with civic engagement (Mehay et al, 2021). Universities that encourage social responsibility and citizenship equally with student learning and educational attainment are likely to show higher levels of civic engagement behaviours (Ostrander, 2004). However, there is a lack of civic engagement related studies available in the context of the United Kingdom, and it has been stated that there is a systemic challenge preventing the development of civically engaged universities in the UK, relating to the communal decline in the idea of public service (Annette, 2010) discussed further in the review of the literature, chapter two.

1.4 Research Paradigm

This thesis falls between a transformative paradigm (Mertens 2010) and an interpretative paradigm although the quantitative element falls more within the transformative paradigm. It seeks to enhance civic engagement and social equality, ontologically assuming that while there are many realities which may be considered to be real, the truths must be

explored in the perspectives of the participants equally during analysis, with personal and epistemological reflexivity and thus without structural prioritization of opinions and researcher's biases. The aim of this research was not to argue that there is one correct answer, but to explore and attempt to understand the relationship between life history, civic engagement and wellbeing taking the participant's perspectives and responses as truths. A transformative paradigm invites both qualitative and quantitative methods, and ontological assumptions within this paradigm accept that participants may evidence multiple realities that may be shaped by their societal, political, and economic values (Kawulich 2012). Within this transformative paradigm, epistemology lies between relativist and realist standings, and the data collected is seen as a way of transforming and empowering participants through its collaborative, participatory nature.

Further, within this paradigm, participants were involved in defining and identifying problems through the methods employed by the researcher. The possible hierarchy between researcher and interviewee is reduced during the collaborative life history methods employed within this study. Through the discussions and qualitative interviews, participants reported to feel a sense of empowerment and relief after discussing their stories, and two participants described partaking in the interviews as a counselling session and feeling like aa weight was lifted afterwards. However, the place of values within research within this study does not follow that of a transformative paradigm, but more of an interpretative or constructivist. This is because this study does not condemn any groups values or ideologies as being right or wrong, instead it seeks to understand them and accepts that they are integral to daily life and should be expected to differ across societal groups dependent on geography, culture, religion, gender and race. This study sought to objectively accept all values and ideologies as a reality and as equal to one another. Further, the cross fertilization of disciplinary fields that may hold certain limitations when considered individually, including public health, sociology, and psychology, aids this study with the attempt at an integrated and unique perspective of civic engagement and health and wellbeing. A holistic approach such as this holds the potential to lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between civic engagement, life history experiences, and wellbeing.

The knowledge gained through the literature review and the self-reported cross-sectional cohort are used within this thesis to better explore the research questions and to interpret empirical findings.

1.5 Theoretical underpinnings

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the term civic engagement one must think about conceptual debates surrounding the phenomena. Taking a philosophical viewpoint, for instance, we can understand collaborative civic engagement as a habitual, natural behavior for human beings, and one which is needed within our modern human civilization. Social or Neo-Darwinism and the concept of 'survival of the fittest' or better comprehended as 'natural selection' is preoccupied with the ability of surviving and adapting to life in one's immediate environment, which is a fluid and subjective entity as humanity grows and adapts with technology, but one which includes collective collaboration and social engagement, dominantly so in the case of human beings (Bequemont, 2011). In fact, the sought collaboration of human beings in order to make choices for the common good actually relies on substantial levels of civic engagement. This realization is not new. The vitality of civic engagement was acknowledged as far back as 399 BC in ancient philosophy. Socrates 'emphasized the importance of critical thinking through dialogue with others' (Nussbaum, 2011, p125) which is a form of collaboration and knowledge and is a sound form of civic engagement in its own right (Barrett and Zani, 2011). Aristotle builds on such thinking, as he highlighted the importance of education to allow younger generations to actively input to political planning (Nussbaum, 2011).

Aristotle's argument that any success within a society cannot be rewarding for its citizens without them first having an educated input is very important to mention here; as civic engagement is indeed a pathway to acknowledging and actively pursuing political outcomes, whether they be good or bad. Regardless of the integrity of any societal outcome, direct pleasure and satisfaction of such an event can only be experienced by those who were informed enough to understand the outcome in the first place, for one to actually be a part of it on any level. Highlighting this concept, it has been concluded that

when attempting to establish collective agency within a group or society, an individual must have played a part in order to properly find the outcomes achieved beneficial or desirable (Barrett and Zani, 2010). This places civic engagement at the center of a human's basic needs, perhaps progressively so throughout modernity and continuously functioning democratic societies. The linkage between the ability for one to make informed choices and their capacity of understanding and enjoying the outcomes of such choices also provides sound standing for civic engagement to be re-conceptualized as a health behavior. Tying the thoughts of Socrates and Aristotle together is the notion of critical thinking through dialogue, and the fact that humans may derive happiness and pleasure through familiar routes communally believed to be beneficial. Thus, without education, critical thinking through interacting with others, and thus civic engagement, citizens may indeed be stripped of their intrinsic pathways to achieving any real pleasure or satisfaction in life. Aristotle was aware of the vulnerability of humans, but believed it was the job of the political elite to ensure that all of their citizens were able to make informed choices and to think critically, thus allowing them to flourish in life. On these grounds, the political elite are responsible for creating a functioning civil society organism. At times referring to man as a 'political animal', Aristotle saw it as each government's responsibility to provide spaces in which such interactions and civic friendships would be initiated and could thrive (Nussbaum, 2011). Aristotle considered these spaces to be as important for humans as nutrition and clean water are, thus affirming again the public health significance of civic engagement and its contribution to healthy societies. Intertwined, and perhaps influenced by the thinking of Socrates and Aristotle, are the writings of Amartya Sen, specifically in the 'capability approach'. Akin to Aristotle, Sen believes that for humans, true happiness lies in our ability to be able to live the life in which we see value. One's ideologies or values are themselves built on their prior education and interactions with others around them. The ability to live a life in which one sees value to quite an extent dependent on their societal connections and ongoing relationships with other community members (Sen, 1992). Thus, resonating with Aristotle's writings, Sen signifies again that civic engagement is indeed a vital element for not only population level wellbeing, but also for individual wellbeing.

Life history and capability approaches are considered within this study. Adopting a life

history approach in the quest to understand the pathways to civic engagement and the complexity of its relationship with health and wellbeing is vital, both at micro and macro levels. Capability theory, born from economics, states that 'human development is a process of enlarging people's choices' (Gasper, 1997, p286). The concept of citizenship and the necessity to fulfil a role within society lies at the foundations of the capability approach developed by economist Amartya Sen (Sen, 1995). In order for citizens to achieve collective goals and have needs catered for by those who govern, they must first have freedom of speech and exist within a democratic society. (Sen, 1999). A democratic society, however, also relies on the adoption of civic engagement opportunities by its citizens. Therefore, a two-way dialogue must co-exist in unison. Following this, within the capability approach, Sen mentions priority goals. (Gasper, 1997). The ability to function as a citizen and to flourish in society is included here, as Sen states that this pathway can lead to better health and wellbeing and quality of life, although it is acknowledged that this desire for political freedoms may be both a priority and a product of western societies. Within the capability approach, the significance of plurality in relation to assessing quality of life is emphasized. (Nussbaum, 2011). Sen concentrates on the situation people find themselves in socio-economically, and how this transcends into the choices and capabilities they have access to in order to live a satisfying and value-filled life as a member of the society in which they are living. While the responsibility of citizens to take issues into their own hands and to make the world a better place is emphasized in Sen's book 'Development as Freedom' (Sen 1999) it is also acknowledged that the notion of 'self-help' is a dangerous one and one that 'fits well into the mood of present times' (Sen p283:1999). An individual's capabilities may also be referred to as their 'substantial freedoms' (Nussbaum, p.20:2011) meaning their ability to be who they want to be or to function in a way that allows them to do something that they have decided they want to do. An individual's ability to achieve a good quality of life is dependent on their combined capability, taking their inherited capability, socio- demographic circumstance and internal capabilities (including personality and preferences) into account. The potential diversity of one's combined capabilities reflects the plurality and non- deductible nature of the capability approach. Following this is Bourdieu's concept of social capital, (Morrow et al, 1999) which he also argues has its foundations in economic capital, and although social

capital is understood to be beneficial in itself, it again relies on one's capabilities and socio- economic position. This overlapping notion is strengthened in Gramsci's work on civil society, in which it is argued that the civil society is a selfish and bourgeois entity (Maglaras, 2013) which indicates that although it is accepting to certain classes and those following socially accepted pathways in life, civil society intrinsically exists as an exclusive and class-based entity. This translates naturally to the inclusion of the life course perspective in this thesis, as Sen states that one's ability to live a satisfying life is predominantly contingent upon their inherited set of capabilities - or indeed their life course (Gasper 1997). If one sees themselves as operating outside of the civil society from a young age – for instance due to their level of schooling, their socio-economic status or their relationship with others – they have inherited a poor set of capabilities from the point of birth - which will in turn limit their self-esteem but also their choices and capabilities to live a life that they value as an adult. This notion is how the capability approach and the life course overlap, and how together they provide the ability to break down and understand civic engagement in a new and unique way, even more so with the inclusion of health and wellbeing. Taking the views of Sen, Bourdieu and Gramsci into account, it can be argued that if one has the tools and the societal networks allowing them to recognize their purpose in society they must be civically engaged to do so, and that this choice to be civically engaged and the social networks, opportunities and knowledge associated with this choice is likely to lead to better levels of health and wellbeing for them long-term on a variety of levels. The life span or life course approach 'emphasizes a plurality of developmental paths and outcomes' and is a progressively popular approach since it was set into motion during the 1970s. This approach takes the variety of influences into account, for example environmental, hereditary, and socio-economic.

1.6 Defining Civic Engagement

In order to explore the motivators, barriers or outcomes of civic engagement, we must first establish what we mean by the term 'civic engagement'. Some examples of civic engagement are as follows: supporting activities for the wellbeing of a community; collaborative problem solving; donating time or money for a good cause; active membership in a variety of social groups; volunteering and fund-raising; holding opinions

about political or civic matters and / or campaigning; or paying attention to the news in order to generate civic values, knowledge and understanding (Barrett and Zani, 2010). Civic engagement has been described as a 'multifaceted and complex phenomenon' (p.5, Sherrod et al, 2010). It is a multidisciplinary term, used dominantly by political scientists in the first instance (Flanagan et al 2010) and one that has been gaining considerable momentum in recent years, proving challenging for scholars, educators and policy makers alike to conceptualize it universally. Despite this, the term 'civic engagement' is indeed an ambiguous one. There is not yet a universally accepted definition for the term; although there have been multiple definitions offered to date. The ambiguity surrounding the concept of civic engagement, or what it means for one to be civically engaged in practice, is vast. With technological advancements such as the World Wide Web, along with the inevitable process of globalization, the meaning of civic engagement becomes more and more fluid. There is not yet a universally accepted definition for the term civic engagement, yet there has been an array of definitions provided by both scholars and institutions across the world. It has been defined as *'the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future'* (Adler, 2005:1). Across all definitions, the phenomenon of civic engagement is, arguably, about active participation that may benefit others, and this can happen on a variety of levels and contexts. Ehrlich's definition states that civic engagement is an action undertaken for the collective good, including developing skills and knowledge to make a difference within a society (Ehrlich, 2000). This includes therefore the conscious taking in and dissemination of information and implies that civic engagement is a vehicle for making a change - which is considered (by the partaker) to be for the good of society as a whole. However, some lesser activities can still be considered as a domain of civic engagement, for example signing a petition, or attending a local community project albeit quite different to single-handedly coordinating a campaign or a local fundraiser for the homeless; however, both of these actions are considered acts of civic engagement. The second of these actions requires a deeper level of civic engagement than the first. This indicates that not only are there distinguished levels of being civically engaged, but there is also a hierarchy of civic engagement. Furthermore, based on this, if actions such as attending community groups or taking part

in local book clubs are considered to be acts of civic engagement, then there is an undeniable overlap between being socially connected and being purposefully civically engaged, which again speaks to the scale and ambiguity of the term.

A definition offered by the World Bank states that civic engagement is involvement in the public sphere, including both direct and indirect interactions with civil society organizations for decision-making or the collective perusal of common goals. While this definition does include the wider sphere of the civil society, it fails to mention the development or seeking of increased knowledge and skills; both significant aspects of civic engagement in their own right that may empower one to be civically engaged in other ways. Thus, suffice to say, civic engagement includes reciprocal networks, taking part in local projects or initiatives, a sense of self and of social responsibility, an action towards social change and the perusal of common goals.

Being civically engaged is similar to being an active citizen, and whereby an action may be executed in an attempt to rectify a communal issue or inequality. While the uptake of civic engagement is considered by the partaker to be for the good of themselves and others, it is important to highlight that this may not always be the case in practice. Civic engagement is very much related to participation in the civil society and may not always be positive, which is an important distinction to make. Civic engagement is, in some cases, dependent on the class system and is therefore an indicator of one's socio-economic status. Greater quality of life goes hand in hand with civic engagement (Uslaner et al, 2005).

Many theorists, including Gramsci, saw civil society as a place where citizens would work together publicly to achieve goals for their collective well-being (Kumar, 2007) thus a space for civic engagement to take place. However, the consistent fluidity of this term, as with the term civic engagement, has been argued to render it increasingly perplexing and meaningless (Henderson and Vercseg 2010). The 'reflexivity' of civil society and its potential to allow independent questioning and critical consciousness are crucial to understanding the concept, as civil society offers the citizens a 'capacity to imagine a different future' (Henderson and Vercseg p26:2010). Elements of civic engagement, for

instance participating in community groups and networks which build trust within society are believed to be an 'essential element of social capital' (Winter, 2000, p.3). Following this, it can be argued that collective civic engagement is, quite naturally, an essential building block to achieving a functioning and transparent 'civil society' (Spurk, 2006, p.1).

The term civic engagement is also oftentimes linked to the term 'civil society', a sphere in which one may become or continue to be civically engaged. Civil society has been described as a 'public zone' (p13:2010, Henderson and Vercsag) that falls within the public domain, an open space for citizens to develop a critical consciousness and initiate social changes for the common good. Much the same as the term civic engagement, civil society has become a multi-disciplinary term used globally, but again one that is complex, ambiguous, and, to an extent, also fluid. It is thought that a connected community is a pathway to a strong civil society. Civil society is an entity located parallel to the state and to the market, and has been described as within society, or even as a 'kind of society' (p16: 2010, Henderson and Vercseg). It is perceived to exist as a space between the political elite and their citizens, and an environment in which social movements and civic engagement are able to take place. Civil society is to some extent an arena for two-way conversation – not dissimilar to the space discussed previously that Aristotle argued a government must support for the good of their people. Civil society allows citizens to 'compliment and challenge' (p4:2010 Henderson and Vercsag) the dominant political system, a desired outcome of many forms of civic engagement, and one that could be argued to be a pathway to a healthy democratic footing. However, while there has been indisputable fluidity and ambiguity surrounding the communal meaning of civic engagement, there has been little dispute across this body of literature regarding the potential health related benefits of civic engagement, which appear to be vast.

The concept of 'citizenship' is also somewhat blurred (Barret and Bruna, 2010). A citizen may encapsulate a variety of meanings, it may be one who is able to partake in political decision making, a newborn who is automatically a citizen, a spouse who has gained citizenship, or a citizen could also include a new arrival to a country who may be civically engaged too - regardless of legal status or rights to vote. Civic engagement may refer to an individual action that shapes a happier community, for example helping an elderly

neighbor with groceries, or it may be used to define institutionally organized actions, for instance voting, political campaigns, or fundraisers. Local organizations, charities or schools may also encourage civic engagement or reinforce the significance of being civically engaged within their teachings. The terms citizen and citizenship, their meanings and who they refer to are debated by researchers across the world. The differing versions of citizenship, its potential implications to one's identity, and its day-to-day requirements are somewhat confusing (Mouffe, 1991). However, it is generally agreed that citizenship includes belonging to a place, a town or a state. It is also worth mentioning the legal and official connotations of the word citizenship, in terms of status, human rights and belonging to a country (Barrett and Zani 2015). In a study carried out with native and minority groups of 15- to 28-year-olds in Europe, it was found that inclusive to both groups, three types of civic participation were experienced, including personal (for instance volunteering or donating), internet based (for example sharing knowledge with others) and radical participation, for example illegal activities (for instance graffiti in public settings). (Barrett and Zani 2015). The role that the internet plays and areas of the internet such as social networking and the ability to use these sites as a tool to share knowledge are seeming to be of increasing significance in what is to be considered as civic engagement, especially among younger age groups. This is especially true as our reliance on the World Wide Web is increasing rapidly daily tasks, the internet is used as a tool for shopping, education, keeping up to date with news, virtual gathering, political campaigns, and more.

Civic engagement has been described as political engagement and civic volunteerism (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004) and in some cases a clear distinction is made between political forms of engagement and community level participation (Barrett and Zani 2015). Civic engagement is a term used across organizations and disciplines, and it is argued that this multi-disciplinary use of the term is an origin of its ambiguity (Flanagan et al 2010). Civic engagement is known to be of significance when attempting to establish a democratic society (Flanagan, 2015). Voting has been described as the most 'common act' of civic engagement (Putnam p31:2000) and the interest in gaining political knowledge as a more active form of engagement. Being civically engaged can incorporate

differing levels and domains of activities, from voting, volunteering, or even interactive computer gaming (Lenhart et al, 2008). There has been some research into the relationship between video gaming and civic values, and as over 90% of young people play video games, if this form of civic engagement is accepted it could make a big difference to how many young people we understand to be civically engaged (Lenhart et al, 2008). Video gaming does offer exposure to social and anti-social behavior, promote new friendships in the form of gaming communities and expose the players to civic learning opportunities. As technology continues to advance there could be more activities and behavior choices which fall under the umbrella of rightful civic engagement.

Increasingly today there is research being carried out which looks at the processes of online democratic participation (Coleman and Shane, 2012). Beetham highlights the existing ambiguity surrounding the term democracy, sharing stark similarities in its conceptualization as with the term civic engagement, he attempts to understand common principles and ideologies. Beetham has referred to term democracy as the 'rule of the people' (Beetham, 1996:6). Establishing what the rule of the people entails in any society is dependent on that society's levels of civic engagement across generations and demographics, highlighting the significance of understanding civic engagement further in a quest to understand democracy further also. On the other hand, rational choice theory (Flanagan et al, 2010:27) reasons that nonparticipation may in fact have better 'pay off' than participation, thus unless there is an incentive or intrinsic interest in civic engagement, it can be assumed that citizens may choose not to be civically engaged politically if they feel their engagement may not lead to a better outcome for themselves or their community.

Civic engagement may take place between two individuals, or within a volunteer organization, or across a community, a society or a country, and this range of potential contexts is a contributing factor to the sheer complexity and subjectivity of the term. Similar to the desired effects when considering civic engagement as a pathway to establishing democracy is the concept of community 'resilience', which may happen in unison with, be sister of or an outcome of civic engagement. Again, as with the term civic

engagement, the term resilience is increasingly used across disciplines in research and in practice, despite there being no commonly accepted definition for the term. An analysis to determine a concrete definition for the term 'resilience' was carried in 2016 by the *Community and Regional Resilience Institute*, with a focus on widely accepted definitions surrounding different uses of the term throughout, including when referring to 'community resilience'. Many of the definitions offered when discussing community resilience encapsulate the capability or ability of a community to spring back and work together after disaster or within times of stress – a process which could be considered to be civic engagement in practice.

The term civic engagement therefore has the potential to encapsulate a broad variety of behaviors and choices, but ultimately, civic engagement will be defined as a combination of the above given definitions. Thus, civic engagement is active participation in civil society, on some level in an action for the common good of a communal group or for society.

1.7 Defining Wellbeing

Research into 'wellbeing' is gaining momentum, however, (and similarly to the term civic engagement) a universally accepted definition or understanding for the term does not yet exist, (Dodge et al, 2012) and this leads to issues with understanding and capturing wellbeing (Simons and Baldwin, 2021). This study will be examining the wellbeing related outcomes of civic engagement by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data on civic engagement and on wellbeing, and thus it is important to also explore what we mean by wellbeing, and what it may encapsulate.

Wellbeing is a multi-dimensional, abstract and subjective notion that cannot be articulated by one feeling alone, although it is likely to reflect feeling of happiness (Kern et al, 2014) and is moderately correlated with life satisfaction. Wellbeing may vary from person to person, be culturally dependent, and be influenced by feeling involved and that one is inputting to their society (Simons and Baldwin, 2021). Wellbeing also encapsulates positive emotions, for example hope and gratitude (Kern et al, 2014) and may be linked

to physical activity, success, or having good relationships and social networks (Howell et al, 2007). In fact, despite its growing use across academia and practice, wellbeing has been described as *"intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure'* (Thomas 2009, p.11). The term 'wellbeing' has multiple uses across multiple arenas and public discourses globally (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008) and is a growing field of research in the fields of public health, psychology, sociology and more. In an attempt to better conceptualize wellbeing, five core elements that make up wellbeing have been articulated and used to measure subjective wellbeing among students, as follows; positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Kern et al, 2014).

The term wellbeing is described as one being healthy and happy – inclusive of physical and mental health (Beaumont 2011) and this is reflected in the dictionary (Cambridge University Press 2019). The World Health Organisation has highlighted the promotion of wellbeing needs to be better prioritized in public health policy and has defined wellbeing as a vital element of health (WHO, 2009). Therefore, we cannot distinguish wellbeing from health as a separate entity, as the two concepts are heavily intertwined. However, unlike physical health, one's wellbeing may be subjective to their life experiences, there are no physical or economical markers for wellbeing, which has been described by scholars in the field as a *social construct* (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008). Wellbeing has been linked to having a sense of belonging and safety in one's local community, levels of physical activity, and levels of stress (Young, Russel and Powers, 2004). One's wellbeing may also be influenced by self-esteem (Diener et al, 1991) by socioeconomics, skills, education, or external factors such as the economy or the natural environment (Beaumont, 2011). Further, highlighting the significance of the population within this study, it has been evidenced that promoting better wellbeing in the educational environment may serve as a pathway for improved life satisfaction, sense of citizenship, as well as heightening social cohesion (Kern et al, 2014). The Well-Being Institute at the University of Cambridge have explained the term as the following: "positive and sustainable characteristics which enable individuals and organizations to thrive and flourish" (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008, p.4). It has been argued that the concept of wellbeing, and pathway to good wellbeing needs better understanding, as after 30 years of research into wellbeing, it was found that wellbeing is predicted more by personal, individual

characteristics, adaptations, and coping strategies than by external entities or experiences (Deiner et al, 1991). In a process whereby deprived communities were encouraged to become civically engaged, to decide on shared goals and work towards said goals together, resulted in more resilient, more comfortable, and healthier communities with improved wellbeing. More recent and similar initiatives that sought to encourage communities to work together towards a common goal have shown similar positive impacts (WHO, 2016).

The term wellbeing has gained momentum in recent years, especially so in the field of psychology. Its meaning has progressed over time, moving away from meaning not only to be well rather than in ill health. The concept of wellbeing is subjective, and this is reflected across the literature, but for the purpose of this thesis, wellbeing gives value and significance to many things such as mental health, feeling valued, work–life balance, the notion of inner harmony, positive relationships with loved ones, happiness, kindness, fun and safety. (Jarden et al, 2023). The term wellbeing is concerned with optimizing health rather than just preventing ill health or disease (Scaria et al, 2020). We cannot distinguish wellbeing from health as a separate entity, as the two concepts are heavily intertwined.

2 Chapter two: Literature Review

Civic engagement may encapsulate a diversity of actions, for instance supporting a local church or homeless shelter, helping to organize the school play, fundraising for a charity, campaigning, voting, mentoring, showing an interest in global affairs, and more. Broadly, civic engagement may be categorised into volunteering, political engagement, social networks, group membership, and acquiring knowledge and information (Barret and Zani, 2014; Netuveli, Randall and Farr, 2016). The meaning of civic engagement is explored further throughout this body of work, and within a section titled 'Defining civic engagement' which can be found in Chapter One of this thesis.

This literature review focuses on literature gathered in the university context where possible and includes three sections: 1) civic engagement and early life, 2) civic engagement and wellbeing, and 3) a socio-economic perspective.

There is a vast, multi-disciplinary body of literature, much of it added within the last decade, surrounding civic engagement in the broadest of contexts (Flanagan 2010; Billings and Terkla 2011, Turrentine 2012, Viggiani et al 2013). There is also a growing

academic cluster of nuanced, empirical research in relation to civic engagement and health and wellbeing across an array of populations and contexts. A substantial amount of the research carried out surrounding civic engagement (Flanagan 2010) is focused on civic engagement practices that are based within in the educational environment, and so incorporate the civic engagement experiences of students (Billings and Terkla 2011; Turrentine 2012, Brammer and Morton 2014). Voting has been described as the most 'common act' of civic engagement (Putnam p31:2000) and the interest in gaining political knowledge is considered by some to be a more active form of civic engagement than attending community projects or joining local groups. Being civically engaged can incorporate differing levels and domains of activities, from voting, volunteering, or even interactive computer gaming (Lenhart et al, 2008). There has been some research into the relationship between video gaming and civic values, and as over 90% of young people play video games, if this form of civic engagement is accepted it could make a big difference to how many young people we understand to be civically engaged. (Lenhart et al, 2008). Video gaming does offer exposure to social and anti-social behavior, promote new friendships in the form of gaming communities and expose the players to civic learning opportunities. As technology continues to advance and generations continue to adapt and incorporate this into daily living, there could be more activities and behavior choices emerging which fall under the umbrella of what might one-day be deemed as a virtual form of civic engagement.

The significance of encouraging civic engagement among student populations has been highlighted, (Barret and Zani 2014) however there are also a range of research studies showing the benefits of being civically engaged outside of the educational environment, and, again, much of this research has shown that civic engagement can have a diversely positive impact on one's life across a range of groups, including for example the young, the old, and the socially excluded. (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). There has, however, been very little research carried out looking at civic engagement and the life course. (Flanagan 2010). This is an important association for scholars and policy makers to understand, especially as developing a deeper understanding of what makes one civically engaged may facilitate a more civically engaged population in future years. It is

also understood that some individuals may face significantly more barriers to becoming civically engaged citizens than others do (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004), and this may be due to socioeconomics or inherited capabilities, and is something that has been acknowledged but must also be studied and understood further in order to mitigate the civic engagement disparity across groups.

Following the Sustainable Development Summit 2015, held in New York City, China's sustainable goals were decided to be achievable by mobilizing forms of civic engagement across organizations and grass roots groups in order to tackle air pollution and thus improve public health, highlighting the demand to understand civic engagement further in the interests of population level health. (Ying and Pratt, 2017).

Civic engagement and general participation in political processes has been described as one of the most poorly understood areas. (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). This lack of understanding especially refers to the dropping and non-substantial uptake of civic engagement, signifying the need for more research into civic engagement and especially into the barriers preventing new generations from taking part in decision making. This development has rippled out and led to a rapidly growing interest in civic engagement for scholars and disciplines globally, with a growing anxiousness surrounding wide-spread political disengagement especially at its core. (1994, Beetham). Growing levels of globalization and migration worldwide are argued to be causing population turnover and fractures in local communities worldwide, and is felt to have an impact on 'civic and political status quo' (Allen and Bang, 2015, p. 34). The gravity of deepening societal understandings of civic engagement is especially important in these times of austerity or a crippling world-wide pandemic, with an increasing demand on new generations to be active, caring and responsible citizens (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004) highlighting the significance of generating new research and perspectives relating to civic engagement and future populations.

2.1 Civic engagement and early life

Early life refers to the period of time where one is generally considered to be a child, before moving to adolescence from the age of 10 years (National Research Council, 2000) although it should also be acknowledged that while this is a useful guide, these prescribed ages of what constitutes as an early life experience may vary slightly from person to person depending on factors such as experience, family, education, personality, culture, and more. Measuring childhood adversities is vital for public health - adverse life experiences during early life that could have been prevented carry the ability to impact mortality and future health and wellbeing (Finkelhor et al, 2013). A wide variety of methodologies and theoretical standings can all be argued to fall under life course research (Bernardi et al, 2018). Life course theory acknowledges the significance of early life on health and wellbeing and life satisfaction in adulthood (Diendl 2013). It has been shown that experiences in early life, such as play, do influence civic engagement behaviours (Austuto and Ruck, 2010). Some factors that found to be predictors for civic engagement among university students in Greece are interpersonal trust, religion, and political ideology (Arvanitidus, 2017). However, there is a paucity of research that explores the impact of early life on the ability or desire to be civically engaged (Flangan et al, 2010). Despite this, it is logical to assume when considering child psychology that an individual's ability to connect and empathize with others is, to some extent, based on early years, (Merz and Jak, 2013) and based on that it follows that an individual's ability to engage in in civic engagement practices as an active citizen may also be threaded back to early childhood experiences. It has been argued that early life as a foundation for civic engagement may have been overlooked (Flanagan et al, 2010) which limits communal knowledge on what factors may prevent or encourage civic engagement, and for whom. In the context of observational learning, self-efficiency theory offers an approach in which the extent that an individual believes they have control or input is reliant on their cognitive learning, and so quite probably their early life. This approach, from Bandura, is proving popular in understanding the facilitators for young people to become civically engaged. (Flanagan et al, 2010). Some factors that found to be predictors for civic engagement among university students in Greece are interpersonal trust, religiosity and political ideology (Arvanitidus, 2017).

Perhaps the paucity of early life and civic engagement research is due to the practical barriers in collecting empirical research (for instance a child's limited ability to understand politics and society) although there have been various studies within this body of research that have aimed to tackle such barriers, and there is also the potential for retrospective data collection as a way of bypassing some practical barriers. The association between primary socialization and civic awareness initially came to light in the 1950s, when scholars from a range of disciplines attempted to study the origins of civic behaviors, party affiliations and political ideologies. Data was collected in the form of quantitative surveys, and research design reflected an overt attempt to correlate children's political thinking and civic identity with that of their parent's. (Hess and Torney, 1967, Greenstein, 1965). Such attempts to collect and analyise primary data met inevitable limitations, were built on assumptions and in some cases, could not include children any younger than 7 years. Following this, influential qualitative research was conducted in Australia focusing on the process and development of civic awareness during early life. This research included participants as young as 5 years old and produced interview techniques considered successful in collecting qualitative research from children of such a young age. Irrespective of this, longitudinal data was generally considered as preferable in determining the impacts of early life on future attitudes and uptake of civic engagement. Four frameworks were proposed by Hess and Torney in 1967 that attempted to understand how civic awareness and an understanding of political systems were developed in children of 7 years and above, thus seeing the depth of citizenship as an individual process rather than one mirrored throughout biological or environmental generations. In 1962, Easton and Hess stated that the most formative years when considering civic awareness and engagement were in fact between 3 and 13; and this statement has been supported since. (Greenstein, 1965). However, following this intense period of data collection between the 1950s and 70s, the collection of primary data from children under the ages of early teenage years has almost evaporated in mainstream research and there has been little progression in terms of literature and in terms of practice when considering civic engagement and the life course. Despite the communal withdrawal in conducting research investigating the linkages between early life and civic participation, (Flanagan 2010) recent scholars have become acutely aware

again of the need to understand the processes of civic engagement across the life course, and research conducted in this area is both needed and relevant. Taking a sociological approach, one might view life as a social construct, whereby the immediate influences such as family experiences, individual factors such as age, and the wider sociological factors may all interact together and influence a person's life trajectory and their tools for adapting and progressing in adult life (Richard and Stetterson, 2002).

It has been found that feelings of connectedness within the family and community environment during teenage years may be a predictor for civic engagement among young adults and throughout the life course (Duke et al, 2008). These forms of civic engagement may include the endorsement of civic trust, likelihood of voting, communit based volunteering, partaking in social action, and participating in conversations. Further, the frequency of such activities during teenage years, especially those which require collaboration with others, were shown to be predictors of specific forms of civic engagement among young adults, including political participation. The process of young adults shaping their identity and future while undergoing the transition to adulthood is a pivotal point and a thriving area for life course researchers. (Shanahan, 2000). Studies have shown that young people's knowledge of civics and how their country is governed is proportionally low globally. (Silbereisen 2007). Strengthening this notion further, modernity is improving the life course constraints on young people's agency and ability to make free choices because traditional constraints of family and paid work have been lessened in recent years. (Shanahan, 2000). Younger generations previously oppressed or expected by society to take on specific roles are increasingly free to make life decisions such as higher education, career paths, travelling or more. Taking this into account, the need for studies which provide a current understanding around increased autonomy to make lifestyle choices is a significant one for the life course field and adds to the urgent need to understand civic engagement as an important choice in itself.

In 1966 within social cognitive research study, it was found that adolescents conceptualized the government as an overall limitless authority, while a few years later and as young adults this view shifted, and it was reported that a government's authority

can and should be questioned; especially when autonomy and freedom of citizens is at stake. (Flanagan 2010). This research shows the pivotal period in civic consciousness. It is important for political understanding and civic knowledge to become a priority within the educational curriculum, alongside and as vital to development as core subjects such as science and maths, in order to achieve healthy, conscious and functioning democratic societies. (Silbereisen 2007). Further to this is the notion of civic responsibility, a crucial element beyond the gathering of civic knowledge which includes the willingness of young adults to choose to act prosocial beings and to involve themselves in civic engagement practices. (Flanagan 2010). Gallatin and Adelson explored the idea of personal responsibility and public good within young adults and found that while in some situations the good of society was recognized, the participants were also capable of identifying their own personal rights and liberties to choose in other cases, showing a consciousness of the boundaries between blind citizenship and freedom. Young adults have been reported to understand a variety of civic engagement practices as integral to one's social responsibility, yet it is unknown where these values originate from, or when. (Flanagan 2010).

As previously stated, the transitional time of schooling in a young person's life is the most prominent point for them to become civically minded individuals (Eckstein et al., 2012) but it is also acknowledged that there is a reported to be a 'steady decline' in civic values among younger age groups, which is a concern for both parents (Amna, 2012) and for adult populations overall. Moreover, the campus environment itself reflects the current thinking in the field of civic engagement, as educational institutions are under a growing amount of pressure to encourage civic engagement among their students due to the concerning low levels of civic engagement apparent today among younger age groups (Wilson et al., 2006). It has also been stated that there is an increase in civic engagement with factors such as age, length of residence in a particular area, educational attainment and financial income. (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). This implies that not only are elder populations more inclined to be civically engaged, but also that more affluent, financially stable and educated groups are likely to be civically engaged. More research

must be conducted to understand why these patterns exist and what barriers younger groups are facing in terms of civic engagement.

Currently, as stated, the longitudinal impact of early life on civic engagement is unknown, and the extent of which an individual's early life experience forms their adult self's political opinion is still remote and still debated. (Flanagan 2010). In recent years, the PYD approach (positive youth development) has been established as an asset-based way of working with young people to promote civic engagement. (Flanagan 2010). Although attempts to understand potential linkages have been made, it has in fact been stated that no concrete research has been conducted and thus no sound findings have been offered to date (Flanagan et al, 2010) which show early life to be a predictor for civic participation across the life course. In relation to developmental theory among children, Easton and Dennis concluded in 1969 that while this was a sound theory when considering the forming of an individual's personality or emotional attachments, it could not be applied in the context of civic engagement or establishing mature citizens who were able to behave correctly in a political climate due to the complexities and nature of citizenship, for example blindly following authority figures.

2.2   Civic engagement and wellbeing

Civic engagement is known to provoke health benefits: it naturally enhances one's connection to and role within society, and it has been shown that strong social networks are associated with better physical health and wellbeing (Ding et al, 2015). The various health and wellbeing impacts of civic engagement at the micro and macro level are vast and undeniable. Further, the overall health status of a community has been proclaimed to be determined by its citizen's uptake of civic participation (Ziersch et al, 2004, p. 82). Citizenship has been characterized as being inclusive of freedom and of access to health care, signifying the crucial linkage between civic engagement and health and wellbeing (Silbereisen 2007).

Throughout the multi-disciplinary body of relevant literature, civic engagement is most

times (but not always) regarded as a positive behavioral choice. It can be incredibly beneficial and has been proven to increase health and wellbeing on many levels, including, for example, increased self-esteem (Brammer and Morton, 2014) and mental wellbeing (Turrentine et al, 2012). Further, the legitimacy of a government to govern in a fair democratic society is somewhat contingent upon the level of civic engagement during the time of their election, thus it can be argued that if little of the population exercises their citizen's right to vote, those in power are not operating democratically from that point forth (Barrett and Zani, 2010). This disengagement in decision-making processes is a clear indicator of an unhealthy society and is likely to go hand in hand with poor health in other forms at population level, for instance in the form of social networks, sense of control, and lower levels of mental wellbeing. Therefore, while civic engagement has been highlighted as paramount for establishing a fair democratic society, it has also been shown to have a sound association with health and wellbeing. Strong networks and social capital are linked to better health - both mentally and physically. (Ding et al, 2015). On these grounds, it is of great importance for the operation of healthy democratic societies to develop a deeper understanding of citizen's choices to be or not to be civically engaged, and, further, what may influence these behavioral choices - and also when.

Research in health has been described as a multi-disciplinary phenomenon by nature, and as a 'space within which disciplines can meet' (Bowling p4:2009). Physical health may be measured by collecting data relating to levels of physical activity or eating habits. Emotional and psychological wellbeing is regarded as a vital predictor of an individual's overall health, and takes measurements such as anxiety, life satisfaction or self-esteem (Bowling 2009). Civic engagement may be linked to the social determinants of health but may also be an indicator of improved health and wellbeing. Civic engagement holds a diverse selection of proven health related benefits.

Building an environment that encourages individuals to experience positive learning experiences, the opportunity to be creative and 'new identities', as well as other forms of civic engagement can help individuals to look more positively at their future (Viggiani et al, 2013). Recent studies also show that teamwork and group-dynamics are paramount to creating positive behavioral change (Viggiani et al, 2013). It has been found that an

individual's autonomy to volunteer (Glavin, 2012) can increase self-worth, thus making one's life 'seem more meaningful' (Musick, Wilson 2003, p259) which is an element of improved health and wellbeing. Musick and Wilson state that considering today's wide-spread pressure for people to be proactive within the society they are living, the increase in confidence for those who do volunteer is, in some cases, inevitable (Musick, Wilson 2003). Sampson's Collective Efficiency is notable here, as it is determined by strong social networks and results in community-led control (Saegert, Winkel, 2004) it therefore allows a community to achieve shared goals and produces satisfaction and wellbeing at a collective level.

Taking the working environment into account, a study was conducted using regression to investigate self-reported health and sickness in the workplace in relation to levels of civic engagement uptake (Lancee and Hoeven, 2009). The study showed that participants who may not be as psychically healthy as others, but who participate in civic engagement, show more resilience and are less likely to take days off from work, and their civic engagement behavior is an indicator of this. The researchers conclude that the uptake of civic participation must be considered important outside of the workplace, even for those who may not be physically well.

i.   *Civic engagement and wellbeing in the context of higher education*

With regards to research concerning civic engagement and its association there have been multiple studies carried out, especially so within the educational setting. Brammer and Morton provided a useful theoretical background to the term 'civic engagement' and its fast growth in America – predominantly in relation to higher education. Their work provides the current literature base with an educated insight into the thinking behind the growing expectations for colleges and educational institutions to create 'active' citizens (Brammer et al, 2014 p. 11) and highlights the need for more research which focuses on the student's experiences of a civic engagement infusion to their educational experience. The research undertaken by Brammer and Morton adds rich qualitative data to the evidence base surrounding civic engagement and health reflecting student's understanding of their experiences; as well as the key themes identified by students as

paramount for laying the foundation for successful course based civic engagement. For instance, while primarily feeling apprehensive and insecure about building initial relationships within a community setting, students reported afterwards that such experiences actually increased their confidence and self-esteem, direct salubrious related benefits to civic engagement. Further, Brammer and Morton offer distinctive knowledge and understanding reflecting the student's perspectives, which is not based on interpretation. Rather than the authors using data and deducing areas for improvement or how this could be delivered differently in the future themselves, the students themselves were asked to reflect and respond to these questions within individual assignments, and their responses were incorporated into the research project at analysis stage, giving the article a strong standing and less room for the possibility of bias or researcher interpretation. Especially fruitful for educational institutions, the identified themes have the potential to feed into the development of future courses, particularly because they offer bottom-up knowledge capable of engaging and empowering students more effectively, and sustainably too. Interestingly, the authors of this study and its data provide the evidence base with a new way of thinking – portraying civic engagement as an 'art' - again highlighting the diversity of the term and what it may mean to different people or organizations in practice. The students within this study reported that they experienced bountiful positive outcomes both in terms of educational gains but also with a strong emphasis on wellbeing. Taking the collaborative nature of this study into account, one can deduce that the infusion of civic engagement was associated with good health and wellbeing for the students who participated.

Following this, Billings and Terkla also recognize the need for colleges and universities to institutionalize civic engagement for the future health of society and provide an array of examples of institutions already following this path in order to create 'active citizens' (Billings and Terkla, 2011, p. 84). This evaluation was carried out in collaboration with a high achieving American college and the office for Institutional research and Evaluation, suggesting it was well resourced – especially in terms of expertise, access to participants and existing knowledge. Within this article, Billings and Terkla focus on three main research questions, thus taking into account the beliefs, ideologies and the behavior of students, while also analysing responses in terms of demographics – predominantly

gender and race. More than 4000 students participated in the study, so it benefits from a large sample size, and the article provides its readers with a transparent and detailed demographic breakdown of the study participants - which may be of use to future scholars exploring civic engagement in higher education in relation to demographics. The survey instrument used within this study is a combination of several pre-validated tools – thus the responses are comparable, and the survey instrument draws on expertise from a number of institutions – making it reliable and more generalizable. Overall, the article finds that the campus culture did have a positive effect on student's 'civic values and beliefs' (Billings and Terkla, 2011, p. 92) strengthening the notion that higher education is an especially pivotal point in a young adult's life course in terms of civic engagement.

A further study which adds to the literature base in terms of civic engagement and health was conducted using the national survey for student engagement (NSSE) at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. The NSSE survey analysis, however, included a relatively small sample size of just 103 senior students who had participated in intense co-curricular activities over a four-year period, as well as a control group consisting of near identical (demographically) students who were not civically engaged during this same time period. The use of the control group is key within this evaluation, and it successfully highlights the direct positive outcomes for students who are civically engaged by proving that students participating in co-curricular activities during their education 'reported significantly greater gains than their nonparticipant peers' (Turrentine et al, 2012, p. 31). Despite the study focusing on what was initially defined as 'educational gains', the findings show that the outcomes for participants transpire educational gains alone, and in fact include a wide range of positive outcomes, consisting of increased teamwork skills, employability, understanding of self, wellbeing and more. These gains reported by the study participants again depict the association between forms of civic engagement and of self-reported health and wellbeing. These gains are later described in the article as 'personal gains in terms of employment or citizenship or individual maturity and competence' (Turrentine et al, 2012, p. 50). These gains are both significant and interesting; and are also arguably more under the umbrella of health and wellbeing than of 'educational' gains. The study successfully demonstrates the value of infusing civic engagement within the campus environment nonetheless, especially in relation to

creating conscious and civically minded young adults. This article is an important one within the sphere of civic engagement in higher education especially because it proves the value that civic engagement holds for producing healthy, conscious, and civically minded citizens, which is a key deliverable for many educational institutions today. It also proves the value of consistent participation, rather than of short-term gains. However, by its own admittance and due to the sample size and the contextual homogeneity, it is limited, and cannot state that these results and positive outcomes are generalizable and universal by any means. The vast majority of students that attend this university are based in Massachusetts, are female, and are white – therefore the findings in this evaluation must be acknowledged as they could be considered to be limited to this cohort, and the methods used suggest sample bias. The authors themselves suggest that other universities should repeat the study in order to increase understanding within this field within other populations or geographical locations. (Turrentine et al, 2012).

A further and more recent take on civic engagement within the educational setting is offered by Weerts. Weert's contribution opens doors for future scholars to grasp, as it is stated that behavioral patterns have the potential to be country specific, and that patterns should be explored trans-nationally. Weerts provides a micro level insight into individuals or groups who may be behaving similarly regarding civic engagement. The main research question explored is as follows 'in what way may students be categorized based on their civic engagement in college?' (Weerts et al, 2014, p.143) This is explored with quantitative analysis of secondary data taken from 268 American Colleges and Universities. While the use of secondary data (strengthened by the amount of data sources) leads to the argument that one cannot assume good data quality within this study, the study is still a significant one. The contextual range included is an undeniable strength of this study, because it suggests that the findings are not subjective to one educational institution alone, which is of course a flaw for many evaluations studying civic engagement among student populations. This main aim is primarily explored within a literature review, which cleverly intertwines various aspects of civic engagement over a span of years, disciplines and scholars. In conclusion, the article finds four categories of engagers; thus, for the first time allowing the types of behavior of civically engaged students to be distinguished and understood in its own right. This approach to civic

engagement in an educational setting is important because it highlights that a one size fits all approach is not suitable, and that students are likely to engage in contrasting ways dependent on self, early life experiences, demographics, personal preferences, rather than just dependent on the opportunities and environment they are exposed to. These findings are undoubtedly of interest to future researchers, policy makes, educators, psychologists and more – reflecting the breadth and significance of this article within the realm of understanding civic engagement within an educational setting and in terms of the life course.

ii.   *Political engagement*

Civic engagement also shows an association with self-reported health and wellbeing in other contexts outside of the educational environment, and this may be dependent on the specific form of civic engagement encountered. Voting, a form of civic engagement, has been described as a 'rational' choice made at the individual level, but one that is made largely for communal benefit or for the overall wellbeing of others as well as self within a society (Edlin et al, 2007). Voting has been described as the most 'common act' of civic engagement (Putnam p31:2000) as political engagement is considered by some to be a more active or tangible form of civic engagement than other categories. Intrinsic theories surrounding the act of voting often interpret this act as one which has psychological benefits at the individual level. A 'social benefit model of rational voter turnout' has been produced in recent years. The model includes incentives for voting, such as caring for others. (Edlin et al, 2007). In 2001, it was found during a multi-level study with more than 200,000 participants that socioeconomic inequalities in voter turnouts was associated with poor levels of health and wellbeing. A relation between mortality patterns and voter turnout has also been depicted in the United Kingdom (Kelleher et al, 2002) and a cross sectional study was carried out in Ireland more recently focusing on mortality, deprivation, lifestyle, social attitudes, and voting patterns. This study in Ireland used voting as a measure for social apathy or social exclusion and concluded that the relationship between socioeconomic factors and health status was not a straightforward one, and ultimately echoed the methodological complexity faced among other studies within the field that sought to better understand this correlation (Kelleher et al, 2002).

iii. Volunteering

Volunteering, another domain of civic engagement, has also been shown to share a relationship with multiple factors that fall under the umbrella of health and wellbeing. (Musick, Wilson, 2003, p. 261) not to mention the positive outcomes experienced by others directly from their engagement volunteers (Jones 2004). Volunteer England produced a systematic review report in collaboration with the Department for Health in 2015 (Casiday et al, 2015) within which researchers initially identified almost 30,000 papers to be potentially eligible, of which roughly 90 were included in the final review. The review concluded that the act of volunteering was likely to result in a range of health and wellbeing benefits for volunteers, including self-esteem, life satisfaction and healthy behaviors. The report states that the act of volunteering is likely to reduce mortality, and again found that volunteers carried the potential have a positive impact on service users and their mortality also.

In 2012 a UK based study looked at the impact of volunteering to wellbeing in later life and attempted to establish whether a causal relationship could be found between volunteering and wellbeing (Nazroo and Mathews, 2012). Nazroo and Mathews showed using regression that volunteering depicted a relationship with health and wellbeing. Among the volunteers in the study, volunteering actually reduced depression, while quality of life and life satisfaction increased during the two-year period. Community based volunteering (a form of civic engagement) has been shown to make people feel that their life is 'more meaningful' – and research has shown that this is likely to lead to an increase in mental wellbeing for the individual (Musick, Wilson 2003, p259). Francesca Borgonovi found that the act of volunteering could improve social networks and have a positive impact on predictors of happiness, depression, health status and mortality (2008, Borgonovi).

iv. Group membership and social networks

Active participation in social groups, and the resulting acquisition of increased social networks, is too considered a form of civic engagement, social epidemiologists have indicated that the linkages between social ties and human connectedness and health is a critical area for examination (Berkman and Glass, 2000). In the 2000s, we are living in

what has been described as a 'land of strangers' which has an impact on societal communal wellbeing, and further holds the potential to serve the 'survival of the fittest' in terms of the public arena (Amin 2012). Over the last decade, there has been a growing body of literature surrounding social networks and health (Smith and Cristakis, 2008). Many such studies focus on individual level social networks, and it is stated that egocentric analyses are more commonplace than sociocentric, which require the research to collect data from both the social networkers and those operating around them, presenting a far more complex research design. Overall, however, social networks have been shown to be linked to health and wellbeing. The relationship between social and community ties was studied by Berkman and Syme in the 70s (Cohen, 1979) and the results from this study have since been described as significant and generalizable. This study included data taken from 6928 participants in a longitudinal 9-year mortality follow up, and it was concluded that the less social ties reported by the participants, the greater the chance of mortality. Cohen did also state that unfortunately little progress has been made since about how exactly social ties do influence health and wellbeing, although it has been acknowledged that they do. In 2001, a qualitative study investigating social ties, social exclusion and health within deprived communities reported that participation in groups was a positive and beneficial experience for the study respondents, and it was highlighted those different social networks including cultural influences were likely to lead to different pathways to health effects (Cattell, 2001) or social isolation, which may be an area to be explored further.

v.   *Knowledge and information*

Education and the benefits of knowledge and information has a variety of wellbeing gains, especially when coupled with civic engagement (Brammer and Morton, 2014). It has been found that encouragement to be civically engaged through knowledge and information is beneficial for multiple groups, especially those facing social exclusion (Barrett and Zani 2015) and that participation which increases social capabilities and communication can act as a catalyst for behavioral change also (Leonidas, Jordanoska 2014) and, in turn, generate healthier and more active citizens who were previously ostracized and operating outside of civil society. Further, it has been found that access to the internet for various

uses for example knowledge, information, communications, education among other activities may increase psychological wellbeing among populations living in East London (Boniwell, Osin and Renton, 2015). The significance of closing the digital divide, allowing people of all ages and walks of life to interact and communicate online via forums and social media platforms to bring people together in civic life has been highlighted by life course researchers (Hireshorn and Sterreston, 2013).

2.3 A socio-economic perspective of civic engagement in the literature

"People with low socioeconomic position, defined by their job, qualifications, income, wealth, or where they live, are more likely to die young than people with a high socioeconomic position" (Lewer et al, 2020, p.33). When considering civic engagement, we need to take note of barriers some cohorts may face to being civically engaged and the salubrious outcomes it may bring. It has been argued that less civic participation is directly linked to inequality, and this is because disadvantaged or isolated groups are known to show less civic engagement than others. (Beetham, 1994). Reciprocity, equality and feelings of trust are considered to be vital factors when considering the uptake of civic engagement (Uslaner et al, 2005). If this is the case, it is counterproductive to assume that those who feel ostracized or deprived by society be civically engaged, as it is asking them to engage in an entity from which they feel not part of and abandoned. If one's capability to become civically engaged – even on a small level – is dependent on their status and connection with society, it is fair to assume that those operating outside the sphere of civil society will be less susceptible to civic engagement in any of its forms and may be experiencing exclusion. The complexity of the choice to be civically engaged and the factors that may come into play, such as competing demands, cultural concepts, constraints and context, in whether an action is deemed a priority (Hireshorn and Stetterston, 2013) and these factors may also relate to socioeconomics and demographic profiles.

Further to this, if civic engagement is considered a health behaviour, it is probable that the barriers faced due to deprivation will be similar in the context of civic engagement

also. Further to this, and highlighting the significance of my research, the uptake of and investment in civic engagement practices is considered to be most prominent when considering those in higher education (Weerts et al., 2014) and at a pivotal point in their lives. Although it has been stated that disengagement is due to unequal opportunities during the transition to adulthood, more research must be conducted in order to identify the specific risk factors associated with disengagement and the impact this may lead to in terms of health and wellbeing later on in life. The belief that engagement in the civil society is something of a bourgeois behavior is not new, but in order to establish equal, healthy and democratic societies, we must strive for research which not only takes this into account, but which that attempts to probe it further. Thus, a rigorous attempt to understand what life history factors may result in civic engagement or disengagement could lead to a deeper comprehension of the associations between life course and civic engagement, and latterly, health. The roles and trajectories that humans find themselves in due to societal norms, inherited capabilities and socio-economic status are known to be related to chosen health behaviors.

Further to this, the realization that one's connection to society has the potential to influence their health behaviors is too important to highlight, because it shows that one's conscious choice to be civically engaged is a two-way binding of their previous social ties and their current participation in the civil society – essentially these two entities are interrelated and exist together (Morrow et al, 1999) again emphasizing the significance of understanding the relationship between life history, civic engagement and health and wellbeing. Strengthening this notion further, modernity is improving the life course constraints on young people's agency and ability to make free choices because traditional constraints of family and paid work have been lessened in recent years. (Shanahan, 2000). Younger generations previously oppressed by society due to their socio-economic situation are increasingly free to make life decisions such as higher education, career paths, travelling the world, or more. Taking this into account, the need for studies which provide a current understanding around increased autonomy and geographical flexibility to make lifestyle choices is a significant one for the life course field and adds to the urgent need to understand civic engagement as an important choice in itself.

Research carried out in the United States has shown a significant decline in civic engagement in recent decades and has also highlighted the demographic differences in those who uptake civic engagement (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). There is a growing acknowledgement of the roles that diversity, culture and context play when considering civic engagement (Flanagan et al 2010). It has been shown that the financial position of an area may be reflected in levels of civic engagement (Putnam 2000) meaning that the wealthier a community is, will likely predict higher levels of civic engagement, and the more deprived a community is will likely be reflected in lower levels of civic engagement.

Following the association between income and civic engagement is the concept of information poverty within the global digital divide, and the role that technology may play in preventing or enabling citizens to be civically engaged (Norris, 2003). Further, the association between social class and a person's civic responsibilities may also be subjective to both area and to country (Flanagan 2015). Regardless, a functioning democratic society should ensure that all members of the society are presented with equal openings for involvement in civic engagement practices, regardless of income, gender, ethnicity, or level of education (Barrett and Zani 2015).

It has been stated that there is two ways of governing within a democracy, the first of which assumes that as a party has been legitimately voted into power that this gives them the authority to make decisions on behalf of their people. The second approach to governing acknowledges that a government cannot possibly have all of the opinions and answers for a diverse population of citizens, and that citizen's voices must be incorporated into policy making. Most governments alternate between these two approaches (Coleman and Shane 2012). However, some groups may be more able to participate politically than others for a variety of reasons. Group inequalities in the context of civic engagement are especially important because they lead to a distinctive bias in democratic processes, and those groups who are not civically engaged do not have a voice and are so not catered for in terms of accessing services and establishing equality, while some groups are over-represented and have a notable dominance in political

planning and decision making (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). An example of a barrier which may prevent particular groups from being able to participate in today's day and age is evident in the digital divide, as more and more there is a demand to participate online, although this is a multifaceted issue, and more research needs to be conducted in order to properly understand the elements for inclusive consultation (Coleman and Shane 2012).   The disproportionality may also exist in terms of age or of gender (Barrett and Zani 2015). This disproportion is especially significant because it is argued by scholars that cohorts of young people from specific backgrounds, ethnicities and social-economic status are in fact more prone to be disengaged. It has been stated that 'low income and minority young adults' are believed to exhibit noticeably lower rates of civic participation than their counterparts (Flanagan and Levine, 2010). It has been stated that for democracy to function, civic engagement is especially crucial for minorities who face discrimination by the majority in the environment in which they live (Barrett and Zani 2015).

If one is civically engaged, they are likely to be connected to the culture, the ideologies, expectations and the decision making within their community, and so they are likely to experience a greater sense of belonging and thus have an increased understanding of how to play a valuable role within their community. It has been found that ethic minority youth reported to feel that their acts of civic engagement would be less influential and that they were less capable of achieving a successful input (Flanagan 2015) although in some cases they may feel very interested in civic engagement if it was for their immediate environment and so a place in which they feel they belong.

One of the core claims of the capability approach is that in order to access one's quality of life we must take into account the opportunities they have had to live the lives that they value (Robeyns, 2005) however if one is ostracized or disconnected from society it is unlikely they will seek to engage in it, and therefore they are unlikely to have even an understanding of what is communally valued. Often when scholars discuss the term citizenship, they mention social exclusion and isolation alongside their discussion of the term citizenship (Clark, 2006). It has been shown that an individual's ethnic background,

culture, financial income, and level of education can be predictors of their uptake of civic engagement (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004). In order to participate in the civil society, one needs to feel to be a part of society as a whole – both physically and mentally. A study conducted in the Czech Republic collected data from minority youth about civic engagement, including types or civic engagement and the barriers that they had faced (Barret and Zani 2014) It was found that the encouragement at community level of civic organizations was likely to result in the uptake of civic engagement for this particular group, but equally as important was the role of the internet in reaching out and facilitating civic engagement. In this particular study, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from native and minority groups ranging between the ages of 15 and 28 years. It was found that initial participation in civic practices was likely to expose the minority groups to other members within the community, as well as to further opportunities to be engaged and differing opinions. This was seen as very positive on many levels, including for personal wellbeing.

'The sick role' (Parsons 1951) developed by positivist sociologists acknowledges the relationship between sociology and health, and links societal labelling with poorer health due to societal expectations of the deprived. However, there has also been a vast amount of theory and research conducted which shows the civic engagement induced positive experiences in relation to individuals who have been socially isolated, and again shows a strong association between civic engagement and health and wellbeing, but also in the need to understand barriers and pathways to civic engagement further. Further, 'Collective efficacy theory' states that neighborhood resources (for instance opportunities to volunteer) can reduce one's potential for disengagement in mainstream society by engaging them in community-based activities instead (Abrams et al, 2010). It is argued that when socially excluded individuals who have been discriminated against by society are given the tools and civic support needed this is likely to result in an uptake of civic engagement and desistance from disengagement or the rejection of societal norms (Uggen et al, 2004).

The uptake of civic engagement can provide a level of protection to discriminated groups through the establishment of a communal voice (Barrett and Zani 2015) and by achieving changes that would be unlikely to take place without such political participation. It has been recommended that research must be carried out that explores civic engagement and social capital at the individual level (Ziersch et al, 2004). Individuals have reported to have experienced new-found identities, aspirations, feelings of usefulness and self-esteem. (Kathryn, 2010).

Volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement have been proven to be a pathway that brings communities back together, (Saegert, Winkel, 2004) demonstrating the role civic engagement can play in achieving healthier. In fact, volunteering has been found to be a way of 'gaining social approval' (Musick, Wilson, 2003, p. 261). Following this, creative forms of civic engagement actually encouraged positive behavioral change for ex-prisoners, especially in cases where offenders achieved high academic education during imprisonment, and/or where they had gone on to further education post-release (Leonidas, Jordanoska, 2014) which is a sound form and anticipated pathway of civic engagement, highlighting the role that civic engagement can play in increasing wellbeing and a healthier, more equal society.

Further studies are needed to better understand the inequalities of civil participation within marginalised groups in the UK (Mehay et al, 2021) especially in the context of a London based widening participation university. Very little previous research carried out in the UK was found. As a result of this gap in the literature, the aim of this study was to explore the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing.

3 Chapter three: Methods

3.1 Study aims and research questions

The main aim of this thesis was to use the literature review alongside three empirical research components to study the relationship between early life, civic engagement, and wellbeing. The breadth of knowledge, relevant theory and familiarity with empirical research gained though conducting a review of the literature has been an integral process in understanding where the gaps in knowledge lie, thus in designing the research elements that followed, and equally in interpreting and positioning the research findings. Life course theory and an acclamation for life history perspectives is adopted throughout. Early life was studied in relation to one's ability and desire to be civically engaged, thus pathways to and barriers and facilitators of civic engagement are vital to the overall study aims in understanding who may or may not be civically engaged - and thus live healthier lives.

To achieve these research aim(s) I address the following research questions based on the assumptions that 1) civic engagement can be associated with health and wellbeing, which is more often positive but may not be always so; 2) Civic engagement has life course determinants whereby individual's early life experiences, life course transitions and life stages directly influence civically engagement; and 3) individual's life experiences, culture, and socio-economic positioning interact with their environment and may either block or facilitate specific domains of civic engagement.

I translated these assumptions into the following research questions, representing the methodological approaches of my PhD research study, answered by primary data collection:

- What does civic engagement mean in the context of a widening participation university?
- In what ways, if any, is this sample civically engaged?
- How can life history influence civic engagement?
- How is civic engagement associated with wellbeing?

3.2 Ethics

Three separate ethical approval applications were completed for the three elements of empirical data collected within this thesis. Due to the focus of this thesis being of a potentially sensitive nature, with elements of lived early life experiences and of health and wellbeing incorporated, the ethical approval process primarily sought to protect the wellbeing and welfare of the participants and the researcher. Upon completion of the survey, under ethics, all participants were given a tailored 'debrief sheet' (on the computer this was a final page which was downloadable) which thanked participants for their time taken to complete the survey, and also presented a range of both local and national support services should they feel they need support. This sheet can be found in the appendices. Due to the potentially upsetting nature of the qualitative elements, especially the life history interviews, various protocols and risk management strategies were discussed within the ethical approval process, for example signs that the interview should be paused or terminated for protection of the participant or the researcher. A tailored 'referral sheet' of support numbers was developed in the anticipation that some participants may be signposted to specialist services either during or upon completion of the interview. This referral sheet included contact information for a breadth of issues, including for example the MIND mental health charity, refugee support, financial help services, and a range of on-site university student support services. Ethical approval was re-submitted and amended during the Covid-19 pandemic to allow for virtual data collection of the life history interviews, including further logistical ethical considerations such as the importance for any data collected electronically to be stored via the defined secure and GDPR compliant university software. In order to ensure the ethical protocols

were followed, an interview debrief also took place during regular supervisory meetings where each interview was discussed, and this was inclusive of ethical considerations.

3.3 Taking a Convergent (multi-level) Mixed Method Design

The former identified research questions were explored using the wider literature as well as three methods of primary data collection including:

1. focus groups to explore the meaning of civic engagement in this university context
2. statistical survey data to find the prevalence of civic engagement and its relationship to early life and health and wellbeing
3. life history calendar interviews to identify common patterns in experiences, and to explore the impact of life history on civic engagement and wellbeing. The findings from these three elements are discussed together in chapter 7.

The integration of the three separate components of empirical data collected as part of this thesis have been visualized below, developed based on the wider body of literature.
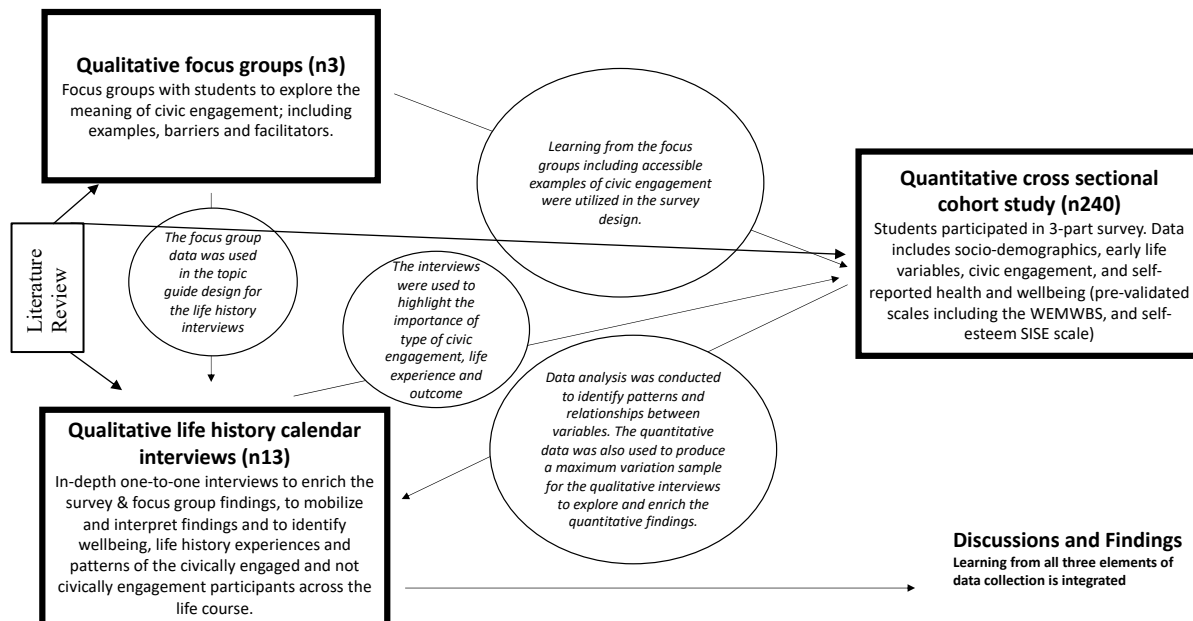
Figure 1: Mixed Methods Approach: A Visualisation

As depicted in this diagram, the literature supported the design of the survey, and this was primarily in terms of categories of civic engagement and impacts of civic engagement on wellbeing across different contexts, as well as developing an understanding early life. The literature heavily influenced the decisions regarding what scales to use in the final section of the survey which focused on health and wellbeing. The qualitative interviews and focus group design were also aided by the literature review, especially so in exploring the concept of civic engagement and the potential impacts to be explored with participants in the calendar interviews. The wider literature also provided important insights and understanding about the positioning of this research within the wider literature landscape, explored in the discussions and conclusion chapters.

Criteria for mixed methods research:
1. at least one qualitative method (QUAL) and one quantitative method (QUAN) are combined
2. each method is used rigorously
3. the data collections, and/or data analyses, and/or results are integrated.

Mixed methods approaches are used to combine the strengths of, and to compensate for, the limitations of quantitative and qualitative methods. Previously, quantitative, and quantitative standings belong to different epistemological ideologies and two competing paradigms. Empirical quantitative data may provide answers about causal relationships, statistical significance or prevalence, whereas qualitative data may provide new and in-depth understandings about how or why a project has had the desired effect or why people may not have responded in the desired way – hence the importance of both forms of research which produces a new kind of evidence. (Pluye and Hong 2014).

This thesis adopts a mixed method approach of both qualitative and quantitative to better understand a phenomenon and its linkages to life course through focus groups and qualitative interviews, and to measure its prevalence, trends, and various associations through a quantitative survey. Mixed method research may be fixed or emergent (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2006). Emergent mixed method design may arise during the research process, for example when a new element of added or a previous strand of data

is found to be inadequate.

The linkages between the initial focus groups and the survey content, and the mobilization of the quantitative data for the design and sampling of the qualitative interviews does not necessarily fit a 'sequential explanatory' or an 'sequential exploratory' mixed method design, although it is sequential, and it does fall within a convergent mixed method design. The multi-phase or multi-level mixed method design is characterised within a methodology which adopts three or more phases or building blocks. The priority of the 3 strands of data within this thesis is qualitative and is so due to timing and suitability in exploring a relatively unknown (especially contextually) area, as per the research aims of this overall study. The findings from the cross-sectional cohort study are explored and enhanced further by the in-depth individual level qualitative data sourced from the life history calendar interviews within the discussions chapter. These datasets add to the current evidence base and potentially decrease the ambiguity surrounding the concept of civic engagement, and its relationship to life history and wellbeing.

3.4 Literature Review

In the context of this thesis, conducting a rigorous review of the literature was key to exploring the key concepts (being civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing) and for establishing an understanding of the known relationships between these. Due to the scale of literature available relating to the key concepts explored within this thesis, a systematic approach to carrying out the literature searches was adopted. Steps for conducting the literature review and gathering knowledge to answer the research aims of this thesis are listed below, inclusive of the search terms that were used, and the databases used, accessed through 'OpenAthens'. Pre-accessed literature from previous research projects as well as higher education is also used in the literature review that was not gathered in the steps below but is relevant nonetheless and applicable to this thesis. The initial literature review search strings are listed below.

Eligibility criteria

Exclusion:

Any literature not available in English - due to language barrier

Inclusion:

Peer reviewed publications

Published 2000 onwards

<u>Civic engagement terms used:</u>

Civic engagement

Civic participation

Civic involvement

Civic activity

Civic processes

Civic development

<u>Domains:</u>

1. Volunteering
2. Social networks
3. Knowledge and information
4. Membership in groups
5. Political

<u>Search terms:</u>

Civic engagement and health

Volunteering and health

Social networks and health

Knowledge and information and health

Membership in groups and health

Political engagement and health

Civic engagement and wellbeing

Volunteering and wellbeing

Social networks and wellbeing

Knowledge and information and wellbeing

Membership in groups and wellbeing

Political engagement and wellbeing

Civic participation and health

Civic involvement and health

Civic activity and health

Civic processes and health

Civic development and health

Civic engagement and wellbeing

Civic participation and wellbeing

Civic involvement and wellbeing

Civic activity and wellbeing

Civic processes and wellbeing

Civic development and wellbeing

Voting and wellbeing

Voting and health

Life history and civic* engagement

Early life and civic engagement

Early life and wellbeing

Socioeconomics and civic engagement

Civic engagement and the determinants of health

Civic engagement and socio-demographics

Civic engagement and higher education

Civic engagement and university

Civic engagement and life course trajecrories

Civic engagement and students

Civic engagement on campus

<u>Data-bases used</u>

- ✓ PubMed
- ✓ Sage research methods
- ✓ Sage
- ✓ Sage journals
- ✓ Wiley online library
- ✓ Taylor and Francis online
- ✓ Oxford academic

3.5 Exploratory focus groups

3.5.1 Rationale and Limitations

Primary research was carried out within this thesis on two counts, the first being to add knowledge to the current literature base in the journey of conceptualising civic engagement. The second being to determine what civic engagement may mean to the population within this research study specifically which may differ to other groups – and thus is key to exploring the phenomenon in this context – and addressing the study aims overall. This was in an attempt to influence the development and designs of the latter elements, but also with reference to the ambiguity surrounding the term civic engagement, the focus groups were carried out with the intention exploring and better understanding the meaning of civic engagement to this specific cohort of university students. The meaning of civic engagement (including barriers and facilitators of civic

engagement) experienced by this group are vital to the overall study aims; especially so in understanding the term and experiences surrounding civic engagement further in the context of higher education.

Focus groups can offer an advantage over other forms of qualitative data collection, especially so when discussing issues or concepts which are not publicly conceptualised yet or understood finitely in mainstream society (Morgan 1996). Considering the ambiguity surrounding the concept of civic engagement, this particular technique of qualitative data collection through focus group methodology is key to answering the research questions and the research aims within this thesis for a variety of reasons. For instance, one of the desired outcomes of using a group setting for data collection was the anticipated probability that this may inspire a participatory discussion among the participants, and allow an opportunity for opinions to be both challenged and explored among peers, which may not be as fruitful through the other methods of primary data collection planned within this thesis, for instance within one to one interviews whereby participant's views will not be questioned or challenged by the interviewer. Further, by collecting data in the form of focus groups, this allows for more a more representative dataset simply because more voices have thew opportunity to partake, to be heard, and for analysis to be reflective of a communal understanding of the meaning of civic engagement, which may not be possible through collection of one-to-one interviews alone.

Focus groups are known to provide the researcher with access to data which may not have been possible through other forms of data collection. (Morgan 1996). While focus groups are understood to be largely unstructured forms of data gathering (Bowling 2009) which may be seen as a negative, it does allow the voices of the participants to lead the discussion. Considering the wide-spread confusion both in the literature and in practice when discussing civic engagement, the setting of a focus group provides a safe environment in which participant's questions are able to be discussed, explored and answered through conversation with their peers, using the collaborative group dynamics and the equality of the participants to fuel discussions further naturally. This may not be

possible during one-to-one interviews in which the participant may be limited in sharing their thoughts, questions and opinions, or find this sharing more difficult than based on the one-to-one researcher dynamics which are less present among peer groups. Focus groups can be a useful technique for exploring not only what the participants think about something, but also why and how they think the way that they do (Kitzinger, 1995). A common question in research design is whether focus groups or in-depth interviews actually produce the same or very similar data (Morgan 1996) however it was anticipated that the conversational nature of these focus groups among class-room peers could result in the gathering of reflective qualitative data that is reflective of the meaning of civic engagement to this group of non-traditional university students. Focus group guides sought to explore civic engagement, The design included broad questions such as 'what is civic engagement' and 'what does civic engagement look like' for students to discuss. Participants were also asked to give examples, including those from their own experience, within the focus groups.

3.5.2 Sampling, recruitment, data collection and analysis

Three focus groups were conducted with students to explore what civic engagement means to them, inclusive of perceived or experienced barriers and enablers. This data was used to inform the survey and influenced the latter qualitative life history interview topic guides. A series of focus groups were carried out with university students during which they were asked to discuss what civic engagement meant to them, who civic engagement was for, and also what civic engagement may look like. After ethical approval was granted, and the topic guide was tested within a focus group pilot, all were student teaching assistant volunteers, to establish whether the topic guide was fit for purpose, clear, and also for estimating time allocations for the focus groups. Prompts were added to the topic guide following the pilot focus group, and the feedback from the pilot participants was positive.

Convenience and snowballing sampling methods were used for the focus group recruitment, and recruitment was largely dependent on fellow colleagues and student peers, as it took place within the university and classroom setting. The focus groups were

conducted on university grounds in a classroom setting, and each focus group was allocated an hour although not all the focus groups lasted for the full amount of time allocated, and in fact ranged between 35 minutes and one hour. Between four and eight students took part in each of the focus groups. The participants were dominantly female, although at least 1 male voice was present in all of the focus groups. A total of three focus groups have been used within this analysis.

Focus groups were transcribed and analyised using QSR Nvivo 11 software for data management, coding, and analysis including theme development. None of the three focus group transcriptions were considered in isolation during the analysis process, although it should be noted that it was evident that the focus group dynamics varied proportionately. For instance, in one of the focus groups 5 of the 6 participants were parents, reflecting the diverse and mature student demographic of the widening participation university, while in some cases the participants were not so homogenous. The focus group recordings were transcribed using Express Scribe software and a transcriber foot pedal to aid the process, between 2016 and 2017, and uploaded to QSR Nvivo software as three anonymised transcript files, to be analysed together, equally. Thematic analysis began in early 2017 to identify themes reflecting this diverse group of student's perceptions of civic engagement, and what civic engagement means in practice to them. Once all focus group data coding had taken place, and some codes were merged or re-named, the codes were used to establish over-arching and broader themes and subthemes, (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which were examined in relation to the current body of literature surrounding the conceptualisation of civic engagement. In some cases, tools such as number of references and data coverage have been used in relation to participant quotes which are used to illustrate the themes identified. Elements of focus group dynamics, although are not key to addressing the research aims for this element of the overall study. While a significant proportion of the coding process was largely reflective of the current literature surrounding civic engagement, there were also some more unique notions which became quickly evident during the coding process, and these will also be presented within this chapter. The ideas and concepts put forward by students during these focus groups are considered alongside mainstream notions or studies throughout

this chapter in order to evaluate how this population's conceptualization of civic engagement tallies.

While a significant proportion of the coding process was largely reflective of the current literature surrounding civic engagement, there were also some more unique notions which became quickly evident during the data familiarisation and coding process and have been presented within the results chapter. Due to the study aims, the focus group findings have been reported in the first results chapter (chapter four) alongside mainstream notions of civic engagement where relevant to bring together and better position the participant's voices and understandings of civic engagement alongside the wider literature and conceptualisations of what civic engagement encapsulates and what may enable or prevent one being civically engaged. The exploratory focus groups presented within this chapter were the first data type to be gathered within this overall mixed methods study. The focus groups naturally highlighted elements of the overall study hypothesis, being that civic engagement is related to life course experiences and to wellbeing. The learning taken from the focus groups, inclusive of facilitation experience and findings, has also been applied in the design of a further element of primary data collection conducted latterly within this overall piece of research.

3.6 Cross sectional Cohort

Self-reported data focusing on early life, civic engagement, and self-reported health and wellbeing were collected in the form of a three-part survey, disseminated online via Survey Monkey. This survey added empirical data to the knowledge base regarding the aim of this thesis – and research questions related to factors of early life as indicators for uptake of civic engagement, the prevalence of civic engagement within this population, and the relationship between the uptake of civic engagement and health and wellbeing. This part of the study will add insight into diverse student population's prevalence of civic engagement, and provide findings that will be reliable, and comparable to similar studies.

3.6.1 Rationale

Statistical self-reported data focusing on early life, civic engagement, and self-reported health and wellbeing were collected in the form of a three-part survey, disseminated via an online survey platform. This survey holds the potential to add empirical data to the knowledge base regarding the aim of this thesis – and some of the identified research questions, precisely, for instance whether factors of early life can be indicators for uptake of civic engagement, the prevalence of civic engagement within this population, and whether uptake of civic engagement across the domains expressed within mainstream literature shows a statistically significant correlation with health and wellbeing scales. Initially a sample size was calculated in the hope that this element of primary data collection may add insight into diverse student population's prevalence of civic engagement, dependent on sample size.

Civic engagement is widely understood to provoke health benefits (Zaff et al, 2010). When fractioned into domains, such as political engagement or volunteering, each domain of civic engagement carries literature of its own (see chapter two) evidencing civic engagement is likely to increase confidence, academic competencies, wellbeing, self-efficacy (Musick and Wilson, 2008) and more. Civic engagement is known to be important at both micro and macro levels and can inform and improve political processes at societal level (Zaff et al, 2010). This survey seeks to evidence the above claims regarding the relationship between civic engagement and wellbeing within this context of non-traditional university students at a widening participation university.

Civic engagement presents barriers for marginalised and low-income groups (Moore et al, 2006). Ethnic minorities have been found to have lower engagement rates in other contexts (Weirtz 2016). Class position and life-course stage as well as immigration status affect these processes of formal and informal civic engagement among migrants living in London. (McIlwaine and Bermu 2011). Working class men emerged as least active, and more affluent individuals found formal engagements easier to access. Calls for focuses on gender and intersectionality in any future research in this area. Early experiences of working collaboratively with others to achieve a common goal are known to promote civic

engagement later in life, conditions can be associated with civic engagement and characteristics of difference between individuals of the same age from the life course perspective are known to influence civic engagement (Greenfield and Moorman, 2017) in other educational contexts or populations. Based on this, socio-demographics and current living arrangements were collected at the very beginning of the survey.

It is becoming increasingly urgent for universities to not only provide an environment that enhances civic engagement, but to also measure the levels and impact of civic engagement among students and staff in a demonstratable and robust way. In light of this, the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation launched a series of research studies to evaluate civic engagement in an educational setting. One of these studies was an annual student survey, which, when evaluated, showed that civic engagement initiatives had a very positive effect on students and their skills acquired during college (Meredith et all, 2011). Further to this, a four-year study at Bridgewater State University found that students who participated in out-of-class initiatives reported 'significantly greater gains' across nine areas of personal development, as well as an increased understanding of ethnic diversity. (p30, Esposito et al, 2012). Despite the above, and while interest in this field is growing, surprisingly little research has been conducted in this area - especially outside of America. In an article in the Journal of Education, Meredith and colleagues continuously highlight the need for studies that quantitatively measure civic engagement in further education. (Meredith et all, 2011).

There have been many similar calls for further research, which is why empirical component is an important one with undoubtable potential to contribute to future knowledge in the contact of civic engagement in the UK as a new instrument for measuring civic engagement. For the purpose of this study, we refer to civic engagement as "the engagement with civil society". By adopting this definition, we link the idea of civic engagement to the intellectual legacy of the enlightenment in the 18th century and the broader discourse around civil society, which will force us to think about both the negative and positive aspects of civic engagement.

With the aim of conducting a varied and explorative study, a wide variety of established relevant theories and perspectives noted in the literature were included, the survey included almost 200 variables in total. Based on the literature and the focus group component, the three-part survey gathered information on various socio-demographics and socioeconomics, and based on the focus group findings, included questions about parenting and carer commitments. The first section of the survey was developed using the review of the literature as a basis and collected data based on early life, using LIKERT scales to measure family relationships, family disruption, community networks, school experiences.

A measurement of civic engagement across five specified domains (FDQ-CE) was collected. The FDQ-CE is a survey tool to measure civic engagement, which was developed and validated by researchers at The University of East London. The survey included 5 domains of civic engagement and included measures of frequency, density and quality for each civic engagement domain included. In this context, a measurement of civic engagement is essential but there are very few instruments available to measure civic engagement and most of them are inventories of attitudes, behaviours, and practices and often too long. Based on a review of literature of measurement of civic engagement, five overarching domains of were identified, each domain consisting of three dimensions; frequency, density and quality. These represent individual questions within the domains, collecting responses on civic engagement activities such as volunteering or campaigning, to be answered using a visual analogue scale. The civic engagement section of the survey (FDQ-CE) was validated and piloted in 2015 by myself and my supervisor, following initial discussions and feedback from a group of student volunteers. Civic engagement may take place at different levels, and a useful approach to help us determine whether an action or practice can be called civic engagement is Laurent Thevenot's regimes of engagement. Thevenot's three regimes of engagement are familiarity, regular planned action, and justification. The last one of these regimes engages with the collective conventions of the common good and nearer to our understanding of what civic engagement might look like. Based on a review of literature of measurement of civic

engagement, we arrived at five domains of 'collective conventions of common good', each domain consisting of three dimensions: frequency, density and quality. The five domains are as follows:

1. Volunteering
2. Social Connections
3. Group Membership
4. Involvement with Politics
5. Information

Lastly, the third and final section focused on self-reported health and wellbeing. Validated scales including self-reported mental wellbeing (WEMWBS), physical health, sense of coherence, hope, social networks, self-esteem (SISE) and personal development.

Pilot and Validation of the FDC-CE

Prior to administering the survey, university students and student volunteers inputted to the development of the survey during a pilot session in order to ensure it was accessible and clear for participants to understand and complete autonomously.

Ethical approval to pilot the FDQ-CE was granted by UREC in October 2015 and the survey was administered to students in November 2015. Recruitment took place on campus through in-class recruitment drives. In order to complete the validation, the survey was re-administered for a second time to the same students shortly afterwards, therefore students were asked to complete the survey on two separate occasions. A small focus group of student volunteers helped in the design of the questionnaire form, and feedback was taken during validation also. All surveys were completed in paper form. To assess the questionnaire psychometrically, a small cohort of 100 new students were recruited. Since this measure used self-reports, reliability also needed to be assessed, which is why the questionnaire was re-administered to the same participants after a short

period. The findings of the validation were reported in 2016 (Netuveli, Randall and Farr, 2016).

Lastly, the third and final section focused on self-reported health and wellbeing. Validated scales including self-reported mental wellbeing (WEMWBS), physical health, sense of coherence, hope, social networks, self-esteem (SISE) and personal development.

3.6.3 Survey Sample and Recruitment

A minimum sample size for the civic engagement section of the survey was calculated using the data from the FDQ-CE validation study (Netuvei, Randall and Farr 2016) as an initial guide and the number of first year students enrolled as the population, and this was calculated to be 500. The survey, including two further sections focused on early life and health and wellbeing was designed and finalised in paper format. The survey was then uploaded to an online platform and went live in 2016 as planned. Data collection faced many difficulties, shortening the survey was discussed, and collection continued beyond initial planning. Recruitment and data collection eventually ceased in March 2018 following issues with limitations and with recruitment.

Despite adopting a range of recruitment strategies (including recruitment drives at university fairs and after lectures, and through lecturers) and extending data collection deadlines, just under 50% of the intended sample size was met and it was decided to cease data collection after the response rate was calculated to be just 50%. The survey has 3 sections including early life experiences, uptake of civic engagement across 5 domains, and self-reported health and wellbeing.

3.6.4 Data analysis

All survey data was exported from the online platform (survey monkey) in SPSS format, and all variables were renamed and shortened for ease of data management and analysis before the dataset was converted into STATA format then imported to STATA 14.

While the desired sample size was calculated to be 500, 240 observations and 194 variables are present in the dataset. Data cleaning was a lengthy task due to the quality of the downloaded datasheet from the online server. All empty variables were removed in STATA, and all variables de-stringed in preparation for analysis. Date of birth variables were converted to age for ease for analysis, and each participant's responses to the civic engagement section were converted to a civic engagement score across all 5 civic engagement domains.

Analysis was used to explore the extent of civic engagement in student sample, and to identify factors that were associated with and potentially predictive of CE using the early life responses in section

Tests were run on STATA to show correlations between civic engagement dimensions and validated scales (i.e., likert scale) in section 3, the health and wellbeing section. Simple linear tests were run for relationships between two continuous variables, correlation tests of variables from sections 1 and 2 and sections 2 and 3 of the survey were conducted. Initially, Chi-square tests, t-tests and descriptive statistics were carried out.

Survey respondents are diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, early life experiences, socio-economic status, and respondents were enrolled on fourteen different university courses. However, the sample size was smaller than planned and is less than 50% of initially calculated sample size, which impacted ability to run a full analysis. Results cannot be made generalizable due to the sample size not being met.

All data was downloaded into a codebook and uploaded to STATA Statistical software. After data had been cleaned and de-stringed it was initially used to calculate averages

across the civic engagement domains, for the overall civic engagement scores (across averages of the 5 domains of civic engagement, and the frequency, density and quality reported for each of these). Segments in the population which have diverse FDQ scores (like gender, ethnicity, age) were identified, and have been reported in chapter six.

A data analysis plan and an analysis log were designed for the descriptive statistics and regression analysis of the survey data and data analysis was carried out accordingly, as follows:

Initial plan:

Profiles and dummy tables / comparisons to other groups
1. Socio-demographic profile of this group
2. Civic engagement profile of this group
3. Health and wellbeing profile of this group

Relationships via bivariate analysis using section 2 averages *(poisson regression)*
1. Age and civic engagement
2. Parenting and civic engagement (focus group grounding)
3. Trust and civic engagement (literature grounding)
4. Early relationships and civic engagement
5. Socio-demographics and civic engagement (literature grounding – CE more prevalent in affluent groups and geographical locations?)
6. Social networks and civic engagement
7. Self-esteem and civic engagement (focus group grounding)
8. Happiness and civic engagement
9. General health and civic engagement

Trends / Patterns
1. Identify any section 1 or 3 patterns among those who are civically engaged across the domains
2. Identify any section 1 or 3 patterns among those who are not civically engaged across the domains
3. Identify if types of civic engagement may be related to early life relationships

4. Identify whether early life may be related to section 3 variables such as self-esteem, efficacy and wellbeing variables

The data collected has shown whether students are civically engaged, and how they are civically engaged, as well as producing a socio-demographic and wellbeing profile. This dataset signified who participates in civic engagement and how, whether some groups show higher uptake of particular domains than others. At analysis stage, it was possible to explore whether there is a positive correlation between civic engagement and health and wellbeing in this context, what life history factors may be considered significant for future studies, but further who is civically engaged, and how, and who isn't. Further, the use of the FDQ-CE to establish a measure of civic engagement allows for further piloting and validation for its use within a UK context. Further, socio-demographic and socio-economic information was collected, which was highlighted as potentially significant in the literature review – especially when considering barriers to civic engagement.

(Stratified) Purposeful Sampling Strategy for the qualitative interviews

This form of sampling for the qualitative interviews effectively means selecting 'information-rich' cases for in-depth study (Patton 2015) whereby the population was divided into different groups from which participants were sampled at random. In this case, the survey sample has been divided into groups based on their civic engagement score(s) along with other factors, based on partly the literature ans partly the findings so far in this overall study. Interviewees were allocated groups dependant on these factors, selected at random based on self-reported level of civic engagement and with reference to specific diversity measures such as age range, gender, ethnic group and 'early-life' experience in order to ensure a representative sample, WEMWBs score, and family disruption - as this was identified as a significant variable during the regression analysis. Ensuring a range of participants using the diversity measures above was important as it reflects the diverse profile of students at the university. In total, 17 groups were identified based on the above made up of high civic engagement, medium and low, early life, and WEMWBs, although some of these groups only included 1 or 2 participants while others included 40+. Circa 15 in-depth life history interviews were to be conducted, as is a guide

phenomenologically for this approach to qualitative interviews and sampling (Gentles et al 2015; p1783:).

Justification:

A purposive sampling strategy is more suitable rather than identifying a maximum variation sample. Identifying a random sample of participants is better suited to quantitative techniques than for the understanding a specific or rare phenomenon through conducting qualitative interviews. (Marshall 1996). Understanding the relationship between early life variables, civic engagement and health is the aim of these interviews, which is why a sample must be identified directly based on pre-determined criteria, in this case being their survey responses. While a random sample may aid generalizable results while dealing with quantitative data, it is less likely to capture the most suited participants and lead to a deeper understanding when considering in-depth interviews. Whereas identifying participants who fit well within or even go against the trend will help to explore how early life, civic engagement and health are related in the experiences of this sample. An 'ongoing' or 'two-tier' (Gentles et al, 2015) sampling approach has been adopted rather than a-priori. This ongoing sampling strategy allowed new findings to be explored because it was influenced by the analysis of survey data. The decision to include a specific early life variable relating to family disruption in the sampling matrix is based on statistical learning from this same population of students that the interview sample will be obtained.

Positive family experience and family stability during early life is likely to result in having a higher civic engagement score for this sample. Early life variables result in around a 2% variation for civic engagement during higher education, in this case.

Family stability is also associated within this sample with a reporting a high Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Score (WEMWBS).

Ordinary least square regression has shown that civic engagement can be a predictor for higher self-esteem and higher mental wellbeing, especially when civic engagement is in the form of social networks.

This has been visualised in the below diagram:
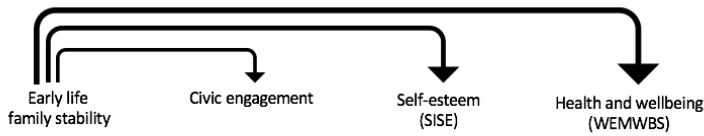
Steps for identifying sample

An early life variable that showed significance during bi-variable analysis is to be included in the sampling as a diversity measure alongside age, gender, ethnic group and county of birth, to avoid duplication and to ensure that interviewees are representative of the population and student's voices are heard from a range of cultural and early life backgrounds in order to really examine the interview aims. Including the steps for the identification of all available participants in the categories, those who fit and those who play against the trend (i.e., two participants from the highest age group, one with a high civic engagement score as predicted, and one from the same age-group but with a very low civic engagement score).

Stratified Sample Groups

	Category
1)	*10001 Low Civic engagement, no family disruption, Low WE and low SE
2)	10002 Low Civic engagement, no family disruption, Low WE and high SE
3)	10011 Low Civic engagement, no family disruption, high WE and low SE
4)	10012 Low Civic engagement, no family disruption, Low WE and high SE
5)	10101 Low Civic engagement, high family disruption, Low WE and low SE
6)	10102 Low Civic engagement, high family disruption, Low WE and high SE
7)	*10111 Low Civic engagement, high family disruption, high WE and low SE
8)	*10112 Low Civic engagement, high family disruption, high WE and high SE
9)	11001 high Civic engagement, no family disruption, Low WE and low SE
10)	11002 high Civic engagement, no family disruption, Low WE and high SE
11)	11011

		High Civic engagement, no family disruption, high WE and low SE
12)	*11012*	
	High Civic engagement, no family disruption, high WE and high SE	
13)	*11101*	
	High Civic engagement, high family disruption, Low WE and low SE	
14)	*11111*	
	High Civic engagement, high family disruption, high WE and low SE	
15)	*11112*	
	High Civic engagement, high family disruption, high WE and high SE	

The sample identified was diverse and representative in terms of gender, country of birth, and ethnicity, as well as a representative spread using the findings and scores from the cross-sectional cohort study.

3.7 Qualitative life history interviews

3.7.1   Rationale

Adopting an in-depth qualitative approach alongside the survey carries the potential for establishing a deeper understanding of the potential linkages between civic engagement and health, and to explore how civic engagement pathways may happen and interrelate with life history experiences, which is not possible using the quantitative survey data alone. The knowledge gathered provides a unique standing about the civic engagement in the context of a diverse student sample, how it is perceived by students, early life indicators and potential pathways, what it might look like in practice, and rich examples of individual level health and wellbeing outcomes. Thematic analysis has been carried out to identify patterns in the student's experiences of how civic engagement might influence wellbeing, and also of experiences of enablers and barriers of civic engagement across the life course.

3.7.2 Origins of life history calendar method

Collecting qualitative life histories in this way originated in a quantitative life grid method for statistical data that was adapted into a qualitative interview method, it has the capacity to produce very rich in-depth data but is sometimes criticized due to the potential for recall bias, and the natural likelihood of one's memories to distort over time. (Parry et al, 1999).

The life grid method was initially used in 1998 (Gallie, 1988). Since then, it has been refined and was piloted in 1996 by Imperial College London with a focus on chronic obstructive airway disease, and due to the results being consistent with existing knowledge of the disease, it was stated to be a 'sound method' of collecting life history data which needed 'further development'. (Blane, 755:1996).

This method aims to reduce recall bias as much as possible, thus making data gathered more reliable, in this case for the participant's ability to better remember their life histories. The life grid method involves carrying out one-to-one interviews while cross-references dates on a physical grid for accuracy. The grid includes life trajectories in the form of yearly measures, including residence, occupation, family, and external dates (key national dates, for example the general election, the end of a war, the death of a public figure). It allows for revisions to be made throughout the interview, as often 'external dates' and personal milestones can prompt memories or aid the accuracy of a memory in terms of the exact date. Berney and Blane are pioneers of the life-history and are able to include a background to the method, along with examples of the life grid, quickly increasing the reader's understanding of this method of data collection. The authors highlight the significance of the participatory exercise within this method, as the joint activity between interviewer and interviewee of filling the grid together means that rapport can be built quickly, thus causing the interviewee to relax and open-up more quickly than when using other methods. However, perhaps this assumption should be evaluated further, as some interviewees may find this exercise tiresome and interrogative due to the extent of detail and personal information required. Berney and Blane are aware of the likelihood of participants to under report certain activities (for example smoking is not as accepted by society as it used to be and thus participants are likely to over report) and over report others (for example the societal pressure to be physically active may lead people to exaggerate their engagement with physical activity) and so incorporate these likelihoods within analysis, making findings outcomes more reliable.

Overall, this qualitative data element was a series of retrospective, in depth life history calendar interviews, which were dependant on recruitment (partly during the Covid-19 pandemic), empirical saturation, and sampling techniques. In order to understand what

civic engagement means to this cohort of students and how they consider themselves to be civically engaged, the findings from the in-depth life history interviews and focus groups have been considered together within the discussion section of this thesis, although the interview participants were sampled from the survey respondents, none of the participants from the focus groups part-took in the life history interviews. The aim of these interviews is to collect life history data, to develop an understanding of the relationship between civic engagement and health, as well as the pathways to, and barriers and facilitators of civic engagement. The relationship between types and levels of civic engagement and self-reported health and wellbeing is also included within this thesis. The themes covered in these interviews are civic engagement, early life, and self-reported health and wellbeing.

3.7.3 Topic Guide Design and Life History Calendar Adaptation

Life histories provide a story into 'how cultural values and traditions influenced development across the life cycle'. (Atkinson, 1998, p. 4). This approach to qualitative data collection is flexible and open-ended approach, which allows for participant autonomy and input, and allows the researcher and interviewee a 'much closer interaction' than other forms of data collection because of the historical and personal nature of the oral history (Hitchcock and Hughs, 1995, p. 185). During the interviews, participants will be prompted to converse via open-ended questions regarding their residential background, their family history, their education, their self-reported health, their social networks and sense of communal belonging, and their uptake of civic engagement in all forms throughout their life course. The interviews will adopt the structure and content of the cross-sectional surveys and so will include questions about frequency, quality, and density of civic engagement also. By adopting this approach to collecting life course data, a realistic and thorough understanding of the journey of civic engagement will be evident during analysis at the individual level. Not only will this aid the current understanding of civic engagement better, but may also show whether students are commonly happier and healthier when they make a choice to be civically engaged, whether civic engagement can be associated with health and wellbeing, and potentially also whether individuals

experiencing social exclusion are less civically engaged and have lower levels of health and wellbeing – although it is acknowledged that this may not always be the case.

Using the learning taken from working as a research assistant and various training (including a recent foundation level Social Research Council course into in-depth interviewing) this topic guide was designed to incorporate two separate but complimentary methods of life history data collection and analysis. Sample size is dependent on empirical saturation and relevant diversity of participants; however, it has been estimated at a minimum of 10 and a sample matrix has been produced as a guide for recruitment in order to cover a diverse range of civic engagement uptake across the mainstream domains, life trajectories that reflect the sample population and the research questions. Purposeful sampling will be used via individual level survey responses to identify participants who represent a diversity of civic engagement uptake across the domains.

The life history calendar method is a method for capturing retrospective data from participants using semi structured qualitative interviews alongside the grid components. The grid itself covers 4 areas within a given time span:

1. External (important dates / events)

2. Family

3. Residential

4. Occupational

Once this part of the methodology is mapped out visually, semi-structured qualitative interviews take place using the calendar as a prop; allowing corrections from participants throughout by cross referencing between the four lines – and therefore increasing the accuracy of the data collected (Blane, 1996). Completing the calendar is a joint task for the interviewer and the interviewee.

The flexibility of this method, and the opportunity for the interviewer and interviewee to

build 'rapport' during the process have both been highlighted as an important factor in this approach which 'must not be understated' (Berney, Blane, 21:2003). Indeed, this has been considered to be an enjoyable process for the participants, allowing them to recall details about memories that they may not have considered for years. (Blane, 1996). During the collection of life history calendars, the researcher will support the respondent to complete a visual 'life calendar' using font colours or sizes, pictures, pens or post-it notes to do so alongside three areas or lines, in this case the three lines were life history, civic engagement, and wellbeing. Section 2 is a tool for actually mapping a participant's life across the main research topics within this study, and due to the accuracy of this technique and the use of dates with personal information, it reduces recall bias and can actually act as a cross-reference for data collected within section 1 of the interview. Therefore, the unique combination of these methods carries the potential for reducing re-call bias and aiding the vitality of the data collected overall.

Furthermore, and strengthening this method's origins in collecting retrospective data, it has also been found that when personal memories can often be recalled alongside public events, which implies that the participant may naturally be cross-checking details themselves by using the lines parallel to each-other (Brown, 1990). This method therefore enhances the participant's ability to recall information (Blane, 2003).

An adaptation of the life grid method was used within this study. This interview schedule in this case was split into two items with the initial section of the interview covering the same themes as the calendar prop, but with the emphasis on a free and participant led interview in the first instance. The 'external dates' column was filled using desk-based research and attempted to use globally relevant historical milestones, including the death of Michael Jackson or the Twin Towers attack.

Within the interviews, participants were asked questions such as:

- *Could you tell me about your childhood?*
- *Do you remember the first time you experienced what might be considered civic engagement?*

- *Could you describe your health and wellbeing during your childhood?*

The full topic guide and calendar design can be found in the Appendices section.

3.7.4 Data Collection

Participants were identified from the pool of survey respondents through a sampling process aimed at maximum variation and including a representative sample (see section 3.2 in methods chapter for details of the sampling). Following the sampling plan, participants were contacted via voluntary contact details to be invited to take part in the interviews.

Due to the time between survey completion and interviewing, reaching participants presented various obstacles. A number of the participants had completed their course at the university and moved home, which meant that sampling had to be re-run for a number of the identified groups. Out of the fifteen identified groups or categories through the sampling process, thirteen interviews were completed.

Due to accessibility issues and also Covid-19, while some of these were conducted in person, a number of them were also completed collaboratively using video online to complete the calendar. While this presented some technical issues such as bad internet connections (meaning one interview had to be disregarded) this change in methods was also an opportunity to re-invite previously sampled participants who had moved away to participate, and all of them did. Further, by conducting the interviews online, specific barriers were removed such as lack of time, parenthood, or illness or disabilities. One of the interviews was conducted with a new mother who breastfed during the interview, which was an opportunity to build trust during the interview and helped the participant to feel relaxed. Another interview was conducted with a participant who was at home with her son on suicide watch and was not willing to leave the house, and another with someone who had moved back home and was no longer living in the UK. Therefore, moving the data collection to an online platform in fact allowed the progression of findings

in this mixed method study and for the sampled participants to be interviewed, despite these barriers being in place.

This element used two methods of qualitative data collection, being the communal completion of participant's life history calendars, and the interview topic guide itself, although for the most part these two data collection techniques were merged and carried out in unison in a fluid, conversational and collaborative process, with the calendar as an interview prompt. The interviews were all audibly recorded (from start to finish, this including the calendar completion) and the life history calendars were anonymised and re-configured into summarised infographic timelines, which were used as visual life history guides during analysis and reporting stages. For ethical reasons these timelines cannot be presented in this thesis for they are compromised by various identifiable information, especially in the case of the student body and peers, due to the small sample size obtained.

Section 1 refers to the one-to-one depth-interviewing, in which 3 overarching areas were covered: early life, civic engagement, and health and wellbeing. The non- prescriptive nature of this interview resulted in a conversational approach, with rich participant-led data. Section 2 of the interview was a collaborative exercise, which was more participant led with some than others and was at times subjective to the participant's personalities or immediate environment. While a depth-interviewing was created, it was used alongside the adaptation of the life history calendar method. The merging added further depth to experiences gathered within the topic guide, allowing both the interviewer and interviewee to cross-reference and revisit experiences across the life course. Essentially, semi-structured qualitative interviews take place using the calendar as a prop; allowing corrections from participants throughout by cross referencing between the four lines – and therefore increasing the accuracy of the data collected. (Blane, 1996). Photos or screenshots were taken of the visual calendars for an electronic representation of each completed life grid and for reference during analysis stage.

Some respondents found it easier to complete the timeline first and then go into talking about civic engagement, while others found it easier to look at the calendar as an

interview prompt throughout, and also talk about civic engagement or wellbeing at that particular time in their lives, rather than completing each of the sections separately. Usually, the initial question would collect basic socio-demographic details, and country of birth, as well as living arrangements and siblings, and helped to ground the first section of the calendar interviewing method. It was useful as the first entry or starting point in each participant's life calendar, and as the first opportunity for interview probing for elaboration about living arrangements, family relationships and home-life. Overall, participants had positive feelings from the interview, in relation to linking civic engagement with health and wellbeing but also in discussing their lives, and many sent grateful messages following the interview having had enjoyed it. However, one note of caution was that some of the questions asked could trigger emotional responses from respondents - especially with participants who had experienced abuse, neglect, suicidal feelings, or loss of a loved one. In this situation, participants were asked if they would like to have a break, although none did, and were offered the referral sheet of support contacts straight after the interview, which only one participant accepted.

Due to covid-19, more than half of these interviews were conducted remotely via video. While this did change the nature and dynamics of the interviews, it also allowed for some participants who had been sampled but have moved country or left the university to take part, as conducting the interviews online via Microsoft Teams prevented all physical obstacles. This meant that participants previously unable to be interviewed were re-introduced, including a new mother (who participated in the interview from home with her new-born baby) as well as participants who had moved geographically or were unable to attend in person due to personal commitments, such as work or family. While it was initially planned for data collection to happen in person, the introduction of remote data collection in fact removed barriers for participants, and allowed them to part-take collaboratively, by inputting to the calendar and taking part in a video interview from the comfort of their own homes.

3.7.5 Data management and Analysis

All interviews were audibly recorded, and those conducted via Microsoft teams were recorded both in teams and audibly, and downloaded from the programme to be uploaded to Express Scribe Pro for transcribing. Transcribing was completed during the course of data collection, and anonymization of the data took place simultaneously. Interviews were saved with participant IDs, civic engagement scores from the survey data, and basic socio-demographic details to aid analysis. Transcribing was completed verbatim, interviews were numbered throughout and uploaded to QSR Nvivo 12 for analysis. Transcribing took place alongside and also post data collection.

All life history calendar interview data was transcribed using express scribe and a transcriber pedal and then uploaded as anonymised to QSR Nvivo 12 software to be considered as a whole dataset. Following the life history interviews data collection and transcription, a series of themes relating were identified via the process of systematic thematic analysis, the most commonly used approach for analysis used when considering qualitative research. (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows for thr identification of patterns of meaning and commonalities across the dataset to be identified, which is key to understanding how early life may inculence civic engagement behaviours, and how participants understood their own civic engagemen behaviours in relation to health and wellbeing. By analyzing the interview data thematically, any shared experiences across the sample are recognized in the process. Analysis was inclusive of the interviews conducted via video online and those conducted in person. Thematic analysis, the most commonly used approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was carried out across the six guided steps for a more rigorous approach to systematic thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke have developed 6 fluid and iterative guidelines for conducting thematic analysis. The first of these is data familiarization, which is likely to (partly) take place during the listening and the transcription of the collected qualitative empirical data.

Data familiarisation and initial coding of the life history calendar data included the coding of all lines of transcripts into the overarching areas (1. Early life, 2. Civic engagement and 3. Wellbeing) but from there on coding was data driven and provided insight into

participant's individual life histories and experiences, but also or identification of common patterns of meaning across the interviews reflecting the relationship between life history, civic engagement, and wellbeing across the life course. During the initial stages of coding there were many similar codes (for instance 'racism in early life' and 'discrimination in early life') and these were merged together under a higher theme of 'experiencing prejudice in early life', which became part of an overarching 'adverse childhood experiences' theme during the later stages of analysis and reporting.

Step two is generating initial codes. Initially, there were many detailed codes, some of these with few references across the dataset. For example, under the code 'early life' there was a series of almost 20 subcodes. These included 'overcrowding', 'community networks', 'family networks', 'school networks', 'bullying', 'racism', 'moving homes', 'moving country', language barriers', 'childhood isolation/loneliness', 'good family memories', 'bad family memories', 'protecting others', 'experiencing abuse', 'holidays', and more. In this step, there were 14 main codes, such as 'civic engagement barriers', 'civic engagement motivators', 'wellbeing', 'general health', 'socio-demographics', 'education', ect, or nodes created and various sub-codes, this was mainly the case under the node 'early life' which included the highest number of sub-nodes.

Some of these nodes and sub-nodes with just had one reference from one interview (i.e. panic attacks in childhood), which were in some cases collapsed into similar neighbouring codes (childhood wellbeing) during step 3, which is *searching for themes* in the data. For example, the nodes 'racism' and 'bullying' was collapsed into a larger node called 'discrimination in early years', and 'loneliness' and 'feeling angry' were collapsed into 'wellbeing during early years', as they were very similar notions, with often the similar content or context in the references or quotes. There were obvious patterns and shared experiences within the dataset, particularly so with impacts of types of volunteering, and many similar experiences in childhood, such as moving to a new country, facing neglect and abuse in early years and lacking a stable and loving home. Another pattern identified was that despite these negative experiences, those participants who had been shown encouragement from peers, a member of the community or family, had been able to

interpret their experiences positively and as adults showed a keenness to help others in need.

Step four is reviewing these themes, which was a long and iterative process, and required going back to previous steps and revisiting the life history calendars on a case-by-case basis. For example, looking over the content within each of the codes led to changes in the overall coding. There was a code 'motivators for engagement', and it was apparent that there were distinct motivators reported under this code, which were important to explore within the aims of this study. During the exploration of the content under this code, it became clear that motivations for different domains (and for consciously not engaging with particular domains) were common across the sample. Many reported engaging in group membership and social networks as a form of escaping family life. Most of the time, the participants volunteered almost empathetically to help others, but in some instances, volunteering was a form of work experience for their own personal development. It was clear that several participants had actively chosen not to engage in political or knowledge and information because of lack of trust, and in some cases, the negative impact that engaging had on their wellbeing. Therefore, it must be noted that following these steps was by no means a coherent process and the more the data was explored, the more steps were revisited, and researcher triangulation happened with guidance from the wider supervisory team.

Step five, naming the themes, was especially difficult to do, and took place in many reflective stages with a desire to really name the essence of the theme and to ensure the participant's voices weren't lost in the process.

The final step, step six, reflects the writing up and reporting of the interview findings, which can be found in chapter six of this thesis, where findings have been reported by sub-heading, and further in chapter seven, where the findings are revisiting alongside literature and the other empirical elements included within this thesis. Initially, a civic engagement timeline to visualise patterns of civic engagement was attempted, although it was decided this did not encapsulate the interviews and could not be used as, although

summarised, it risked presenting identifiable information. Secondly, a summary map was created to reflect all identified themes and findings, however it was not possible to present the nuanced detail collected by the life history calendar method this way and meant that participant's voices and experiences were effectively lost within the visualisation. Finally, the themes were presented with visualisations and quotes alongside. This allowed for the work in visualising the interview findings together also be incorporated with the survey element and focus group findings on a summarised map, presented in the discussions and conclusions chapter.

4. Chapter four: Results Chapter One: Meanings of civic engagement to university students: Focus Group Findings through Thematic Analysis

4.1 Introduction and chapter outline

The aims of the focus groups were to explore the diverse concept of civic engagement in the context of this widening participation university student sample, but also to gather a better understanding of whether this sample of university students are in fact civically engaged, why, and how.

This chapter aims to apprise and explore the focus group data using the focus group themes and guides as an anchor. The themes and patterns of meaning identified through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) will be detailed using direct quotes relevant to each of the identified themes. Throughout this chapter, the focus group findings are also considered alongside current literature where relevant, in order to develop a richer understanding of what is meant by the term 'civic engagement' primarily among this group of university students, how their understanding tallies with mainstream understandings, but also who civic engagement is for and what being civically engaged may entail in practice. This chapter begins with a section detailing the analysis process and participant characteristics, followed by a presentation of the focus group findings, and is finalized with a conclusion.

i.   Participant characteristics

Due to the demographic of the university cohort overall, the focus group participants were diverse in age, ethnicity, country of birth and gender. Students were enrolled on a variety of courses, but all within the school of 'Health, sports and bioscience'. The participants reported their demographics. Some were international students, most were black or black-British, female, many were mature students, although young males did also take part in the focus group discussions.

Due to the aim of the focus groups being to understand the meaning of civic engagement in this context in relation to wider meanings and conceptualisations, the findings have been presented with literature throughout this chapter where relevant. These findings provide a useful, applicable contextual understanding of the civic engagement phenomena which is useful in informing the life history interview design and challenging the ambiguity of the term civic engagement, further highlighting the subjectivity of the term for different disciplines, populations and environments worldwide. The research questions for the overall study can be found in the Methods chapter, section 5.3 of this thesis.

4.2 Overview of Themes

The focus group data collected verifies these students to be civically engaged mostly within the commonly accepted domains (derived from wider literature) of 'membership in groups' and volunteering, and less so in the domain of political civic engagement, although this will be explored further with latter forms of empirical data collected within this overall study.

According to Braun and Clarkes guidelines for thematic analysis, a map is suggested during step 3 of the analysis to aid the development of the themes and the overall story of the data collected. Below is a visual diagram summary of the focus group findings, reflecting the themes that surfaced during analysis when considering what civic engagement encapsulates and what it might look like in practice, as well as the student's discussions regarding barriers and facilitators, and where civic engagement might happen. The diagram attempts to give a visual overview of the focus group findings but can too be used as a grounding map to illustrate the structure and content of this results chapter.

<u>Visual map of focus group findings</u>

```
                              ┌─────────────────────┐
                              │   Political forms of │
                          ┌───│   civic engagement   │
                          │   └─────────────────────┘
                          │   ┌─────────────────────┐
                          │   │     Protecting,      │
                      ┌───┤───│   supporting and     │
┌─────────────────┐   │       │  empowering others   │
│ What does civic │───┤       └─────────────────────┘
│ engagement mean?│   │       ┌─────────────────────┐
└─────────────────┘   │───────│    Collaborating to  │
                      │       │  establish change for│
                      │       │       the better     │
                      │       └─────────────────────┘
                      │       ┌─────────────────────┐
                      │       │      Building        │
                      └───────│  relationships and   │
                              │  social connections  │
                              └─────────────────────┘
```
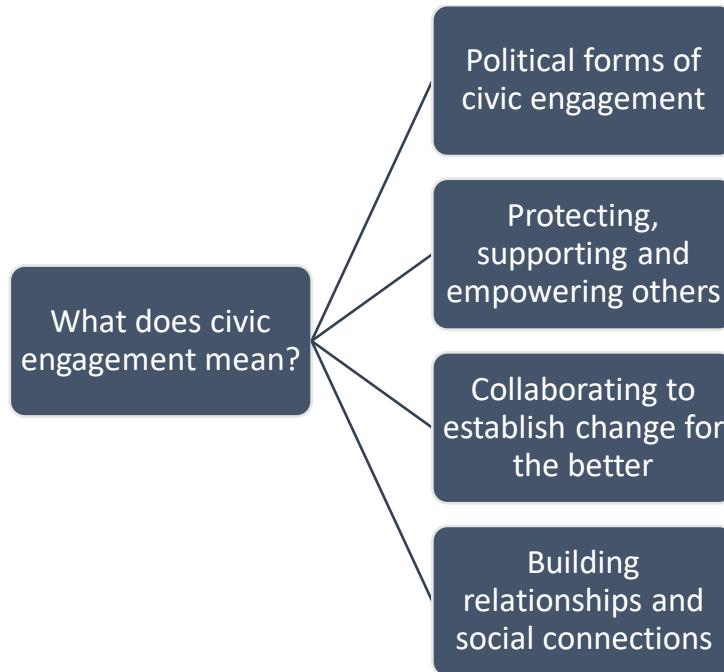
Taking the focus group data into account for the objectives of this study, four overarching themes emerged within the focus group analysis, evidenced in the above visual map. Each of these themes is presented under a subheading within this chapter.

Data was also gathered regarding civic engagement barriers, motivators, where civic engagement might happen, and what civic engagement is in practice, also presented in this chapter.

These themes presented in the diagram above were identified and named in stages 3, 4 and 5 of Braun and Clarke's steps for systematic thematic analysis. The final themes initially originated within nodes created within the discussions in the focus groups about what civic engagement means; but also, in student's first-hand experiences of behaviours that they considered to be civic engagement. Within this chapter the themes are presented in the order listed above, alongside the findings relating to where civic engagement might happen, who to / or with, and what may prevent or motivate specific acts of civic engagement.

i.Political forms of Engagement: Citizenship and the State

Students reiterated common concepts of mainstream notions surrounding what civic engagement encapsulates, for example in their recognising that taking part in general elections and accessing their right to vote may be deemed a sound example of one being civically engaged:

> *"…am I civically engaged ummmmm not as much as I used to be but like when I was pregnant I was more civically engaged I used to go to mother and baby groups I lived at a mother and baby unit and other groups many other groups but I don't really feel like I you know when you vote think that has something to do with this"*
>
> *Facilitator: "That is a good point is voting is that civically engaged?"*
> *"I think it is yea so maybe I am actually bit not like I used to be so"*
> (1251-1256)

In this case, the participant relays their own experiences of civic engagement, showing the belief that a hierarchy of engagement exists and that it is likely that life course situations may have an impact on civic engagement uptake – in this case motherhood was a facilitator for a new uptake of civic engagement. One's uptake of civic engagement may fluctuate across the life course and during particular milestones, it is contingent upon individual circumstances, and this fluctuation may include not only levels of civic engagement uptake, but also domains. The finding of political involvement as an overarching theme within these exploratory focus groups tallies with current literature, and echoes the widespread belief that civic engagement is a significant constituent for democracy (Flanagan 2015). Within this transcript and throughout the focus groups, political actions such as voting appear to symbol less engagement to the participants than other articulated acts of civic engagement. However when considering literature, voting has previously been understood as the most 'common act' of civic engagement (Putnam, p3:2000).

During the focus groups, participants also voiced that to be civically engaged must encapsulate a meeting of ideas on some level between citizens and the state, as well as an element of what students termed 'consultation' on behalf of a governing body with the general public by which they govern;

> *"Is it like getting public to talk about… things that they don't like in the Government…" (1440)*

This two-way relationship between a government and its citizens is reflected, and is widely considered to be a sound domain of civic engagement across the current literature. (Barret and Zani, 2015). Political forms of civic engagement are understood to be a vital element of civic engagement overall according to literature. However, during the focus group data coding process it became quickly evident that according to the participants, more than one form existed within the political involvement arena of civic engagement. The importance of working together was a significant finding in understanding these student's conceptualization of the political domain of civic engagement, thus resulted in the theme being un-packed into sub themes to reflect the importance of two-way dialogue and actions between a government and their citizens.

> *"I think it is joint I think it is joint I think there is a policy issue then there is an agency issue the person themselves doing something about it and there is the whole community like everyone else around them so it is about the government it is about the person then and about the community it is a joint effort everybody has to"*
> *"All stay together"*
> *"Everyone has to what?"*
> *"Work together"*
> *(1440-1447)*

While some students expressed civic engagement as being something that the government should provide for its citizens, for example for financial support and/or

accommodation provision, other students saw the political element of civic engagement as something that needed to happen on every possible level in order for it to be a successful exemplar of civic engagement;

> *"I also think see if it involves the um the like population so let's say all of UK people in terms of bring change to democracy and politics and helping poor ones it would bring change but there has to be a lot of people involved not just a few so more people it helps out but less people it doesn't work"*
> (1831-1834)

The political domain of civic engagement was again understood to be a vehicle for supporting others, which is echoed throughout all of the focus group conversations. This deeper conceptualisation of civic engagement is touched upon in some areas of the literature but is profound conceptualisation of this form of civic engagement and one which echo's a functioning and equal democratic state. The communal effort or significance of joint working towards a shared common goal was highlighted by participants as a crucial aspect of what may be deemed as true civic engagement.

I.Protecting, supporting and Empowering Others

The theme of 'supporting and empowering others' was a strong concept during the focus groups, and it was evident during data collection, familiarization and coding that supporting neighbours, peers or wider community members was a significant core aspect of what civic engagement really means. Throughout the focus groups, civic engagement was largely understood by the focus group participants to be an essential communal behaviour for the welfare of all, especially of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups within a society, but it was also acknowledged to be something for 'the whole community' or for 'everyone'. Civic engagement was perceived by this cohort of students to carry connotations of class and to reflect socioeconomics and a class-based society, although the discussions had also show an overwhelming communal understanding that civic engagement should be accessible to and extend all boundaries within a society.

Examples include recognising that sometimes educated and wealthy young people - or even the Prime Minister - may benefit from other people's acts of civic engagement during a time of need, again reflecting the opinions of these students that civic engagement is primarily about actively helping others;

"I think it is everyone"
"Yea because everyone has issues on a daily basis"
"Yea but not everyone needs it"
"Some people need it but dunno how to get it"
"Like a prime minister we all need"
"Do you know what everyone needs it everyone has an issue, regardless if they are depressed or what"
(1753-1761)

During the coding process the Nvivo node which showed the highest number of references across all of the focus group data was 'help and support', which was titled 'protecting and supporting others' during the next stage of analysis and in the development of the final over-arching themes and sub-themes. Regardless of the differences in dynamics and some notions across the three focus group discussions, all three focus groups conversed notably about civic engagement being a vehicle for supporting those who were vulnerable and in need of benefitting from societal civic engagement in a spectrum of ways. This theme of supporting disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in society was the most prominent code and theme in the focus group analysis, with the node possessing the highest number of references and sources on QSR Nvivo once the coding process was finalised. The eligibility for considering those populations as being in need of civic engagement, however, differed. For instance, in some cases issues such as addiction and homelessness surfaced, and in others, students discussed developing countries as being in need of civic engagement. Under-privileged or vulnerable groups in the community (such as young people) was a common theme throughout the dataset.

Across the focus group data, various situations that students felt to be in need of civic engagement were discussed, including protecting those suffering multitude forms of abuse, supporting the homeless population, single mothers struggling, newly arrived migrants with navigating the systems in place, young people, prisoners, and those suffering an array of emotional issues and/or addictions.

"It is like a project we do and see if people come from different countries so like let's say if you come from Somali or Pakistan or any country when you get there we will help you get to the place you need to go like let's say if you wanna go home office I used to help out with um wide people Like um"
"It was cool yea"
"I belong to one club I don't know if it is civic engagement but it's a club"
"What do you guys do?"
"We help the um single parents that are ready to go back home and don't have papers and can't cope with life here some of them actually want to set up business"
 (1477-1487)

The focus group participants quickly acknowledged the magnitude of equality when considering civic engagement. The importance of not possessing bias, of establishing equality across age and gender and being open to and respectful of other people's values and/or experiences in order to be civically engaged was recognised by this group of students unanimously, and this is also echoed in the prominent overarching theme of supporting and empowering others. Despite the fleeting mention of class during the discussions, students were clear that civic engagement must be accessible to everyone in society equally, without prejudice or judgement.

"well you have to be able to work as a team because there will be other people there"
"be a talkative person"
"communicate"

Facilitator: communication skills be team player yea and anything else?

"ummmm you you would have to know how to work with lots of different types of people"

Facilitator: "so an awareness of diversity and ability?"

"I think you have to be respectful like all the people you come across they are all different people"

"Yea ethics"

"Not be bias"

"You have to be caring as well because if you are selfish as well because if you are selfish you wouldn't really want to help other people"

(1397-1410)

During the focus groups, there was a communal understanding of the importance of acceptance and of equality in order for an action to be considered a sound example of civic engagement. In the above transcript, students are discussing what personality traits or skills one would need to be civically engaged, and are widely describing the possession of good communication skills and the desire to support others as leading requirements for a civically engaged citizen.

Following this, the focus group findings also highlighted student's understanding of citizenship, and interestingly of both formal and informal acts of civic engagement.

"Ummmm I used to but I don't now but my neighbour I used to help him I had one of his keys because most of the time he would leave them in the door and he would come with the police and hospital but he is dead now but… but when I had the y-stop training I managed to tell a lot of youngsters to be aware of what to do in case they are stop and searched so I think that is civic engagement as well"

"Passing on knowledge"

"Passing on knowledge yea"

…

"Yea but there are more professional ways to do it"
"You always have to be professional because helping at least you are engaging to keep them safe because that guy could be someone from"
"He was at the end he was a bit of dementia and he couldn't find his keys and the nurses had to bring him to my house because I have always got a spare key for him although I don't know even when he was not my neighbour I still have the keys"
(1296-1321)

The active and informal support offered by a student to their vulnerable neighbour was perceived to be an example of civic engagement, although there was some dispute about the informality of this behaviour and the lack of professional input or official process, which led some students to question whether this behaviour could in fact be considered an example of one being civically engaged, although it was clear that it was actioned for the better for the community - and thus should be. This begs the question how uptake of civic engagement is measured, and whether these informal and altruistic acts are included across studies of civic engagement.

Throughout the focus groups, it was common for students to relate the discussions to their own experiences of civic engagement in order to inspire others to contribute, or in some cases to propose new questions to the facilitator and group for their own clarity about the term;

"I am a librarian assistant is that civic engagement?"
Facilitator: "Is that is that paid or not paid?"
"Not paid volunteering"
"So it would have to be volunteer though or paid I don't know would it"
Facilitator: "I don't know. I don't I don't know there is a lot of different definitions for it but so is that is that what you do so he is a volunteer library assistant in a community library?"

"Yea"

Facilitator: "Yea so is that is that civic engagement?"

"I think it is because it is helping out citizens"

"You help out like people with dyslexia like if they wanna borrow our books…

you kind of narrow it down for them? I dunno if that's civic engagement"

"You see like what if you were in like befriending projects helping young

people to get their rights and stuff"

"Yea"

"that's civic engagement as well I used to do that in class though"

(1458-1473)

Another of the focus group themes that conveys the mainstream understanding of civic engagement is that referring to knowledge and keeping up to date on civic matters within the society in which you live (Ehrlich, 2000). Students discussed the importance of actively utilising acquired knowledge and information for the greater good in order for this to be considered an element of civic engagement:

"Because they can make an impact if you use that knowledge to make an impact then that is being civically engaged if it is just for yourself to gain more knowledge then probably no that is just being politically aware of your surroundings" (1846-1849)

The significance of obtaining and sharing knowledge, and how this related to empowerment, was recognised by the students, however the gravity of sharing and catalysing awareness within others to allow them to make better and more informed choices was of equal or larger concern among this cohort, which emerged during the latter stages of the thematic analysis:

"I mean the other week they were talking about… about"

"Equality"

"resistance isn't it like antibiotic resistance getting the community to understand that antibiotics when it is right to take them this is things in which we are trying to get people knowledgeable about issues that are affecting lives isn't it?"

"Yea because"

"So it is trying to share knowledge with people about issues that are effecting their lives?"

"Yea so that they can make better decisions"

"Awareness"

"Yea awareness raise awareness"

(1581-1592)

Within this transcript, a domain of civic engagement was naturally related to public health and health literacy. Students used the act of increasing health related knowledge and awareness amongst others as a sound form of civic engagement, linking civic engagement and public health, a primary aim of this study.

An identified over-arching theme that surfaced through these focus groups was 'empowerment'. Students placed great emphasis on empowerment; on encouraging knowledge and awareness among others to achieve empowerment as a form of being civically engaged, and this ranged from health literacy, hypothetical conversations, human rights to describing personal experiences as a vehicle for articulating their opinions and promoting strength in others facing similar issues;

"Because basically… it is all about improving it is about trying to make the youths understand that when they have been stopped this is how they are supposed to react so that things don't get out of hand and they can deal with things so they know"

(1187-1180)

One of the most commonly understood acts of civic engagement is formal volunteering, which is a prominent term within the literature defining civic engagement and also evaluations of civic engagement projects (Barrett and Zani, 2015). Interestingly, although

volunteering was noted as a sound form and integral element of civic engagement by the students who participated in the focus groups, it was by no-means as highly regarded during the discussions or neither as prominent during analysis as the other main themes in defining the meaning of civic engagement, although many of the conversations had during the focus groups may have included aspects of altruistic volunteering behaviors, for example various means of helping others in need.

"Another thing I want to say I has just come to me I think because people are saying stuff but like I was working with victim support you know where they tell people and work with the emotional impact of crime I feel that is really to do with civic engagement and I feel like civic engagement is actually what public health is all about and health management I think that is what it is about it involves society it looks at the epidemic of issues and problems and tried to comes to terms… civic engagement it comes to terms with how to deal and recognise certain issues"
"Come together"
"Come together yes"
(1279-1288)

II.Collaborating to establish change for the better

An additional theme which is reflective of current literature and was uncovered during the exploratory focus groups is the notion that civic engagement is indeed a way of collaboratively inducing change, but specifically change which is believed to be for the better (Putnam, 1995). This wide-spread collaboration for change was a prominent example of civic engagement during the focus group data collection and the analysis processes. Literature states that civic engagement is a vehicle for making improvements for the future; *'Civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future'* (Adler, 2005:1). The students echoed this notion and highlighted civic engagement

as being a behaviour that elicited the desire for a diversity of societal improvements on many levels. This over-arching theme also reflects the theoretical underpinnings of this study in regard to the capability approach, which states 'human development is a process of enlarging people's choices' (Gasper, 1997, p286). Within the 4 main themes, a sub-theme was 'being open to others and sharing values'. In the transcript below, participants were listing words that they felt explained the term civic engagement;

"Connectedness involvement making improvements building up a relationship"
"empowerment protection helping and combining values"
    (1133-1132)

Further, it was expressed during the focus groups that a diversity of opinions and experiences across the societal spectrum could ultimately be a benefit when considering civic engagement and what it really means;

"political and non-political people when we say political in the system in the way they are non-political it is also under there"
Facilitator: *"so it is like a meeting why both?"*
"because we need ideas from different areas and maybe it will be different from a non-political person that a political person so the ideas coming together"
(1242-1247)

The belief voiced by these students that bringing together a diversity of opinions and ideas could illicit better outcomes is reflective of creating a sound and palpable democracy, one in which the majority have an influence in decision making processes and a consistent input to how their society is governed beyond elections (Beetham, 1994).

I. Building relationships and social connections

The significance of relationship building and social connections as a form of civic engagement is one which is noted in current literature and was also acknowledged by

this cohort of students. In this case, students actually related civic engagement to religion and activities participated in through churches that they were members of, and religion was a coded during steps 1 and 2 of analysis, later falling under the theme of relationships and social networks. Civic engagement has been referred to as a taking part in groups 'the participation of individuals in civil life and groupings' (Putnam 2000, p. 31-180). Many theorists, including Gramsci, saw civil society as a place where citizens would work together publically to achieve goals for their collective well-being (Kumar, 2007). Elements of civic engagement, for instance participating in community groups and networks which build trust within society are believed to be an 'essential element of social capital' (Winter, 2000, p.3). Civic engagement is also considered an essential building block to implementing and achieving a 'civil society' (Spurk, 2006, p.1). Students discussed various forms of relationship building and befriending, including class based and community-based befriending and various forms of socializing with others were deemed to be sound forms of civic engagement;

"I think to be fair to an extent it is but like it is but not always but like coming
to lectures daily and involving yourself in daily stuff it is to an extent civic
engagement it is because you are involving yourself with people"
(1251-1261)

 A proportional amount of these references was coded within relationship building, as well as helping others or sharing knowledge within the first instance, as the complexity of the first-hand examples discussed at times extended more than one code, and later more than one theme.

"Because young mothers may need civic engagement maybe they are isolated
or depression it falls into different aspects of life"
(1231-1232)

While informal forms of civic engagement were disputed in some cases, it was evident that a significant amount of the focus groups surrounded acts of civic engagement that

took place in a community setting and included helping others who were less fortunate, and this was the most prominent and cross-cutting theme within the focus groups overall.

The focus groups also led to opinions about socio-demographics in the context of civic engagement to emerge, especially so in discussing who civic engagement is for;

"Yea because they are the ones who are likely to be in contact with the law
and you cannot say this for the whole population because there are people
who have their life is already singled out and they don't need that kind of
engagement with… they have their social circles they can easily book holidays
so I think it is for different areas"
"So in a way the themes or the"
"Oh I see what you mean"
"The idea of civic engagement could fit in every aspect of"
"Yea but I think there a class for the civic engagement no?"
"A class for it?"
"Well I think to me that's my opinion"
"Remember those children they from rich background they can go astray and
some of them get into trouble yea they have parents who can hire big
lawyers and pay but they are still young offenders anyway"
"Yes but they will not be brought into the young offenders institutions
because with young offenders you wouldn't have gone into a cell you would
have a family member to sit with you guide you through the ways of life
those kinds if they got locked up their parents they will take you them
holiday or they will hire someone to come home and speak to them"
(1199-1217)

Again, civic engagement is understood to primarily be actions to help those less fortunate. Supporting others was a leading example discussed among the students, and often discussed in the first person using personal experiences as explanations. Students voluntarily extended the depth of this domain across all three of the focus groups by

providing personal context and experiences of their supporting others as valid forms of civic engagement;

"Personally, I am part of charity that helps with the drug addicts not only the drug addicts but the homeless jobless migrants who can't speak English English barrier all this most of them if they are having a housing problem we will refer them or write them a letter to a charity or"
(1623-1627)

"OK ummm what about mentoring because I am going to do mentoring in my secondary school slash 6 form because I went to them to get my certificates and some of the teachers were like you changed so much over the years and I think maybe if you talked to the students you could impact on some of their lives"
(1639-1643)

Throughout the focus groups, students consistently articulated the ability for forms of civic engagement to reduce the impact of crime, as well as a diverse range of complex issues that society faces.

"No I was just saying about the minorities not even the minorities what about the drug addicts? You understand or maybe the homeless or vulnerable groups?"
"Like what can you do apart from the government trying to let the government it is sort of isolating them puts them in prison you understand"
(1594-1598)

There have been studies with offenders to demonstrate that this is a realistic opinion, and that particular forms of civic engagement can be a pathway to changes in behaviour at the individual level when different approaches are considered, implemented and evaluated (Kathryn 2010).

i.   Perceived Barriers and Facilitators to Uptake of Civic Engagement

The aims of the focus groups were to collect data on what students understood by the term civic engagement, whether students were civically engaged, but also on their perceptions of barriers and facilitators when considering the uptake of civic engagement. In some cases, discussions surrounding potential barriers and facilitators were prompted by the facilitator, however in other instances these conversations digressed naturally within the focus group conversations. An example of this natural digression is when a student was discussing her desire to mitigate confrontational situations between young people within her community, and when questioned by her peers as to why she felt compelled to intervene, she describes her son as being an inspiring factor, and her desire for his safety to be the instigator for her informal civic behavior. A similar situation occurs when a student is describing her acts of civic engagement within a community setting, and she again acknowledges her parental responsibility as being a facilitator for this chosen civic behavior:

"I do talk to young offenders I do help with um prisoners I like to organise little things for the community you know I am a planning member for the council"
"So you are a voice in a way in the community then?"
"Yes"
"That's quite a lot that you do how do you find time for that because"
"I do just because my son is 24 and I have been through a lot with him so that has given me the I think ability to engage and to learn more so I can pass it onto him"
(1102-1110)

In this instance, the participant verifies her parenthood as a direct indicator for her uptake of civic engagement. The context of the family was a running thread throughout much of the focus group discussions, which may be accountable to the dynamics of the focus groups and the diversity of the student participants, some of whom were parents and some of whom were late teenagers living in shared housing or in some instances still in their family home.

"Oh yea charity yea"

*"Yea but it begins from home what if you cannot do what you cannot organise
you home but you are doing it outside they are some people who are nicer
outside so for me it begins at home"*

"Yea that's true"

(1341-1345)

Within the transcript here it was alluded to that unless one is civically engaged at home they will not have the necessary tools to be civically engaged outside of the home, thus participants perceived parental bonding and familial support as a facilitator and pathway to meaningful uptake of other forms of civic engagement in a broader sense:

*"I think us to we might be the same I think might be a civic engagement as
well I have just for this short time in uni I have managed to transform my
family like about the issue about parenting I noticed I lacked a lot of
communication between my children I have transformed we have more
family I don't usually have time to talk to them but at least now my mum is
there to have this parental love"*

"Bonding"

"A bit of civic engagement with my family as well"

(1324-1331)

The focus group participants seemed to communally agree that familial structures were linked to civic engagement and this notion was accepted within the group rather than challenged. Although studies have been carried out investigating the longitudinal linkages between parental warmth and support and children's uptake of engagement in later stages of life, (Bebiroglu et al, 2013) there is very little literature or knowledge available about familial bonds from the perspective as parenting being a facilitator for civic engagement. The surfacing of familial structures and feelings of responsibility as a

pathway to civic engagement uptake is an unanticipated and new perspective in the field of civic engagement research and one that will be explored further within this study.

On the other hand, issues surrounding trust and social isolation were discussed by students on a variety of levels when considering potential barriers to becoming civically engaged. When asked to discuss potential benefits or negatives of being civically engaged, many students inputted to a conversation about trusting strangers, and about the potential risks of attempting to help others, which were dominantly about preserving one's physical safety and being wary of instigating contact with strangers in this context;

> _Facilitator:_ _"What are the benefits or the negatives of civic engagement do you think?"_
> _"Oh like um physical abuse like you know when you like civic engagement can be like social work and you are helping someone and sometimes people don't want your help and they might resort to violence"_
> (1473-1476)

this poses a question about the health and safety aspects of civic engagement and active citizenship, which may be a barrier to uptake of particular domains of civic engagement. Limited or lack of trust within society has been linked to less civic engagement among specific groups (Uslaner et al, 2005) although not as a tangible barrier that prevents one from carrying out positive actions.

However, following this notion, another discussion of a similar nature was a natural digression to the barriers that some groups in society may face, and was prompted by the statement "_freedom of speech is not real"_ (1778), which was met by some students with criticism. This notion was expanded on by a young female's experience of prejudice which was considered to be an obstacle in the way of her establishing trust with others, and so feeling able to be civically engaged. One of the over-arching themes identified within this piece of research was 'collaborating to establish change', inclusing being open to and sharing other's values, in which the students acknowledged the significance of equality

and diversity when attempting to establish successful structures of civic engagement on a large societal scale. Feelings of mistrust, potential risks and highlighted isolation are examples of the potential adverse and unfavourable products of civic engagement flagged by this cohort of university students during the focus groups.

> *"How they are talking about migrants at the moment as well obviously we are part of migrants as well so"*
> *"That's true"*
> *"The way they portray migrants is really bad it makes us feel bad now if you are walking down the street and you are wearing hijab people with be looking at you like-"*
> *"It's the media actually it just the media"*
> *"They are corrupt basically"*
> *"Like if I say a certain word like at the train station there was this little kid and he was white and he said oh imagine the train exploded and no one even looked at him but if I had said that everyone would be like oh she has got a bomb so like there is no freedom of speech you need to keep a mute on yourself"*
> (1787-1798)

Citizenship has been defined previously as being inclusive of freedom, including freedom of speech, and of access to health care, signifying the linkage between civic engagement and health (Silbereisen 2007) in equality as well as the verified significance of this barrier mentioned during the student focus groups. Following this focus group transcript, students expressed a lack of trust for politicians and governing bodies, which contributed to the barriers to uptake of civic engagement voiced during the focus groups. In previously conducted studies, researchers have found societal trust and equality to be crucial pathways for one's uptake of civic engagement (Uslaner et al, 2005). The socioeconomic linkage discussed during the focus groups specifically of isolation and its linkages to low uptake of civic engagement is also present in literature. It has been found that disadvantaged and ostracized groups are less likely to part-take in forms of civic

engagement than more affluent groups (Beetham, 1994). Students expressed a lack of trust for the government and feelings of isolation, which they felt would never change. The perceived top-down deliberate oppression of working class or minority groups in society is acknowledged and criticized by many scholars. This societal condemnation is argued to be a planned pretence, and one that benefits a government by successfully disguising serious economic and social disparities in order to preserve societal inequalities and feelings of mistrust. (Jones, 2012).

Detailed discussion of findings: Focus groups

The aim(s) of the focus groups was to provide a deeper level of understanding of how this cohort of university students defined and understood the term civic engagement, what civic engagement meant to them in practice, and what they perceived to be potential barriers and facilitators of civic engagement in their experiences.

The collected focus group data provided valuable insight, including personal experiences of civic engagement, of barriers and facilitators, communal notions surrounding the term, as well as a set of over-arching themes for defining the term in this context of a higher education widening participation university; a context in which the term is increasingly prevalent (Brammer and Morton 2014). The narrative surfacing throughout the focus groups was that civic engagement is largely a positive behavioural choice, and that civic engagement is foremost an opportunity to empower and support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. Although it was evident that the term instigated levels of confusion initially, by the end of the focus groups and after discussion, students were able to share and challenge personal experiences of civic engagement, and discuss what they understand constitutes one being civically engaged.

Within the focus groups, civic engagement was described as a global phenomenon, meaning it should take place across countries rather than on a local level, a seemingly unique consideration. During the focus groups, participants debated their understanding of civic engagement, discussing whether it was actually about supporting and protecting

third world countries, rather than pertaining to the country or community in which one exists. Interestingly, a participant within the focus group then introduced the question of civic engagement in a more local perspective and was keen to discuss what it may look like in London, or specifically in the diverse and disadvantage borough of London in which the focus group was being conducted, and this interpersonal and community focus was more illustrative of the literature than the global perspective. This perspective of civic engagement may be due to the diversity of the sample, with many being born outside of the UK.

Considering the breadth of literature surrounding political civic engagement, this global macro level perspective was interesting finding within the focus groups. It also proposes a contradiction, as many previous studies have found that civic engagement is far more prevalent in affluent populations and affluent geographical locations (Beetham, 1994). Much of the discussions witnessed among this cohort during the focus group centred around the significance of civic engagement in encouraging empowerment, the sharing of knowledge, and in achieving equality, both locally and globally. Although the political domain of civic engagement of civic engagement did surface, it was certainly perceived by this cohort to be secondary as the conversations gained more depth, and gained less significance to the other types of civic engagement discussed. According to the UEL consensus report, within the school of Health sports and Bioscience, 61% of students were female students during the time of data collection, and many were mature students, which is reflected in the participants who took part in the focus groups.

While this research did tally with mainstream notions of civic engagement and what being civically engaged entails described in the existing literature, the focus groups also added new dimensions, including familial structures and parenthood being a potential facilitator for civic engagement, civic engagement being a vehicle for improving health literacy, and the global perspective of civic engagement. The finding that support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups was the primary example of civic engagement according to this cohort of university students resonates in the existing literature broadly conceptualising civic engagement behaviour. Focus group participants identified lack of trust as a barrier

to being civically engaged. The data collected surrounding socio-economic issues of isolation and prejudice as a barrier to civic engagement may support the validation of the hypothesis presented for this research study overall, whereby determinants and life course factors were hypothesised to impact civic engagement as with health behaviours.

Limitations

The focus group element was based on convenience sampling, thus, unlike the other two elements of empirical data collected, the participants were all enrolled in the same overarching school of the university. While this meant there was little diversity in subject area, the merits of recruiting all participants from the same school did mean that for the most part participants did know each other and feel comfortable to challenge one-an-other.

4.3 Conclusion

A literature review alongside three separate forms of empirical data collection are presented overall within this thesis in order to answer the former identified research questions and study aims. The development and facilitation of these focus groups was the very first piece of data collection within this thesis and the learning and findings has input to the design of the survey and the qualitative interview element. In consideration of the widespread confusion surrounding the conceptualisation of the term civic engagement, it is hoped that these focus groups have the potential to further establish clarity of the term in the context of widening participation universities, and to determine whether the findings are reflective and thus tally with those or aid those in current literature. The aim(s) of the focus groups was to provide a deeper level of understanding of what civic engagement means to the population of focus within this research study, and what they perceived to be potential barriers and facilitators for uptake of civic engagement, while simultaneously acknowledging the current rhetoric within mainstream understandings of the term in this current growing literature climate. The focus group data collected provided valuable insight, including personal experiences of student's barriers and facilitators, communal notions surrounding the term, as well as a set of over-arching

themes for defining the term in this context of higher education; a context in which the term is increasingly prevalent. (Brammer et al, 2014).

Across all 3 of the focus groups, participants initially expressed confusion about the term civic engagement, although this quickly developed into a collaborative and rich discussion about what the term civic engagement means, where it happens and what it may look like in practice. The narrative surfacing throughout the focus groups was that civic engagement is largely a positive behavioural choice, and that civic engagement is foremost an opportunity to empower and support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society, and this was a theme echoed in all of the discussions and with the highest amount of references and coverage during analysis on QSR Nvivo. The focus groups and the discussions about the need for more civic engagement in developing counties also added a new and global perspective to the conversations. Although it was evident that the term instigated levels of confusion initially, by the end of the focus groups students were able to share and challenge personal experiences of civic engagement, and discuss what should constitute as a sound example of one being civically engaged, but also on how civic engagement fluctuates across the life course in terms of amounts and also domains.

Questions such as *is helping an elderly neighbour an example of being civically engaged?* and *what if a person was being paid to be civically engaged?* were considered within the focus groups. Students throughout the focus groups began to challenge other's concepts of not only what civic engagement may look like in practice, but also who civic engagement is – or should be - for. During the focus groups, there was very little discussion surrounding the political aspects of being civically engaged (as is found to be a prominent example in much of the mainstream literature) and instead the student's conversation about civic engagement was fundamentally about the empowerment and protection of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. It was common during the focus groups that civic engagement was largely about the protection and support of vulnerable members of society such as young people, homeless populations or drug

addicts in a variety of ways. This became increasingly apparent during data collection and was highlighted further during the data familiarization and coding process.

Within the focus groups, civic engagement was described as a global phenomenon, a seemingly unique consideration. During the focus groups, participants debated whether civic engagement was actually about supporting and protecting third world countries, rather than subjective to the country or community in which one exists, which is the more prevalent approach across the literature. Interestingly, a participant within the focus group then breeched the question of civic engagement in a more local perspective and was keen to discuss what it may look like in London, or specifically in the borough of London in which the focus group was being conducted, and this approach to understanding and discussing the term was more illustrative of the mainstream literature. Considering the breadth of literature surrounding civic engagement, and much of it focusing on political engagement, this global perspective was an interesting finding within the focus groups. It also proposes a contradiction, as vast studies have found that civic engagement is far more prevalent in affluent populations and affluent geographical locations. (Beetham, 1994). Much of the discussions witnessed among this cohort during the focus group centred around the significance of civic engagement in encouraging empowerment, the sharing of knowledge, and in achieving equality, both locally and globally. Although the political domain of civic engagement did surface, it was certainly perceived by this cohort to be secondary as the conversations gained more depth.

While this research did tally with mainstream notions of civic engagement and what being civically engaged entails, the focus groups also added new dimensions, including familial structures and parenthood being a potential facilitator for civic engagement, the highlighting of civic engagement being a vehicle for improving health literacy, and the global perspective of civic engagement. It was also not reflective of the literature that support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups was the primary example of civic engagement according to this cohort of university students. The data collected surrounding socio-economic issues of isolation and prejudice as a barrier to civic

engagement may support the validation of the hypothesis presented for this research study overall and will be explored further within this thesis.

5. Chapter five: Results of the cross-sectional cohort study

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This survey sought to demonstrate whether this cohort of students was civically engaged, the early life predictors for civic engagement, and its relationship to health and wellbeing. This results chapter presents the findings of the second empirical research component designed and conducted as part of this thesis. The first part of this survey was developed using life course theory, and by adapting questions used within life course research which focus on one's early childhood experiences, and these variables are presented. The second part of the survey collected data on civic engagement behaviours, and was an adapted survey based on the FDQ-CE, validated at UEL. A background to this validation can be found within this Methods Chapter, Chapter 3. In some cases, civic engagement has been divided into civic and political engagement, (Barret and Zani, 2015) or is split into acts of civic engagement, for instance voting in a general election. (Barrett and Zani, 2015). For the purpose of this survey component, civic engagement is reflected in the form of 5 domains as reflected across the literature.

These domains are as follows:

A. Domain A: Politics

This includes questions regarding uptake of political behaviours, such as voting and campaigning.

B. Domain B: Membership in groups

This domain includes questions about different groups, for example sports groups, creative groups and university societies.

C. Domain C: Volunteering

This domain asks about different forms of volunteering, including volunteering in your local community, through work or school, or mentoring and befriending projects.

D. Domain D: Social Networks

This domain is about understanding social networks, including peer and family networks.

E. Domain E: Knowledge and Information

This domain relates to reading the newspaper and keeping up to date with global news.

It has been routinely argued that we cannot assume that research conducted in America relating to social networks, civic engagement and belonging can be applied in the UK because of the inevitable cultural and environmental differences experienced by citizens in these two countries. (Morrow et al, 1999). Building on this, and as the majority of the research conducted on civic engagement (especially in the setting of higher education) has been conducted in the America, this study has the potential to add to the UK evidence base, and therefore aid our understanding of civic engagement among student populations within this context and its association with health. The survey for this study was designed using literature and previous surveys. It was administered online and made up of three main sections: early life, civic engagement, and health and wellbeing. Civic engagement is a growing area of interest especially for this University which has been coined London's leading university for civic engagement – making this proposed study of great significance in terms of research outputs for the University of East London alone.

Throughout this chapter, the cross-sectional cohort findings are presented using the survey data that was collected throughout 2016-18. This chapter begins by providing a socio-demographic profile of the cohort. It includes a description of early life and civic engagement prevalence. Responses to nationally validated health and wellbeing scales (including the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and the Single Item Self-Esteem Scale) are included, followed by findings, discussions and conclusions. Bi-variable and multiple regression was used to identify explanatory variables, which were

used to in the multiple regression model for all 3 sections of the survey for the sampling method adopted to identify participants for the life history interview component.

5.2 Overall description of the Sample

Socio-demographic profile of survey participants

A total of 240 students took part in this survey overall, although as indicated in the 'all available' and 'complete data' columns in the table below, not all the participants completed all sections of the survey, calculated and presented in a 'missing data' column throughout the descriptive tables. The inclusion of these columns portrays the amount of missing data per variable for all sections and variables included within the survey. This shows the number of participants who completed the whole survey, but also allows an insight into potential variations between the group who did and did reported slightly higher civic engagement - although upon completing a variance test it was found that this was not statistically significant. Overall there was 35% missing data. The response rate for this survey was not good, and as recruitment often happened during lectures, many students were not able to complete in the 20 minutes allocated and did not return to finish.

All participants were university students enrolled at the University of East London during the time of data collection (2016-18). The survey participants were predominantly female and were diverse in terms of ethnic group and country of birth. Ages of participants within this study ranged from 18-56, and the mean age was 23 years. Participants reported that they were from a range of courses at the University of East London including media; dance; psychology; business; law; and a range of sport therapy related courses. Although it should be noted that for the most part the survey participants were enrolled within the school of health, sports and bioscience, due to in-lecture survey recruitments bring dominantly supported by lecturers from this school.

Table 1: Description of socio-demographic variables

Variable	Categories	All Available Data			Complete Data	
		N (total)	n	%	n/Mean	%
Age	(continuous) min 18-max 56	231	28.2	9.66	153 /26.4	8.83
Gender	Female	223	168	75.34	105	68.63
	Male	223	55	24.66	48	31.37
Nationality	British	219	164	74.89	117	76
	Non-British	219	55	25.11	36	24
Ethnicity	Black	224	96	45	65	42.48
	White	224	69	33	60	39.22
	Asian	224	23	11	16	10.46
	Mixed	224	23	11	12	7.84
country of birth	Born in UK	224	113	51	88	57.52
	Not born in the UK	224	111	50	65	42.48
Marital Status	single	210	145	65	106	69.28
	Married/civil partnership / co-habiting	210	30	13	20	13.07
	In a relationship	210	35	15	27	17.65
parental status	parent	224	61	27.23	36	23.53
	Not a parent	224	163	73	117	76.47
Carer?	carer	224	36	16	20	13.07
	Not a carer	224	118	84	133	86.93
Current residence	alone	205	27	13	15	9.80
	with family	205	141	69	107	69.93
	in a multi-occupancy household	205	37	18	1	20.26
Household size	1-2	205	49	24	35	23
	3-6	205	142	69	106	66
	more than 6	205	14	6	12	8

Table 1 is a socio-demographic description of the students who took part in this civic engagement and health survey between 2016 and 2018. The participants were undergraduate and master's students enrolled on a variety of courses and recruited at The University of East London. The table shows a diverse socio-demographic cohort of respondents in terms of age, ethnic group and nationality. Almost half of the cohort identified themselves as 'black' ethnic group (n96). The differences between the all available data and complete data columns indicates that complete data across the socio-demographic variables is less than all available data, meaning that not all respondents answered every question in all 3 sections of the survey. For example, while there are 168 females in the 'all available' data there is 105 in the complete data. The participants in this survey were from a range of undergraduate, masters and PhD courses at the

university, and included mature students. While the ages of participants ranged from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 56, the mean age of all survey participants was 23 years of age, with a standard deviation of 9.6. As indicated in *table 1,* the highest age group who participated in this survey were age 18-21 (n76) and 18% of the survey participants were over 45 years of age.

This table shows that the vast majority of the participants reported themselves to be 'single', and around 50% were born in the UK. The survey participants were predominantly female; just one quarter of all survey participants reported themselves to be male (25%). Almost half of the participants (45%) were of black African / black Caribbean ethnicity, while 33% registered themselves as white, 10% as Asian and 10% as mixed ethnicities. One quarter of the survey respondents were not born in the UK (25%). 75% of participants reported their nationality as British. A large proportion in both all available and complete data of the survey participants reported themselves as single rather than married or in a relationship, while 27% of the participants are parents, and 16% reported themselves to be carers.

Early life: description of sample

Due to the scale of information collected, the presentation of the early life data collected within this survey has been split into three sub-headings which are socioeconomics during early life, childhood home environment and childhood networks.

Table 2: Childhood socioeconomic table

Variable	Categories	All Available Data			Complete Data	
		N (total)	n/Mean	Std. Deviation	n/Mean	Std. Deviation
Mother's employment	never in employment	195	36	18	22	14.34
	employed less than half of childhood	195	22	11	19	12.42
	employed more than half of childhood	195	32	16	24	15.69

	always in employment	195	84	41	71	46.41
	did not grow up with my mother	195	5	2	4	2.61
	don't know	195	16	8.21	13	8.50
Mother's working habit	mother worked full time	187	85	41	67	44
	mother worked part time	187	32	16	29	19
	mother worked part and full time	187	38	19	31	20
	don't know	187	24	13	18	12
	other	187	8	4.28	8	5
Mother's education	she did not go to school	195	15	7	8	5
	she completed primary school	195	10	5	10	7
	she completed secondary school	195	58	28	48	31
	she completed college or A levels	195	41	20	33	22
	She completed an apprenticeship	195	9	5	7	5
	she completed a university degree	195	32	16	23	15
	higher than a university degree	195	8	4	6	4
	don't know	195	22	11	18	12
Father's employment	never in employment	196	4	2	1	0.65
	employed less than half of childhood	196	8	4	5	3
	employed more than half of childhood	196	16	8	13	9
	always in employment	196	134	68	106	69
	did not grow up with my father	196	17	9	13	9
	don't know	196	17	9	13	10
Father's working habits	father worked full time	197	153	77	119	78
	father worked part time	197	4	2	4	3
	father worked part and full time	197	15	8	12	8
	don't know	197	23	12	18	12
	other	197	2	1	0	0
Father's education	he did not go to school	197	9	4	5	3
	he completed primary school	197	7	3	5	3
	he completed secondary school	197	48	23	43	28

	he completed collage or A levels	197	25	12	23	15
	he completed an apprenticeship	197	15	7	10	7
	he completed a university degree	197	39	19	30	20
	higher than a university degree	197	17	8	11	7
	don't know	197	37	19	26	17
Childhood home tenure	Local authority owned	199	39	21.13	30	21.13
	Owned by family	199	100	51.41	73	51.41
	Privately rented	199	20	6.34	9	6.34
	Family buying with financial help	199	24	14.06	20	14.06
	Don't know and other	199	16	8.05	10	7.04

The highest category of parent's education, for both mother and father, was the completion of secondary school. 5% of participants reported their father did not attend primary school and so did not receive any education, and 7% reported their mother did not attend primary school. Only 4% of the survey cohort who completed all questions reported that their mothers had received a university degree, whereas 19% of the participant's fathers and 16% of the participant's mothers completed a university degree in total. More than 75% of the participant's fathers worked full time during their childhoods, and 68% reported that their fathers were always employed. Almost 10% of the sample did not grow up with their father, and just 2% did not grow up with their mother, although these percentages could also be overlapped. 32% of the sample left their family home at 18 years of age. 50% of the cohort reported that their family owned the house that they resided in during their childhoods, while 21% reported that their childhood home was local authority owned, and this figure remains the same for both all available and complete data.

Early-life home environment

Table 3: Description of early-life home environment variables

Variable	Categories	All Available Data			Complete Data	
		N (total)	n/Mean	% / Std. Deviation	n/Mean	% / Std. Deviation

Childhood home	Lived in a family home during childhood	202	192	95.05	136	95.77
	Did not live in a family home during childhood	202	6	2.97	2	1.41
	Lived in a family home for part of childhood	202	4	1.98	4	2.82
Parents	During childhood parents were together	194	122	62.89	87	61.27
	During childhood parents were divorced	194	45	23.20	33	23.24
	Parents together for part of childhood	194	27	13.92	22	15.49
Family Stability	Parents separated when participant was 0 – 5 years	142	25	17.61	25	17.61
	5-10 years	195	16	11.27	16	11.27
	10 – 15 years	195	13	9.15	13	9.15
	Older than 15 years	195	10	7.04	10	7.04
	Parents did not divorce	195	78	54.93	78	54.93
family relationship	Very positive	200	124	62	88	61.97
	Fairly positive	200	45	22.50	31	21.83
	ok	200	18	9	11	7.75
	Fairly negative	200	9	4.50	8	5.63
	Very negative	200	4	2	4	2.82

Just over 95% of the survey respondents lived in a family home during childhood, and this is slightly higher in the 'complete data' column, in which 95.77% of complete observations lived in a family home during childhood. More than half (51.41%) of the students who participated in the survey grew up in a home that was owned by their family, and 1 fifth of the participants reported that their childhood home was local authority owned. 63% of the survey participants reported that their parents were together during their childhood, and the remaining 37% reported their parents were divorced during their childhood. The majority of these parent's separations were reported to have happened when the participants were between 0-5 years of age, and just 7% happened during late teenage years when the participants were 25 or older. Of the 200 available respondents, 124 (62%) reported themselves as having a 'very good' family relationship, although just 88 of these participants went on to complete the full survey. Just 3% of the survey

participants reported that they did not live in a family home during their childhood, and 2% reported that they had a 'very negative' family relationship during childhood.

Table 4: Childhood networks

Variable	Categories	All Available Data	Complete Data		
		N (total)	n/Mean	%	n	%
Neighbourhood relationship	Good relationship with local neighbours during childhood	202	145	71.78	92	64.79
	Sometimes good	202	48	23.76	42	29.58
	Not a good relationship with local neighbours during childhood	202	9	4.46	8	
Community connections	Very connected	200	56	28	35	24.65
	Quite connected	200	48	24	35	24.65
	Moderately connected	200	55	27.50	45	31.69
	Not very connected	200	28	14	18	12.68
	Not connected at all	200	13	6.50	9	6.34
School Experiences	Enjoyed school	200	64	31.84	41	28.87
	Quite enjoyed school	201	63	31.34	46	32.39
	Moderately enjoyed school	201	46	22.89	35	24.65
	Didn't enjoy school very much	201	18	8.96	14	9.86
	Didn't enjoy school at all	201	10	4.98	6	4.23

In the above table, almost three quarters (145 participants) of the cohort described their relationship with local neighbours as 'good' during their childhood, while under 'community connections', the most popular category was 'moderately connected' with 27.5% of the cohort selecting this option. However, in total, 79.5% of this cohort reported themselves as being moderately, quite, or very connected during their childhoods. For the most part, this cohort reported to have had a good experience at school, with 32% reporting the most positive option available that they 'enjoyed school', and 31% reporting again that they 'quite enjoyed' school. 9% did not enjoy school very much, and 5% had a very bad experience at school. These numbers do not differ notably between the all available or complete datasets, indicating that those who did not go on to complete all sections of the survey had not reported very different early life experiences as those who had not.

Self-reported health and wellbeing

Section 3 of the survey compromised a range of pre-validated scales for self-reported health and wellbeing. These included aspects of the SF-36 nationally validated health survey (Ware and Sherbourne, 1992) the 'Single Item Self Esteem Scale' (SISE), the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) (Taggart et al, 2015), and the Self efficacy scale (Shwarzer, 2014). To understand the health and wellbeing of this cohort further, the results of these scales have in some cases been compared to national averages or findings from similar studies in the discussions section.

Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (WEMWBS)

Table 5: Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (WEMWBS)

Variable (self reported)	Categories	All Available Data			Complete Data	
		N (total)	n/Mean	%	n/Mean	%
Feeling optimistic about the future	none of the time	0	0	0	0	0
	rarely	161	23	14	14	11
	some of the time	161	53	33	44	37
	often	161	64	40	49	41
	all of the time	161	21	13	12	10
I have been feeling useful	none of the time	161	3	2	3	3
	rarely	161	26	16	19	16
	some of the time	161	57	35	44	37
	often	161	49	30	39	33
	all of the time	161	26	16	14	12
I have been feeling relaxed	none of the time	161	3	2	2	2
	rarely	161	43	26	30	25
	some of the time	161	65	40	51	43
	often	161	39	24	32	27
	all of the time	161	11	7	4	3
I have been feeling interested in other people	none of the time	161	5	3	3	3
	rarely	161	32	20	24	20
	some of the time	161	56	35	41	35
	often	161	48	30	36	30
	all of the time	161	20	12	15	13
I have had energy to spare	none of the time	161	12	7	9	8
	rarely	161	44	27	33	28
	some of the time	161	59	36	46	39
	often	161	35	22	23	20
	all of the time	161	11	7	8	7
	none of the time	161	1	1	0	0
	rarely	161	27	17	21	18

I have been dealing with problems well	some of the time	161	64	40	47	40
	often	161	58	36	42	35
	all of the time	161	17	11	9	8
I have been thinking clearly	none of the time	161	2	1	1	1
	rarely	161	24	15	19	16
	some of the time	161	60	37	43	36
	often	161	58	36	46	39
	all of the time	161	17	11	10	8
I have been feeling good about myself	none of the time	161	3	2	2	2
	rarely	161	32	20	23	20
	some of the time	161	47	29	37	31
	often	161	55	34	43	36
	all of the time	161	24	15	14	12
I have been feeling close to other people	none of the time	161	1	1	1	1
	rarely	161	27	17	19	16
	some of the time	161	67	42	49	41
	often	161	47	29	37	31
	all of the time	161	19	12	13	11
I have been feeling confident	none of the time	161	4	2	3	3
	rarely	161	35	22	26	22
	some of the time	161	55	34	40	34
	often	161	46	29	36	30
	all of the time	161	21	13	14	12
I have been able to make up my own mind about things	none of the time	161	2	1	2	2
	rarely	161	15	9	10	8
	some of the time	161	50	31	37	31
	often	161	65	40	51	43
	all of the time	161	28	18	19	16
I have been feeling loved	none of the time	161	4	2	0	0
	rarely	161	24	15	21	18
	some of the time	161	49	30	36	30
	often	161	47	29	35	29
	all of the time	161	37	23	27	22
I have been interested in new things	none of the time	161	4	2	2	2
	rarely	161	25	15	20	17
	some of the time	161	51	32	39	33
	often	161	56	35	43	36
	all of the time	161	25	16	15	13
I have been feeling cheerful	none of the time	161	2	1	1	1
	rarely	161	31	19	24	20
	some of the time	161	60	37	42	35
	often	161	49	30	41	34
	all of the time	161	19	12	11	9

This table shows the responses for the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale for all available and complete data. The minimum Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale score found within this cohort was 25, and the maximum was 70, which

is the highest possible score. The lowest possible Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale score within the scale is 14, however this was not evident within this student cohort. The mean Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale score for this cohort was 46.98, with a Standard Deviation (SD) of 10.10. For complete data, the total number of observations was 119. The mean score was 46.72, with a standard deviation of 9.74. Both of the means for all available and complete datasets are below the national average.

24% of the participants scored 40 or less than 40 for the scale, and a further 24% scored between 41 and 45. 52% of the participants scored more than 45.
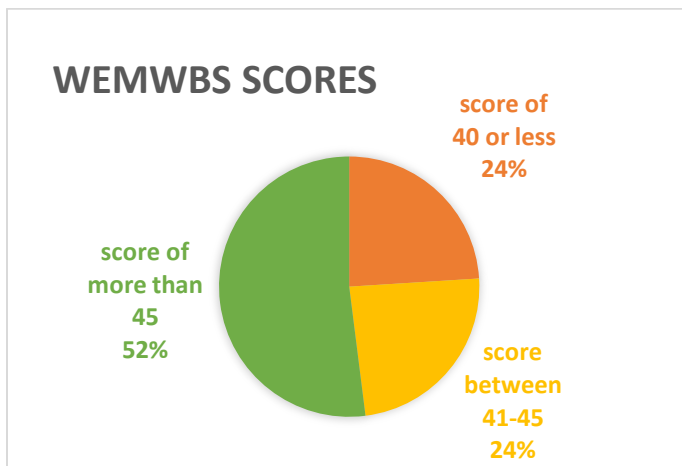
Self-efficacy Scale
Table 6: Self-efficacy Scale

Variable *(self-efficacy)*	Categories	All Available Data			Complete Data		
		N (total)	n/Mean	Std. Deviation	N (total)	n/Mean	Std. Deviation
I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	not at all	159	3	2	118	2	1
	hardly true	159	18	11	118	13	11
	moderately true	159	98	62	118	78	66
	exactly true	159	40	25	118	25	21
if someone opposes me I can find means and ways to get what I want	not at all	159	6	4	118	5	4
	hardly true	159	33	21	118	22	19
	moderately true	159	103	65	118	82	69
	exactly true	159	17	11	118	9	8

it is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish what I want	not at all	159	5	3	118	3	3
	hardly true	159	18	11	118	14	12
	moderately true	159	106	67	118	78	66
	exactly true	159	30	18	118	23	19
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	not at all	159	4	3	118	3	3
	hardly true	159	24	15	118	17	14
	moderately true	159	103	65	118	77	65
	exactly true	159	28	18	118	21	18
thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	not at all	159	5	3	118	3	3
	hardly true	159	25	16	118	18	15
	moderately true	159	100	63	118	77	65
	exactly true	159	29	18	118	20	17
I can solve problems if I invest the necessary effort	not at all	159	2	1	118	1	1
	hardly true	159	6	9	118	4	3
	moderately true	159	92	58	118	72	61
	exactly true	159	56	35	118	41	35
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my own coping abilities	not at all	159	7	4	118	5	4
	hardly true	159	20	13	118	14	12
	moderately true	159	93	59	118	70	59
	exactly true	159	39	25	118	29	25
when I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	not at all	159	5	3	118	3	3
	hardly true	159	27	17	118	20	17
	moderately true	159	98	62	118	75	65
	exactly true	159	29	18	118	20	17
if I am in trouble I can usually think of a solution	not at all	159	3	2	118	2	2
	hardly true	159	21	13	118	17	14
	moderately true	159	102	65	118	76	64
	exactly true	159	33	20	118	23	19
I can usually handle whatever comes my way	not at all	159	3	2	118	1	1
	hardly true	159	19	12	118	13	11
	moderately true	159	103	65	118	81	69
	exactly true	159	34	21	118	23	19

(The General Self-Efficacy Scale is correlated to emotion, optimism, work satisfaction. Negative coefficients were found for depression, stress, health complaints, burnout, and anxiety)

The responses / categories collected in the self-efficacy scale were scored from 1-4 as advised in the user guides for this scale. (Shwarzer et al, 1995). The mean score for the self-efficacy scale for all available data in this cohort was 30.22 with a standard deviation of 5.17. The minimum score found was 10, and the maximum was 40, which are both the

lowest and highest possible scores for the self-efficacy scale. The average scores reported within the complete data sample were almost identical, with a mean average of 30.22, a standard deviation of 4.80, followed by the same minimum and maximum scores as in the 'all available' data sample. This shows that there is little to no difference between the self-efficacy scores of participants who did or did not complete all sections of the survey, however there was slightly less deviation evident within the findings for the complete data.

General health and self-reported happiness (SF-36 RANDS)

Table 7: General health and self-reported happiness (SF-36 RANDS)

Variable (self-reported)	Categories	All Available Data			Complete Data	
		N (total)	n/Mean	%	n/Mean	%
general health	Excellent	172	41	24	32	25
	Very good	172	51	30	38	30
	Good	172	58	34	42	33
	Fair	172	18	10	12	10
	Poor	172	4	2	2	2
Taking all things together, would you say you are:	very happy	119	39	24	29	24
	quite happy	119	77	48	59	50
	not very happy	119	27	17	17	14
	not at all happy	119	4	2	2	2
	don't know	119	13	8	11	9
	prefer not to say	119	1	1	1	1

In this cohort, students have reported relatively high levels of happiness, with almost 50% of respondents selecting the 'quite happy' category and less than a quarter specifying that they are unhappy. 50% of participants who completed the whole survey reported themselves to be 'quite happy' and only 16% reported themselves to be unhappy in the two data categories.

For general health, more than three quarters of the cohort reported their health to be either good, very good or excellent (88%) and this number remained the same for complete data.

Table 8: Single item self-esteem scale (SISE)

Variable (self-reported)	All Available Data			Complete Data		
	N (total)	n/Mean	Std. Deviation	N (total)	n/Mean	Std. Deviation
Self esteem	159	4.64	1.65	118	4.56	1.70

The SISE is a single scale for participants to report self-esteem and is an adaptation of a longer and more detailed self-esteem scale. The minimum available response on this scale is 0, and the maximum response is 7. The mean for this group of university students was 4.64 for all available data and 4.56 for complete data (SD 1.65 and 1.70) showing there was little difference in the reported self-esteem for the two groups. This shows that on average, this cohort has reported good or high self-esteem.

5.3 Civic engagement

This section aims to present an over-view of civic engagement behaviour as reported by this sample of university students. It includes descriptions of civic engagement behaviour across the 5 domains included within the survey and presents civic engagement alongside socio-demographic data.

A summary of self-reported civic engagement

The aim of this section is to provide a description of self-reported civic engagement across the specified domains for this cohort of students, to understand the prevalence of civic engagement in this context and who is or is not civically engaged.

Table 9: civic engagement prevalence

FDQ	n	All available			Complete data			
		mean	Std. dev	95% Conf. Interval	n	mean	Std. dev	95% Conf. Interval
Average frequency	240	8.35	5.01	7.72 , 8.99	142	10.19	3.85	9.55 , 10.83
Average density	240	2.07	1.26	1.91 , 2.23	142	2.50	.94	2.34 , 2.65

Average quality	203	2.66	1.07	2.52 , 2.81	142	2.77	1.05	2.60 , 2.95

Table 1 shows the prevalence of civic engagement averages for frequency, density and quality among the survey cohort, as responded to section 2 of the survey, the FDQ-CE. This table is reporting an overall average for frequency, density and quality reflective of all 5 domains included within the survey. The mean for frequency for all available data shows that across all examples of civic engagement asked about within the survey across the 5 domains, the average amount of behaviours engaged in by this cohort was 8, which is less than half of the total included within the survey. The complete data columns show that out of 240 respondents, 142 of these answered all sections of the survey and have complete data. In the complete data column, the mean and 95% confidence intervals for frequency and density averages is higher than that for all available data, indicating that those respondents who completed the entire survey are likely to take up more forms of civic engagement across the 5 domains included within this survey than those who did not.

Table 10: civic engagement prevalence across the domains

Civic engagement domain	**Complete data**											
	Frequency				**Density**				**Quality**			
	n	mean	Std. dev	95% Conf. Interval	n	mean	Std. dev	95% Conf. Interval	n	mean	Std. dev	95% Conf. Interval

A: politics	142	2.45	.20	2.02 , 2.47	125	.56	.23	.52 .60	125	.58	.23	.54 , .62
B: groups	142	1.5	1.3	1.29 , 1.75	98	.65	.27	.60.71	98	.77	.25	.72 , .82
C: volunteering	142	.88	1.03	.71 , 1.05	72	.58	.24	.52 .64	72	.77	.26	.71 , .84
D: social networks	142	2.64	1.10	2.46 , 2.83	133	.69	.20	.66 .73	133	.75	.19	.72 , .78
E: knowledge & info	142	2.88	1.18	2.68 , 3.07	131	.65	.20	.61 .68	131	.67	.20	.63 , .70

This table shows the prevalence of civic engagement across the 5 domains included within the survey for all available and for complete data. The mean and the 95% confidence intervals for domain E, knowledge and information, is highest in comparison to all other domains of civic engagement, and this is reflected in both the 'all available' and the 'complete data' columns. The least engaged in domain for this cohort was domain C, volunteering, also reflected both in the 'all available' and the 'complete data' columns. This table shows little difference in density of civic engagement across the 5 domains, suggesting that while civic engagement frequency varies depending on activity; density of civic engagement is not so subjective for this cohort. This cohort reported political forms of civic engagement to have the least amount of quality in comparison to all other domains included within the survey, again this is evident within both the 'all available' and 'complete data' columns. Despite having the lowest frequency amongst this cohort, domain C (volunteering) scored highly in comparison to the other domains for quality, suggesting that it is one of the most meaningful forms of civic engagement to this cohort of students. Also, table 11 suggests that those respondents who completed the whole survey are more civically engaged than those who did not.

The highest frequency of civic engagement was in domain E, which is knowledge and information, and the lowest was in domain c, volunteering. However, domain E showed

the lowest 'quality' meaning students did not feel it to be a particularly meaningful experience, while domain c actually showed the highest quality averages.

The highest frequency was 19, meaning that across the 5 domains and out of all available civic engagement behaviours identified in the survey (24) the most civic engagement activities engaged in was 19. The mean was 9 across both genders, meaning out of the civic engagement behaviours included in the survey, the average amount of uptake was 9 of these across all 5 domains.

This section shows civic engagement by socio-demographic variables, to relay any differences between groups.

Table 11: civic engagement by socio-demographics

Gender	n	Frequency			Density			Quality		
		Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval	Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval	Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval
Female	168	.36	8.97	8.24 , 9.69	.0925058	2.21	2.03 , 2.39	.1018965	2.39	2.19 , 2.59
Male	55	.59	8.85	7.66 , 10.04	.1465095	2.22	1.92 , 2.51	.1605289	2.46	2.13 , 2.78

The table above reports civic engagement by gender and shows that there is little difference for males and females in terms of the amount of civic engagement behaviours engaged in (frequency), the density and quality of these.

Table 12: civic engagement by socio-demographics cont.

Ethnic Group	n	Frequency			Density			Quality		
		Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval	Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval	Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval
Black	96	7.40	8.40	.50 , 9.41	.13	2.17	1.91 , 2.43	.1396822	2.28	2.00 , 2.56

	n	Frequency			Density			Quality		
White	69	10.20	10.20	9.18 , 11.21	.12	2.45	2.19 , 2.70	.13 98872	2.77	2.50 , 3.05
Asian	23	.99	9.30	7.23 , 11.37	1.72	2.23	.24 2.74	.28 11457	2.38	1.80 , 2.96
Mixed	23	.82	7.56	5.85 , 9.27	.23	2.10	1.62 , 2.59	.24 81967	2.26	1.75 , 2.78

The table above shows the frequency, density and quality of civic engagement by ethnic group, and indicates that participants who identified as a white ethnic group reported to take part in slightly more civic engagement activities (mean: 10.20) however there was little difference reported in the density and quality for participants across the groups.

Table 13: civic engagement by marital status

Marital Status	n	Frequency			Density			Quality		
		Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval	Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval	Std. Err.	mean	95% Conf. Interval
Single	145	.36	8.88	8.15 , 9.61	.09	2.21	2.03 , 2.39	.10	2.43	2.23 , 2.63
Married	30	.82	8.86	7.18 , 10.54	.20	2.15	1.73 , 2.57	.22	2.27	1.80 , 2.73
In a relationship	35	.82	9.77	8.08 , 11.45	.20	2.30	1.87 , 2.72	.23	2.54	2.07 , 3.02

The table above shows the civic engagement levels per marital status. It tells us that there is little difference in frequency, density and quality for those who are single, married or in a relationship.

The civic engagement score

The civic engagement score is a self-reported measure of civic engagement activity weighted by intensity and impact of frequency, density, and quality on participants. It was developed for analysis purposes, using all responses to civic engagement frequency, density, and quality across the 5 domains specified within current literature and outlined

within the survey. The lowest civic engagement score detected was 2.06, and the highest was 28.66. The mean for the complete data sample is very slightly higher than that found within the 'all available' data – implying that those who answered the entire survey may be very slightly more civically engaged across the 5 given domains, although not significantly.

Table 14: civic engagement score

Variable (self-reported)	All Available Data			Complete Data		
	N (total)	Mean	Std. Deviation	N (total)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Civic engagement Score	203	15.00	5.50	142	15.47	5.47

Civic engagement Categories

To visualise student's levels and forms of civic engagement among this cohort, the responses to the civic engagement section were used to develop categories reflecting student's levels of civic engagement across the 5 specified domains.
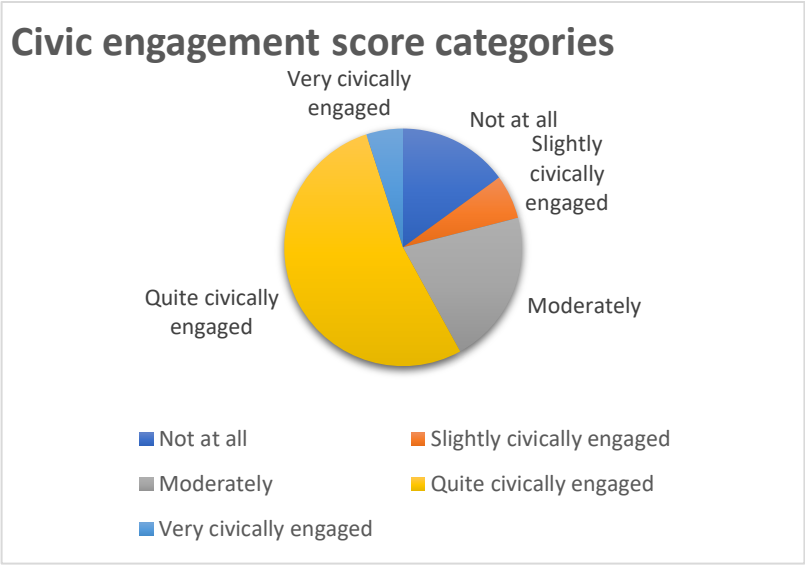
Just over half of the participants fell within the 'quite civically engaged' category (53%) across all 5 domains included within the survey. Only 11% were categorised as very civically engaged, which was less than those who were not at all civically engaged (15%).

Almost a quarter of this cohort were categorised as being 'moderately' Civic Engagement Prevalence Tables by socio-economic variables

5.4 Findings

Ordinary least square regression has been carried out using all early life variables and civic engagement (6.1), all early life variables and self-reported health (6.1) and self-reported health and civic engagement (6.3). All variables that have shown significance during bi-variable analysis with outcome variables (civic engagement score and health and wellbeing scores) have been fitted into the multi-variable analysis, as presented throughout this section.

Early Life, demographics and Civic Engagement bi-variable analysis

Ordinary least square bi-variable regression was used to determine whether the early life variables included within this dataset could be considered as explanatory variables for the civic engagement score. All early life variables were converted to binary variables for analysis purposes. Bi-variable regression was carried out using every socio-demographic and early life course variable separately, with the civic engagement score as the dependent variable. Socio-demographic variables included age, gender, parent, carer, ethnic group, marital status. Many of the results showed no statistical significance, implying that socio-demographic data or early life experiences in this case may not be considered as a statistically significant for civic engagement. There was a statistically significant result ($p>5$) in the regression for ethnic group and FDQ score, and this was increased when only considering the results in the complete dataset.

This showed that participants who reported themselves as being of white ethnic group were likely to have a slightly higher civic engagement score than participants who identified themselves as belonging to the other three ethnic groups. This finding was also present using Poisson regression. In the case of all available data, the adjusted R squared result of 0.03 tells us that the variable ethnic group white is 3% likely to make a change in the dependent variable, which is the civic engagement score.

Two of the early life variables did show strong significance using ordinary least square regression, and these were parent's relationship and family disruption (n203). Results of ordinary least square regression showed a strong significance with family disruption and civic engagement score (0.01) and adjusted R-square of 0.02. Similar to parent's relationship during childhood, which was also significant (0.01). The regression results for both of these variables reported confidence intervals of 1.24-12.52 parent's relationship and 1.48-12.45 for family disruption.
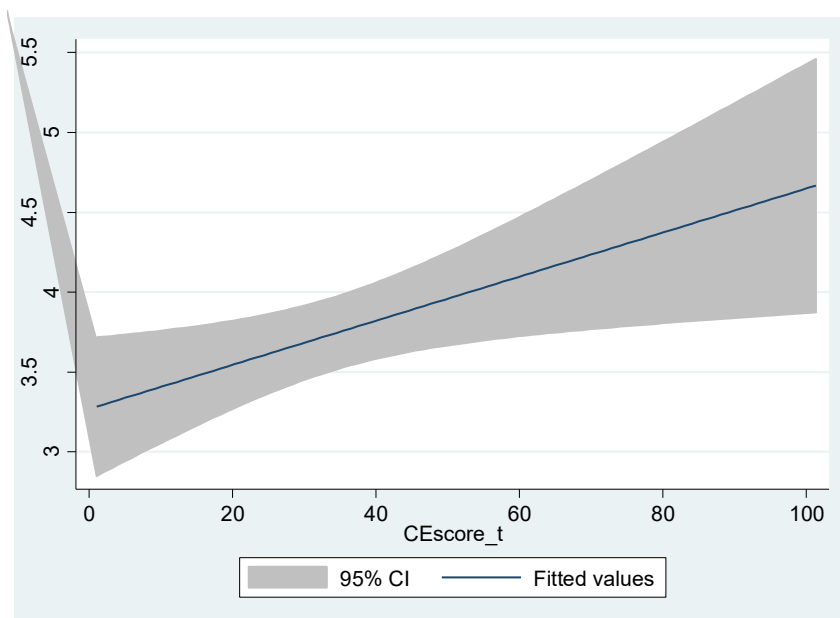
family disruption and civic engagement

Survey data suggests that positive family experience and family stability during early life is likely to result in having a higher civic engagement score for this sample, and that these early life variables result in around a 2% variation for civic engagement during university.

Family disruption and parent's relationship are very similar variables and are likely to go hand in hand, indeed in some cases family disruption may even be a parent's divorce during childhood. The similarities between these two variables, and the overlapping of the two in this sample led to the decision to use one variable in the analysis model, which was 'family disruption' for further analysis. The variable family disruption showed high significance with the civic engagement score variable. Based on the bi-variable analysis

results and having identified family disruption as an explanatory variable, multi-variable models were fitted. Analysis was gender neutral.

Results show that those who did not experience family disruption during early life are 8% less likely to be civically engaged.

Health, Wellbeing, and early life bi-variable analysis

I. *Early life and self-reported mental wellbeing*

Bi-variable regression was carried out using the mental wellbeing score as the dependant variable, and with all early life and socio-demographic variables. Again, little significance was found for the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing score and the sections 1 and civic engagement score variables, as most of the bi-variable analysis showed little results, although a significant regression equation was found with the same explanatory variables as identified above, as well as with family relationships during childhood.

Ordinary least square bi-variable regression carried out on the following variables with the mental wellbeing score as a dependant variable (n161) did show significance: school experience during childhood, family relationships during childhood, parent's relationship during childhood and family disruption.

Table 15: wellbeing and early life regression

Dependent Variable	Explanatory Variable	Adjusted R-squared	P value	Std. Err.	Coef.
Wellbeing score					
	Family disruption	0.02	*0.03	1.62	3.47
	Parent's relationship	0.01	*0.04	1.61	3.31
	Family relationship	0.05	*0.00	1.99	6.12

School experience	0.03	*0.01	1.58	3.75	

This indicates that having a good family relationship during childhood is a good predictor of experiencing better mental wellbeing when considering the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale. The regression result for the early life family relationship variable show that family relationship is responsible for 5% variation in the sample's mental wellbeing score during the time of data collection.

II. *Early life and self esteem*

Linear bi-variable regression was calculated to predict the single item self-esteem among this cohort using all socio-demographic variables, the civic engagement score and all early life variables. The significant findings are recorded in the table below:

Table 16: Early life and self esteem

Dependent Variable	Explanatory Variables	Adjusted R-squared	P value	Std. Err.	Coef.
Self esteem	Family stability	`	0.01	0.08	.20
	Parent's relationship status	0.02	0.02	.18	-.40
	Family relationship	0.06	*0.00	.13	-.42
	School experiences	0.09	*0.00	.10	-.43

The findings shown above in table 18 imply that early life is a sound predictor of self-esteem when the Single item self-esteem scale is the dependant variable.

Health and Wellbeing and Civic Engagement bi-variable analysis

Table 17: Health and Wellbeing and Civic Engagement bi-variable analysis

Number of obs = 186

$F_{(7,178)} = 289$

140

Civic engagement	Coef.	Std. Error.	P-value	95% conf. Interval
Family disruption	-8.92	3.01	0.00	-14.88 2.96
Age	.28	.23	0.21	-1.68 .74
Gender(neut)	-1.55	1.70	0.36	-4.82 1.80
Ethnicity	-.90	1.56	0.56	-3.99 2.17
Country of birth	6.50	3.31	0.05	-.03 13.03
Marital status	-.41	3.49	0.90	-7.29 6.47
Parent status	-6.08	4.83	0.21	-15.63 3.46
_cons	37.89	14.44	0.00	9.39 66.40

The Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing score was used as the dependant variable, using the same equation as with the civic engagement score the result was significant. This shows that socio-demographics and socioeconomics, civic engagement uptake, plus the two identified explanatory variables of family stability and parent's relationship status in early life are significant when the Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing score is considered according to this cohort. This shows that movement in the Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing score was 16% due to the independent and explanatory variables in the equation.

5.5 Discussions

Survey Sample

The aims of this survey were to explore civic engagement among students at this widening participation university, and to explore the impact of early life on civic engagement and health and wellbeing. 240 students participated in the survey. While the ages of participants ranged from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 56, the mean age of all survey participants was 23 years of age, with a standard deviation of 9.6. As indicated in *table 1,* the most common age group who participated in this survey were age 18-21

(n76) and 18% of the survey participants were over 45 years of age. Considering age alone, many students involved in this study were 'mature students' and not what would be considered as typical university students. Over a quarter of the survey participants reported they were a parent, and 50% of the sample were not born in the UK.

When compared to the university's student profile for 2015-16, it is evident that this sample is reflective of the university's overall demographic. The most common courses within the survey participants were located within the school of Health Sports and Bioscience, and this school has the highest intake across all schools at the university, followed closely by the Cass School of Education, again which is reflective in the survey sample. Across the entire student profile, 39% of students were male and 61% female, reflected in the gender ratio of the survey sample. In the school of health sports and Bioscience, 61% of students are female students.

The mean age in the survey sample was 23 years of age, although participants ranged from 18 to 56, and, as indicated in the figure below, this is reflective of the student body at UEL.

	17 and under	18-20	21-24	25-29	30+
Total	27	5,585	2,924	1,655	3,236
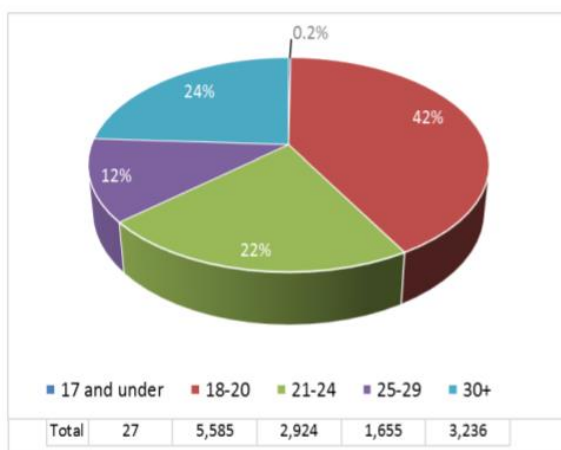
The pie chart indicates that 24% of students enrolled at the university during 2015-16 were over 30 years old, and the majority of students enrolled at the university were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. This is reflective of the survey sample, in which

the mean age was 23, although 17% of the sample are mature students and reported themselves as being over 45 years of age. The ages of the survey participants are clustered around 18-26 years of age.

As indicated in the pie chart below, across the university the highest intake was students of black ethnicity, which also is the highest ethnicity evident within this survey sample (n96).

	Black	Asian	Mixed/Other	White	Not known
Total	4,621	2,886	1,611	4,119	190
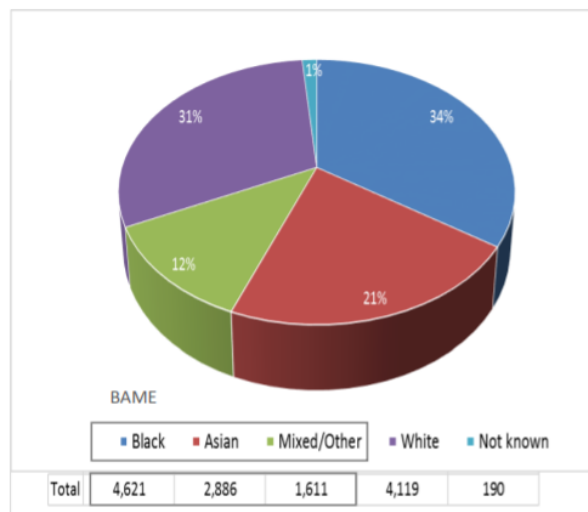
*Note: BAME Students represent 68% of total population.

Figure 2: UEL student ethnicity

Across the university's student profile, 16% declared mental health illnesses and 9% a long-standing health condition. It has been shown in previous studies that populations living in this geographical area are more likely to suffer with mental health illness and experience lower mental wellbeing. (Kirkbride et al, 2012).

Early life and Civic engagement

The majority of this sample did live in a family home during childhood (95%) and over 50% of the survey participants reported that their parents did not divorce. 62% of the survey participants reported their childhood family relationship as 'very positive', which was the highest option they were able to select. Less than 10% reported to have had a

fairly or very negative relationship with their family during childhood. However, the regression analysis has shown that for outcome variables such as civic engagement and mental wellbeing, family disruption and relationships are very significant, and can in fact explain variation in civic engagement behaviours and mental wellbeing during attending university later in life.

Health and wellbeing, early life and civic engagement

The Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale allowed a score to be calculated to measure student's self-reported wellbeing. Although it must be noted that the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale is not designed to measure for this, it has been found in previous studies that a score of 40 or less can indicate depression when considered alongside relevant mental health scales, and those who score 41-45 have a high risk of bad mental health. (Taggart 2015). Just under 50% of this cohort scored 45 or less, as indicated in the table below.

Table 18: wellbeing score categories

WEMWBS scores	N	%
score of 40 or less	39	24
score between 41-45	38	24
score of more than 45	84	52
Total	161	

24% of the participants scored 40 or less than 40 for the scale, and a further 24% scored between 41 and 45. 52% of the participants scored more than 45. This implies that half of the participants in this group are experiencing low mental wellbeing, and this was echoed within the life history calendar interviews. It has been shown in previous studies that populations living in this geographical area are more likely to suffer with mental health illness and experience lower mental wellbeing (Kirkbride et al, 2012).

The health survey for England showed a decline in wellbeing score from 2015-16 and showed little difference between male and female adult scores. However, it was reported that on average, those living in deprived areas scored lower than those not. Those living

in the most deprived areas had average well-being scores of 48.6 for men and 47.3 for women, compared with score averages of 51.5 and 51.0 for participants residing in the least deprived areas of England. (Health survey for England, 2016).

The mean score for this student cohort (mean = 46.98) falls just below the scores of those living in the most deprived areas in the health survey for England 2016. This scale has been shown to increase with family affluence and household socio-economic status. (Clarke et al, 2011).

The mean for this cohort is higher than the mean scores found previously for self-efficacy. Most studies have found an average of 29 using the self-efficacy scale, inclusive of heterogeneous adult populations and high school students. (Shwarzer 2014).

This shows that on average, this cohort has reported good or high self-esteem. In comparison to a study in which the SISI was validated looking at university students in California, mean of 3.5 (SD=1.1) the mean of this group of students is higher.

Overall discussion of findings: Cross sectional cohort study

The survey component provided significant information, including early life and self-reported health and wellbeing data, and the prevalence of civic engagement among this under-represented sample. The survey showed significance between family disruption and wellbeing later in life, and that a positive family experience and family stability during early life is likely to result in having a higher civic engagement score for this sample, and that these early life variables result in around a 2% variation for civic engagement during university.

It is evident through the survey that within this cohort family disruption in early life was identified as an explanatory variable and a predictor for less civic engagement and lower self-reported wellbeing during the time of data collection. While this sample scored

relatively highly for self-efficacy and self-esteem (see sections 4.2 and 4.4) the mean for this sample was low for the Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale.

This component added insight into whether the sample were civically engaged, with low levels of political engagement reported by this sample, reflecting the focus group findings. The breakdown of the five domains of civic engagement as reported by the sample can be found in chapter five, and the table of prevalence across the five domains is table 11 which shows that the most engaged in domain is 'knowledge and information', and the lowest is 'volunteering'. It should be noted all respondents were all enrolled as university students during survey collection. This component was able to add vital knowledge for the study aims and was invaluable for exploring the research questions and adding to the methodological civic engagement knowledge base. Further, the survey was also able to provide a database for the stratified sampling process for identifying participants for the life history interviews. The survey data was gathered to answer questions relating to the relationship between early life and civic engagement, and civic engagement and health and wellbeing. Previously validated scales were used - where possible - to allow for comparisons.

Using this section of the survey, a 'civic engagement score' was assigned to participants, inclusive of averages across the 5 domains. This allowed a civic engagement profile of the respondents to be built. It showed that just over half of the participants fell within the 'quite civically engaged' category (53%) across all 5 domains included within the survey. Only 11% were categorised as very civically engaged, which was less than those who were not at all civically engaged (15%). Almost a quarter of this cohort were categorised as being 'moderately' civically engaged, meaning that their scores fell within the middle quantile.

Section 3 of the survey compromised a range of pre-validated scales for self-reported health and wellbeing. These included aspects of the SF-36, the 'Single Item Self Esteem Scale' (SISE), the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), and the

Self efficacy scale. To understand the health and wellbeing of this cohort further, the results of these scales have, in some cases in the results chapter, been compared to national averages or findings from similar studies. The mean WEMWBS score for this cohort was 46.98, with a Standard Deviation (SD) of 10.10. For complete data, the total number of observations was 119. The mean WEMBWS score was 46.72, with a standard deviation of 9.74. Both of the means for all available and complete datasets are below the national average, showing that the average mental wellbeing reported by this sample is low. Just under 50% of this cohort scored 45 or less.

Limitations

The development and conduction of this component did echo known challenges in measuring civic engagement behaviours, however it also was able to provide a profile of civic engagement uptake among this sample across the five identified domains of civic engagement. While there were obstacles encountered in terms of recruitment of participants into the cross-sectional cohort, the data was utilised as planned in the study aims, was able to add knowledge, and was vital for both the sampling and the development of the final empirical data element, the life history calendar interviews.

Conclusions

The data collected from this sample of university students has shown that they are civically engaged, but also that early life experiences can impact on civic engagement and health and wellbeing later in life. While the profile of this cohort was sufficiently varied in terms of its being diverse across age, ethnicity and nationality, and for identifying a sample for qualitative interviews, it must be acknowledged that the calculated minimum sample size of 500 was not achieved and with the volume of missing data, the approach to analysis and options for analysis had to be reconsidered. The response rate was low. However, despite this, the aims of the cross-sectional cohort study have been met, the relationships between the early life, civic engagement and health and wellbeing variables were explored, and profiles of civic engagement and of the health and wellbeing of this cohort was explored. The participants within this survey were diverse across age, ethnic

group and nationality, and were from a mix of schools, disciplines and were reflective of the university's overall student demographic.

This cohort showed high levels of civic engagement across the 5 specified domains, and reported to feel more quality from Domain C, volunteering. It was found the socio-demographic variables such as ethnic group and gender had little relationship with levels of civic engagement amongst this cohort, which is why analysis was conducted gender neutral. Within this sample, those who reported to be from a white ethnic group reported slightly higher levels of civic engagement (mean=10) although there was very little difference across ethnic groups or genders in the amount of impact or quality participants felt from participating in civic engagement activities. With the development of the civic engagement total score using averages from across the domains, analysis was able to be carried out using one civic engagement outcome variable as a self-reported measure of civic engagement, weighted for intensity and impact.

It is evident that within this cohort that family disruption in early life was identified as an explanatory variable and a predictor for less civic engagement and lower self-reported wellbeing during the time of data collection. While this sample scored relatively highly for self-efficacy and self-esteem (see sections 4.2 and 4.4) the mean for this sample was low for the Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale, and this has been linked to experiencing low level mental wellbeing. The fact that this wellbeing score showed significance with early life experiences such as school and family relationships indicate that these childhood experiences have an impact on wellbeing during higher education, although this finding should be explored further with qualitative research to identify how and why this is.

6.Chapter six: Findings from qualitative life history calendar interviews

6.1 Introduction to chapter and participants

This chapter presents the results of the third component of the empirical work undertaken for this thesis. This component combined two methods of qualitative interviewing: an adapted life history calendar was applied alongside a semi-structured interview guide (see section 5.3 in methods, and the appendices for copies of the life history calendar and semi-structured interview guide). The interview study was designed to explore how early life may influence civic engagement and, in tunr, how civic engagement influences wellbeing later in life, and barriers and facilitator to civic engagement amongst students at a widening participation university.

The findings of the thematic analysis of the interview data are described in this chapter, applying relevant theory as a lens to interpret findings.

Participant Characteristics and background

Thirteen out of the planned fifteen life history calendar interviews were conducted with participants sampled from a pool of survey respondents, as discussed in the methods

chapter. Interviews were conducted in person and online via video with participants identified in the sampling process. This was a largely female sample (also the case in the survey sample participants were identified from, thus anticipated) although males did take part.

The sampling process sought to include a diverse sample based on survey responses, so including those with low wellbeing, low civic engagement and no adversities reported in childhood as well as polar opposites. The interviewees ranged from ages 20-46, were of mixed ethnic backgrounds, including Asian-British, white-British, black, and black-British, white-European. Some participants were parents or carers. Interviews ranged between 1 and 2 hours, the longest interview being 2 full hours. Interviews typically took longer in person, largely because of the collaborative nature of conducting the interview alongside the freedom to input to life history calendars creatively using colors and stickers. The sample included students enrolled on a range of university courses, inclusive of, early childhood studies, psychology, sociology, business and law, and sports science. The interview participants' reported countries of birth covered 8 different countries globally including Jamaica, Bulgaria, England, Ghana, Poland, India, Romania and Nigeria.

6.2 Researcher Reflections

Following every interview conducted, a 'researcher journal' entry was completed following a concise framework of four key questions to discuss. This is good practice in carrying out qualitative research, for instance it may also aid the analysis process later in helping a researcher to easily distinguish interviewees and remember key moments or takeaways across the interviews. This process also aided minor changes in the life history calendar method, such as noting a participant's level of civic engagement under a heading separately to the calendar and understanding that some participants will choose to engage with the calendar throughout, while others won't choose to directly complete the calendar and are more comfortable answering questions and watching the calendar be completed with their voice and adding or correcting as the interview goes on.

Conducting the researcher journal and reflecting on the method also reinforced the importance of talking about civic engagement as an informal day-to-day activity using the calendar as a tool to do so, as it was this that often brough key civic engagement behaviors to light, often those that participants had forgotten and the calendar helped them to remember or actions they didn't first see as civic engagement. Taking the reflections together, the switch to virtual video data collection was highlighted as a significant shift in recruitment as well as in the data that was able to be collected. As many participants were unable to take part in person, the reflections really do highlight the various merits of virtual data collection, as well as the potential downsides. While being interviewed in the comforts of home can be freeing for some interview participants, this may not always be the case. The four questions asked as part of the reflective framework were as follows:

Reflective Framework

- *Who was the participant?*
- *How did the interviewee respond to the questions and calendar? Include any challenges or things that worked well*
- *Did you feel the interview went well? How did it feel?*
- *Did it make me want to change anything about the method after?*

 While the framework does not specifically account for researcher positionality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) referring to the position of the researcher themselves, their stance in relation to the social and political context of the study including their racial, gender or class self-identifications, these factors were nonetheless discussed naturally in the researcher journal across the questions included within the framework. For instance, across the interviews there during some participants who discussed shared experiences that could be related to by the researcher, such as the experience of starting a new school, leaving home to attend university, or experiencing the foster care system. While the fact that these experiences were shared by the interviewer was often not acknowledged within the interview, these commonalities did at times help to build rapport

or continue the interview at ease. Other participants talked of experiences that were not shared, such as becoming a new parent, which was not a shared experience at the time of the interview, or moving country, parents divorcing, of experiencing child abuse or racism. While these lived experiences may not have been shared experiences, it is not felt that this was detrimental to the interview, and in fact often this offered an opportunity to discuss further and to learn during the conversation, and interview participants seemed to actually enjoy and appreciate being able to talk about their lived experiences, both good and bad. It is noted in the reflections that the males who participated tended to open less quickly, needing more probing and time in order to feel comfortable and relaxed within the interviews, and perhaps this would have been different or a faster process if the researcher had been male rather than female. It should be noted that many participants were of a different ethnic group to the researcher, and many were international students with English being their second language, which could have posed barriers, although it is not felt that this was the case. In one case, a young girl talked of feeling trapped and watched within her tight-knight faith-based community and shared very negative aspects about this. Having no religion and having been privileged enough to grow up in a supportive, engaged, and friendly local community, this interview led to a first-hand realisation that having a sense of community may not always be a positive experience, and in fact could cause harm. This interview highlighted the potential negative side of communal civic engagement. For the most part though, conducting these interviews was a powerful emotional experience, partly due to the breadth of adversities suffered by the participants, but predominantly because of their positive outlooks and their overwhelming ability to continue and be happy. It was also interesting that these students felt very happy and proud to be in higher education, which may be considered as a normal or expected route to take for students enrolled at other universities. By the end of these interviews, there was often a sense of friendship and mutual respect, and this might be due to the collaborative nature of conducting the life history calendars. While researcher reflections of the life history interviews have been summarized here, seven (anonymized) researcher journal excerpts have also been included below for reference. It is felt that these are an important contribution to this reflective section, as they include important

detail and have not been altered by hindsight. Please note these are excerpts only, any identifying information has been removed to protect confidentiality.

Excerpt 1

Initially this participant thought that civic engagement was related to trains/city planning, but after asking her questions and discussing more, she now describes it as reaching out to communities and trying to understand their needs and improving things. Really enjoyed this interview and found it useful to put my life into perspective too. Describes her childhood as 'sheltered' even though it was hard, and they were struggling lots financially. Moved into her first bedroom at 14, before then shared a bed or room with parents and was homeless once. Learnt to cook eggs at 5 because parents were out working and was hungry, 'had to grow up' young, had her own key at primary school and had to walk home alone. Very mature and incredibly articulate. When asked what was good about her childhood she says 'everything', mainly because of her positive relationship with her parents which clearly means a lot to her, and this made me think about my parents and how lucky I was too. Seriously bullied at school and actually had to hide after school until 6pm one evening to avoid being beaten up- yet very forgiving of the bullies and has supported one recently with the loss of their mother, very empathetic. Talks about feeling suicidal during school years when being bullied. Very engaged, mentors and supports youth programs every week. Uses the 'external dates' a lot in comparison to others for jogging memories, refers to remembering a film release and to Pluto being downgraded and discussing it in primary school at the time which helps her to remember other things too. Although I have read about the dates being helpful, this is the first time I have properly seen the use of this tool firsthand.

Excerpt 2

First male to take part in the life history interviews, young male and very talkative, seemed really happy to take part. All in all, the interview went really well, and the event history calendar showed a dip in civic engagement during sadder times when the participant

wasn't as happy. Felt like an easy and open interview, however also felt quite surface level to start with even though he was friendly and talkative, and I am not sure why this was, but not sure the topic guide initially managed to dig quite deep enough into family life or real experiences and had to probe a lot. Not much engagement with calendar, although he seemed to really enjoy seeing his memories be recorded on the calendar and this process helped him to remember new points too that were key for the research aims.

Excerpt 3

The eldest participant to agree so far, was very pleased she took part as she said she wasn't interested when the interviews were scheduled to be in person and seemed quite distant and quiet on the phone, had to really reassure confidentiality in our conversation before she agreed. Initially asked for the video call to be at 9pm, then rescheduled for an early morning interview, and then actually then phoned me to ask if I was free. Despite me thinking this may have been a difficult interview and feeling almost reluctant, I was very wrong. I left the interview feeling strangely comforted but also emotional about the strength she had shown in her life, moving countries and unfortunate circumstances she had experienced, and also when I had asked if she wanted to add anything at the end her story about changing her legal name after being bullied about it when she moved to England, and her mum dying recently. While based on my first few conversations I was quite apprehensive about whether this interview would be time well spent and whether she would engage at all, I found the more she talked the more comfortable she became, and also that talking informally about her day-to-day life helped to tease out various volunteering she had done that hadn't registered in her mind during the civic engagement questions. This made me want to add more explorative questions about daily lives to tease out CE actives, otherwise it seems that potential data is lost.

Excerpt 4

Conducted with a new mother with a new-born baby, baby was on the video call from the moment they picked up. Seemed very keen to be interviewed despite my thinking she didn't seem interested initially during recruitment (in-person) and only happy virtually. Breastfeed twice during the interview, which was a new experience for me and initially was hard to concentrate on the interview with the baby making noises and the camera switching between them as she burped the child, pulled socks back on etc., but actually helped to in terms of to build trust and make the interview more informal, flowing and friendly by sharing her day as a new mother, found she opened up more, the interview seemed somehow easy. Someone popped in the room to ask her to paint something for someone which prompted whole new discussion about her creative business and plans for the future, which was actually really helpful, lead to more CE on the calendar and wouldn't have happened if the interview was in person. Made me think that while there are holdbacks with this method in conducting them via video, there are also strong points, for example natural prompts in the home/family members popping in, the home comfort for the participant and being able to include people who otherwise would not have taken part. Maybe for some people doing it this way helps to reach depth. Need to start asking about a 'typical week', weekend hobbies etc., as it seems that these tease out may more civic engagement behaviors that the questions are capturing.

Excerpt 5

Very emotionally difficult interview, with lots of reference to feeling alone and being sad, and to ongoing struggles of being diagnosed with health conditions. Took over 2 hours and found this quite draining, feels let down by almost everyone in life, although it was also a useful interview. Was interesting to look at civic engagement and family pressures in this way and how close families or communities may not always be a positive experience, again identified time as an issue and also mental capacity. The close community meant she didn't want to leave the house – in this case it was a barrier rather than a facilitator to civic engagement – goes against literature and assumptions. Family and cultural pressures for her to be married and starting a family make her feel like a failure. Sent numbers for MIND and wellbeing support which she was grateful for and my

time, mentioned she how much she appreciated being able to talk and not feeling as isolated, as has missed various sessions due to covid. Identifies mental health as a barrier to civic engagement.

Excerpt 6

Really enjoyable and relaxed interview, with a lady who had moved a lot in her life. I would find that very stressful. As an interviewee, she had a really calm presence compared to the others, she spoke slowly and responded to all questions and was relaxed throughout the interview, although she smiled and giggled more towards the end, this was a really nice interview for me and at the end I felt very happy. She felt very lucky to be where she was in life. She had experienced lots of support and friendships from a local church when first moving to the UK, so was civically engaged to want to give that back to others in need as she once was. The method seemed effortlessness during this interview and I wished it was in person so I could have made her a tea afterwards and chatted some more when the interview was over.
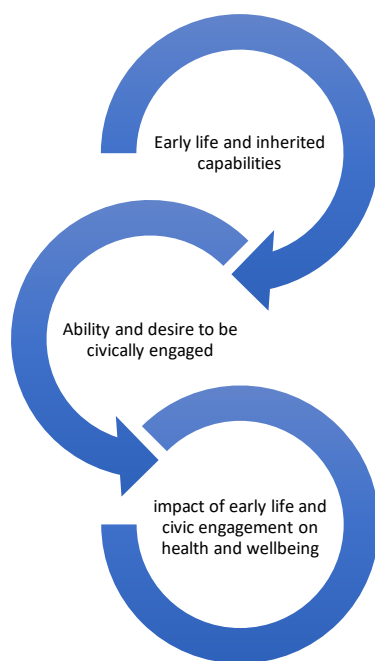
Excerpt 7

Long interview with a psychology student, with a thick *** accent which was difficult to understand at the start and worried me I might miss things, but actually I got used to it quickly and luckily the line on teams was clear throughout too. Appeared a little cold at first, not much smiling and perhaps not trusting, but around 15 minutes in this changed. Was another inspiring interview which again put my struggles into perspective. She cried as she spoke a few times and I asked if she wanted to stop, but she wants to carry on. Little interest in the calendar at all, in fact I think she found my wanting to add to it in our shared screen a little off putting or irritating so around 45 mins in I actually closed the calendar having filled as much of it as I needed, and focused the interview on her alone which was different to the others. Participant actually sighed and stated she wished we had been able to do this in person and how much better it would be for her to relax and

open up about her story. Overall a very powerful interview, although little engagement or interest was given to the calendar method.

6.3 Results

Analysis of interviews showed patterns of civic engagement across the life course, especially so during school years when participants were expected to gain experience and were time rich, and less so later in life due to barriers such as work, illness, and family commitments. Analysis suggested that early life had a nuanced influence on attitudes to, perceptions of, and the practice of civic engagement in all its forms in later life. Further, analysis revealed that participants experienced a back-and-forth relationship between wellbeing and civic engagement, and this was particularly evident across the life history calendars. Reasons for engaging in various forms of civic engagement was often reported to be to enhance wellbeing outcomes. Low wellbeing was also often reported as a reason for withdrawing for civic engagement activities and as a barrier to being civically engaged.

Early life and inherited capabilities

Ability and desire to be civically engaged

impact of early life and civic engagement on health and wellbeing

The interviews infer that the relationship between early life, civic engagement, and wellbeing is therefore a fluid and inter-linked relationship, where civic engagement may play a mediating factor between early life experiences and health and wellbeing later in life, but equally where in some cases, early life experiences may impact health and wellbeing with none / very little civic engagement in-between.

Four overarching themes were identified through thematic analysis with subthemes, as follows:

1) **Early life as a foundation and a motivator for civic engagement**

2) **Adverse life experiences as a barrier to engagement**

3) **Civic engagement as a form of escapism**

4) **civic engagement's reciprocal pathway with wellbeing**

The four themes and sub-themes are discussed in more detail below.

6.3.1 Early life as a foundation and a motivator for civic engagement

	Early life experience	Civic engagement facilitator	Outcomes / wellbeing	
Nostalgia/the continuation of behaviours from early life memories	Happy memories of attending church with family when younger in Africa	Recreating memories. Attends church today in UK with children, and volunteers often through this	Has increased social networks and brings happiness	*"Granddad was a pastor, a man of God, so church a lot... [I] loved church because I loved stories, and you have a different dress and shoes – all those narratives from the bible I was mesmerised by them, and learnt all the songs as well" p9*
Adverse childhood experience as a motivator to help others	Effectively sold for marriage around 12-13 years old by parents to a man roughly 20 years older than herself	Joins a woman's support group after moving to the UK with her son to support others	Has increased social networks	*"Basically, when I help people, I have friends. Sometimes they call me and they tell me 'I wish I could be like you were' I say how? Strong. OK that's not a very hard, but I've done it, just keeping positive. That's all. Don't lose hope, that's the main thing in life" p10*

This visualisation reflects examples present in the interviews where early life experiences acted as a motivator for civic engagement later in life. Experiences in early life appeared to be a foundation and a motivator for civic engagement in adult life, especially group membership and volunteering. The life history calendars provided a timeline for participants to describe life events and their feelings about these, and broadly what was narrated by participants revealed a relationship between being free and capable to engage and feeling good and well.

One of the first questions asked during the interviews was "could you tell me about your childhood?", and (after a pause) this would commonly act as the basis for the interview to follow, and an introduction for the participants in sharing what they felt were their important childhood details or memories throughout the calendar, as non-prescriptively as possible.

Participants talked of various early memories during this early part of the interview, including the community they lived in, their families, their school experiences and first childhood memories, and of various forms of civic engagement.

Church or mosque was a commonality across the interviewees, despite the diversity of the group, the majority of them experienced religion and weekly religious gatherings from a very early age. Some spoke of weekly family attendances at a local church, a form of civic engagement, being happy and positive memories, which they valued greatly, in in some cases still engage in actively today:

"Granddad was a pastor, a man of God, so church a lot… [I] loved church because I loved stories, and you have a different dress and shoes – all those narratives from the bible I was mesmerised by them, and learnt all the songs as well" (P 9)

Early life traditions were a described as a foundation or a learnt behaviour for some civic engagement forms that brought a sense of belonging and group membership, for instance in regular engagement in community networks, helping others, and church going.

"I don't know… now I am talking through things I think it is because I have always been part of a larger group of people" (P 3)

Throughout the interviews, memories of civic engagement (especially in the domain of group membership) were a source of happiness and something that participants desired later in life, and oftentimes found themselves recreating for themselves and their families by engaging in new groups.

It was a common trend in this sample that church outings and communal festivals and events were likely the first memories of civic engagement, and usually described with a sense of nostalgia and happiness.

One participant explained how she had shared a room with her parents in a hostel after being evicted from their house, and barely seeing her mother due to her working two jobs which barely covered the rent. Despite this, she talked of her parents very fondly and described her childhood as loving and good, and was consistently encouraged by her parents to engage in hobbies which resulted in her playing tennis professionally. This

shows that despite suffering some adverse childhood experiences, she had many of the capabilities and functioning's such as care, being able to participate, love, education and affection. Almost all of the participants reported a range of adverse life experiences, including emotional and physical abuse, parents in prison, drug and alcohol problems amongst family members, homelessness, and discrimination.

"We had kind of um um personal problems so my parents weren't able to fully support us so so we had to live somewhere else for an amount of from Monday to Friday… a foster children service
***"Interviewer** What was that like for you?*
"We were kind of staying in a big house and kind of erm there were about 10 children all of sharing the same experiences and family and things …" p2

However, it was evident that these experiences served as strong intrinsic motivators for helping others in the present day. For example, one participant who had moved country and family multiple times as a young person and had suffered greatly due to this, gave her time to help others who were new to the country:

"I think when I went, when entered the place (shelter) it wasn't about my cousin, it was about other nationalities who were lost too, it could easily be you"

Participants were determined to use their suffering to change it into something positive by helping others and showed great amounts of empathy and the desire to make things better for people around them, and the next generation.
However, it was also noticeable that despite the desire, some participants lacked the capabilities and self-esteem to do so, or were held back from doing so by lack of time, finances, wellbeing, or family commitments.

6.3.2   Adverse life experiences as barriers to engagement later in life

This diagram aims to visually articulate this theme, representing how early life adversities act as barriers to being civically engaged.

Adversities

Father suddenly leaving in early life, then being uprooted to the UK with no support networks, and living in very over-crowded conditions with family they did not know

"I was a happy child I guess but the worst part when my dad left and I didn't quite understand what was going on, I don't remember it all clearly but I am pretty sure I was having bad suicidal thoughts at the time...they called an ambulance, then I kept having these mini like mental breakdowns? because I just didn't understand what was happening... it was pretty bad. I just didn't understand what was going on, I remember self-harming as well like I remember smacking my head against the wardrobe like going into total meltdown if I couldn't do my homework, and it was just all from dad yeah"

Barrier
Suffering very low wellbeing and not wanting to leave the house

'He is still embarrassed by his culture and his heritage... everyone f*****g hatred me for it! like I just got even more bulled for that and (laughs) it wasn't it was a loose loose situation for me, unfortunately... Yeah, it was a horrible time. like I sill - it was just so lonely. really lonely... I was not - it was a complete shock to my system, I didn't have anyone, I was just really vulnerable. People used to pick on me all the time I used to cry and not want to go to school or anywhere in the mornings. I still get glimpses... when stress comes about it trickles you know so the worst thing is when I get stressed it I can't sleep so everything becomes so much worse"

While early life experiences were attributed to engaging later in life in some circumstances, patterns in the dataset saw specific adverse life experiences (such as poor family relationships, abuse and prejudice) as direct barriers to various forms of civic engagement, largely the case for activities that require socialising such as group membership or volunteering. Equally, during periods of decreased wellbeing or lack of support (such as lack of care, safety, affection, respect, and periods of having to adapt to new families, languages or countries) previous behaviours of civic engagement were often lacking, and participants reported feeling low, isolated or withdrawn.

One participant describes sitting through church almost like torture, as her mother would not let her engage with children and make her sit though long ceremonies, while she could hear all of the other children playing outside.

"Yes, yeah, that was the whole childhood. Sometimes was even twice a week. Yes, because she knew she knew because at church, obviously the other parents with kids, they don't they can't stand there like sitting for two hours is boring for a child to keep it inside the church. So, there was a special ground for the kids where they can play. Obviously shouldn't let me go in there to. I say I am going to toilet and play with the kids, you don't find me, I will hide myself see. Just looking for me. I was always cheeky. She's

gonna beat me anyway. Does not think I can lose any more than that… I will go out to play with the rest of the kids. I knew I would be beaten for that later" p10

Others explained being forced into a belief system and sitting through readings as children that they did not enjoy, choose, or perhaps even benefit from at all. Upon reflection, this is largely the case with participants who had a strained or negative relationship with their families, or who did not feel supported or cared for by their local communities.

"I've been going to church basically all of my life erm like since I was ... 6 years I was attended this youth programmes catholic, yea so it was always a way for my families to - you know - keep me occupied" p2

These memories prevent the desire to recreate similar experiences of community gatherings and churchgoing, a form of group membership and a sdomain of civic engagement.

In some cases, parents did act as barriers to the participant's engaging, for example in engaging in team sports activities, group activities or play, and was at times described as a possible reason for not feeling capable of engaging in similar activities today as adults.

"Mother was very controlling…. I started martial arts through school until my parents stopped it… I was very, very traumatised for many, many years" p10

"Primary school yea, I was happy I was into a lot of sports, I played netball and steelpans, I got involved in a lot at primary school then we moved twice … at first I was a bit scared then moving was weird obviously I had friends then I was quiet. Even now I am quiet. I hold back before I understand to access to situation before I can let out a bit. The second primary was good, but I remember feeling I was held back a bit" p7

"It was not a happy childhood – I wasn't allowed friends and every time I go out I knew I was going to pay for that and be beaten. Everyone did this with a slipper – it was different back then" p4

Leisure activities, play and imagination are core in the capability approach, and are highlighted as not being present in the childhoods of some of these children, due to controlling parents and contextual factors such as language barriers or an unstable home. Thirteen out of fourteen interviewees described suffering varying forms of poverty growing up:

"yea we did and then I remember struggling to pay rent and the council was going to give us over to social workers then one of my aunties - she was a friend but we called her auntie -basically when mum left she told her she would look after us so she stepped in and fought on our behalf and she actually helped me apply for income support and everything else so" p9

"This was the year I found out that my mother and father split up because of his drinking; I always thought it was because of his drug use" p5

"I do remember my dad being in prison at this point. My mother refused to allow us to see him, and to my knowledge we never received any letters" p2

"I didn't know at the time that it was negative for me growing up that way. At one point yeah, to be honest I did I did find myself crying. Just really sad. because I did not understand what was really going on at the time and I remember clearly erm (pause) my cousins were asking me "what's wrong with you why you crying so much?" and I was just like - I don't know. I was just - I was just in tears" p13

Following on from this, the majority of interviewees had experienced moving to a new country in their early years, and the impacts this experience had on them:

"Yea my parents are from Ghana and so I am originally from there I have been raised um in Italy and um about 5 years ago I moved from Italy to here in the UK um… and yea I worked for a while and after that I decided to um start school" (p2)

"school was challenging yea, I was in fights a lot because I find my English had quickly deteriorated, I was speaking more Dutch and didn't know the system and was being picked on… I was landed in the middle and had to find my way out, so hence I didn't do well. I didn't know what I was talking about… I watched grange hill I thought everything was cool but when I came over it was different… it was challenging for me, it was quite sad. I cried because again I wanted Amsterdam because I had got used to that, because again I settled, I mean you have to adjust isn't it so... I settled" p9

Many explained this as becoming a barrier to civic engagement in forms such as participating at school which is engagement in the civil society and in knowledge in information, or in new communities, of withdrawing, and a major source of stress, especially due to language barriers, lack of support, changes in their environment to adapt to, but also, quite commonly, to facing racism and discrimination in their new lives, usually through school.

Most of the participants who took part in the life history calendar interviews had been suddenly moved countries - and families - more than once in their early lives and had undergone challenging periods of adapting to new surroundings. Participants talked of having a lack of food or water in early life, of being in foster care, of experiencing physical bullying based on their language, culture of the colour of their skin, but almost always were able to look at these adversities as a learning opportunity, or to identify something good amongst all the challenges in their early years. This is echoed in other's experiences, for instance participant 10, who lived in very poor circumstances and was sold by her parents for marriage at 12-year-old, but in response to what had made her so strong and resilient today, she said;

"My Grandmother. She was always - I remember being a child whenever I got scared with someone, or actually that's a very good question, what you ask me now, but I think my my grandmother was the role model. I never thought about that, but now going backwards, I think she was the role model for me. Whatever I was scared I go to my grandmother, I wouldn't go to my father or my mother. I'll go to her and I said, listen this happened. [she] said don't worry I'm gonna come and sort out the problem for you. I'm gonna help you. Don't worry. So, I think it was her" p10

Based on the sampling and the survey responses, 6 of the participants were sampled having reported 'no family disruption' within the survey scales, however it is evident that this is not the case, and actually, only 1 participant's interview reflected a childhood without family disruption or adverse childhood experiences.
One participant described her schooling experience once arriving in the UK and the racism she endured;

*"There was one girl particular called Louise **** she used to like come up and hit me on my head, on my face... yea at that time being African was very very hard. People used to tease me so much about being African it was not good it wasn't but you know...(long pause) life… even the Jamaican kids used to tease me about being African, because Jamaican is better"* p6

and at the end of the interview, when asked if there was anything she wanted to add, she disclosed that she had in fact changed her name as a direct response to the bullying, which had made her hate her birth-given name.

Another shared her experience of racism at the age of 11 in a rural, mostly white, village as simple ignorance, and something people learned from eventually:

"I have to say that… people in Italy are kind of… narrow minded?
(Interviewer) *Ok, Narrow minded, in what sense do you mean?*

"Um, towards what's different so… I... Kind of experienced discrimination and things like that … growing up yea it was mostly white and I was the only black person around there even in the city and stuff … I mean we knew… it was [pause] kind of normal that was our reality kind of… we kind of grew up thinking like I know I am different and that probably people are gonna stare at me just because I have a different colour skin but I know that there is something more than that? so I am not even going to like bother myself thinking too much about someone that could come up on me and say like [pause] something offensive about my physical aspects because of my colour skin and stuff but we were used to that we just kind of got over it… what we found out was that most of the people they… were kind of being superficial it felt like the more time you were spending with the same person who at the beginning was used to offend you because of your physical appearance" (p2)

This negatively impacted the engagement in group and community activates.

The participants spoke of emotional and physical abuse, which may have been from parents, peers, siblings, or even wider community members, and this resulted in withdrawal from others, and usually in anger:

"So, you know you – you're being pulled in so many directions so how do you keep your balance? Especially being that young. so erm - I was mentally frowning at the time, I had like a proper screw face on, especially when I had got something wrong in a lesson. Yeah, and at the time as well, teachers in the Caribbean was allowed to spank students. So, I got a whole lot of spanking, to be honest. I mainly I was angry most of time I would say. I got in lots of fights as well, in year 4?" p13

In moving across the world and having to adapt quickly, participants reported changing from being actively engaged for example in extra-curricular activities, church, community networks, to not having the mechanisms or the desire to be engaged in their new lives. While sharing details of their moves, it was notable quickly the effect that even daily changes such as in weather, climate, surroundings, languages, and communities had on

the participant's wellbeing which became a barrier to engaging, even at times directly preventing them from engaging in activities which they previously would have or desired to:

"At 12 they [parents] decided to pick me up, I guess it was because they sorted documents I don't really know the reason why I left Ghana… I just knew I was leaving this month, I was going to be with my parents, and I came to Amsterdam and I just cried and cried and cried but mainly because there was no sun! Just all rain and snow, I wanted to go back all I could think was I wanted to go back"
Interviewer *did you tell your parents how you felt?*
"Yea, and mum said you will like it give it time you will like it. I just lived with it, it took about 6 months to adjust. I went to school it was pretty challenging and had 1 to 1 lessons, but luckily they spoke English" p9

This participant, as with many others, had no voice or control over these life changing decisions and she wasn't consulted at all. This was common across the interviews and moving to a new country or to live with estranged family members.

Likewise, participant 13, who had been very engaged in school activities, explained withdrawing when arriving in the UK because of it being too cold in comparison to the weather at home, and the rain and winter making him ill and unable to play sports with friends like he used to.

It should also be noted, that, due to the diversity of the sample and the range of countries of birth, some of this sample faced barriers to political engagement such as not having the right to vote, but expressed a desire to do so and saw it as an important behaviour that all citizens should take time to do.

"ermmm I vote yes… just not for general election but I do vote for MPs keeping seats but I am not allowed to because of my Dutch passport, if I could, of course I would." P9

Many of the participants had been moved around a lot during their childhoods, and therefore lacked stability or feelings of safety due to this. Some were moved from family member to family member to family member, with no choice or say, and most were moved to live with a new estranged parent in a new country with a new language to learn, in a few cases this happened multiple times before the age of 16.

Participants reported the inability to trust new surroundings or family members, and learning from these experiences to the present day being cautious of new people, or new situations.

"So for example conflict of interest like my step mum would complain that my mum would be telling me how to behave and my brothers and sisters … not having enough money to go to school? you know, you have money and you have your savings, someone goes into your piggy bank and takes out your money that you have out in there to buy something, maybe to eat or to drink or go somewhere? So it was little conflicts that breaks that trust barrier that you would have had if something happened, so yeah. When you have the breakdown of trust you don't you you know you have literal fights verbal l abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and all all the above that you can think of and the list that follows… frequently enough to really notice and you know and you get emotional about it and keep asking questions and no one giving any good answers. So yeah - if you have your own family member stealing from you when you turn your back, then you know, you're not going to trust anyone, you're gonna wanna fight them, youre gonna wanna like not talk to them, you know? So yeah" P13

In some of the interviews, this lack of trust for family early on seemed to have translated or progressed into a general lack of trust in society, or a reason for not engaging with others more generally;

"Primary school yea, I was happy I was into a lot of sports, I played netball and steelpans, I got involved in a lot at primary school then we moved twice … at first I was a bit scared then moving was weird obviously I had friends then I was quiet. Even now I am quiet. I

hold back before I understand to access to situation before I can let out a bit. The second primary was good, but I remember feeling I was held back a bit" P7

To be politically engaged, a form of civic engagement, is usually measured through voting, signing campaigns, or supporting a political party to try to make the world better or improved in one's eyes. Participants did view political engagement as an important part of being an active citizen, regardless of their life experience or levels of civic engagement, some did express this notion:

"Every vote does count – I want to see someone who shared my views in power to make changes I would like to see" P5

However, some interviewees expressed a dis-trust in society as a general distrust in people stemming from their early experiences, and others went into depth about the reasons politicians and the news should not be trusted, and their conscious decision to not part-take due to countless broken promises and little faith in our democratic system or in any parties running. This could be traced back to ack of trust in interpersonal relationships, but also to learnt lack of trust from family members or the wider community originating within their countries of birth;

"I mean we watched the news I guess, but we never really spoke about politics… it was just always so corrupt where I was from" p3

It may be argued that the choice to refuse to vote based on a mistrust in authorities is a form of civic engagement in itself, whereby the action is for the better.

When asked why they think they don't vote, while some participants lacked the confidence in themselves to make the right decision or understand the voting

"I don't keep up to date with politics and there's not really... I don't particularly agree with any of them like in it enough to consider it. Yeah, I want to vote for them, you know. But

the way I see it is. I don't feel like I know enough about politics to be able to decide what one I think would be best to run the country. So, I think I should leave that for people that understand it, whereas I don't understand it…I understand it's important" P10

one participant responded:

"I think for me if I am being a bit overly honest, it is the politics. They get in the politician's way, so they always say this and they always say that, and erm at the end of the day - people are still suffering. So how are you going to stop people suffering, when everyone suffers?... Everyone gives promises and I do a lot of reading and if you keep a promise you are basically a fool because a promise -I just try and be quite rational and think about well this person actually can they do not just for me but for the community that I am a part of

Interviewer *so you're aware of politics?*

"yeah, yeah, and you know look at for example the most recent one where the UK tried to leave Europe, they said it would finish in October and it is still going on up until now, and they did promise that. So, that is a key example of what I am on about. so, it's all thina 'politicks' really. They're saying this just to keep you dumbed down or what news they actually want you to see, and when, when something else could be possibly going on?" P13

"You know, simple thing is this - you know the stereotype, that you can't really trust politicians" p10

"…. In [anonymous] I have been brought up with this thing of you know all politicians' lie, all the media is - you know I just don't trust them because I don't trust people and I think that's why I don't engage with it. kind of like I would just rather not be disappointed by the choice I have made?.. I suppose yeah, not that anyone ever encouraged me not to but sort of like the general someone just promises yeah we will do thus on tv then nothing gets done, I think we cottoned on pretty quickly this is just for money and everything in [anonymous] is corrupt as well so I think I have just grown up with a negative view of politics / politicians and the news I suppose?" P3

Along with barriers experienced such as language barriers, lack of funds, and lack of trust, the barrier of not having the right to vote (and so take part in democracy and decision making within the political sphere) was also present and experienced by more than one participant within this dataset.

6.3.3   Civic engagement as a form of escapism

This diagram aims to visually articulate this theme using examples within the interviews, representing how civic engagement may be used as a form of escapism.

Life experience   **Escapism**

| Was moved from grandparents and cousins to a country where they couldn't speak the language, and was with a stepfather and sibling she didn't know | → | Wanted to spend as much time as possible not at home, civic engagement in the form of group membership and sports, which continued & evolved | → | *"I think because class-mates are doing it and teacher recommend it and not going home - it meant I could just stay away longer"* |

Adversities such as overcrowding in the house were identified as barriers, but also as direct facilitators to being civically engaged, for example spending hours at the library or joining teams and groups to avoid being at home

"Then being at home… we was kind of in like one room shared in the house? So the sports and all that other stuff it gave me something to be free, to be out, to run around - when you don't really get that opportunity at home"

This was a common thread within the interviews in a variety of ways for the participants. Various forms of civic engagement including joining local teams, volunteering, and after school activities, were described as forms of escapism from difficult family or living

arrangements, while simultaneously, these same family relationships could also act as barriers to engaging in activities they desired to. This may be due to crowded homes, abusive parents or siblings or feeling not part of the family and withdrawing as a result of this.

"I remember I think especially in the first school it [team sports] takes you away from classes and subjects and then being at home with just my mum and brother (pause) I remember with the sports we was in one room sharing in the house, so the sports gave me something to be free and out and run around when you don't get that opportunity at home" P4

Another talked of partaking in everything available to avoid being at home with new stepfather she didn't like, and feeling isolated at home as a motivator to engage elsewhere;

"secondary school was up and down, getting used to transitioning, year 9 I fell off and withdrew myself
***Interviewer** why?*
"by then we had moved into our own house and I had 2 little sisters, but I felt a bit neglected, the attention was all there on them and I wasn't fond of my mum's partner at the time either... I was about 12 13 when he moved in … so I withdrew from family, I would go straight to my room and not talk to them, but at school I would be sociable. It kind of took over my life and wouldn't focus in class more fun over actual learning, so I started off doing netball even joined basketball club 2 times a week other weeks I would be at libraries with friends just doing things to be out late, I was looking forward to school but not for the right reasons" P7

Engaging in the running club for the school was perceived as a way to establish an identity and positive reputation across the school networks:

"I carried on running because it felt like I was being recognised for something and was good at something - it was somewhere I can shine and not just the black girl on the bus – I started making friends" P7

While in the interviews, domains of civic engagement such as group membership, volunteering and peer networks were seen as an escape from home-life, it was also evident that awareness, knowledge and information may be using civic engagement as a mechanism for change too. One participant describes engaging with others in community groups and learning from them allowing her to leave her abusive relationship, and work towards living a life in which she now sees value:

"…then I lucky to meet different people and they made me aware something was not right. My husband didn't want to too much socialising – he was controlling didn't want me to be close to people. I think maybe I had developed Stockholm syndrome… I started reading a bit and doing my own research after people had said this wasn't normal, but before, I had never experienced anything different… Yeah, Yeah, 'cause people around me, they make me to believe in myself." P10

Essentially, the early negative experience in this participant's life in being pushed into marriage as a child ultimately pushes them to join a women's group, and then go on study at a course at university to better make sense of and interperet previous life events and choices.

Likewise, it was found that difficult experiences could be interpreted as a point for learning, and similarly, learning from other's might increase one's health and wellbeing, and keeping healthy may also help you to engage civically:

"They [difficult experiences] have definitely made me stronger. Nothing - like nothing anyone or anything is too difficult, if you get out of it you are just going to be stronger. Not only physically but mentally as well. you've just gotta like for me if i am going through a difficult time, yeah I might be like stressed out or whatever, but i always try to like pull

myself through? as effectively as possible. and I always try to keep fit, erm and try to look on the bright side of life, what could be worse? I just think it is just down to the experiences I have had, and just trying to be positive, trying to look for inspirations, as well. The books that I've read, the videos I watch on you-tube, you know. The people I might talk with, and just use other like role models as well? Like seeing what other people have been through and like what they did during that period for bettering themselves and coming out under better all better" P13

Despite these forms of civic engagement being a way of escaping, many participants actually expressed a desire or reported still engaging in those same forms or activities today and talked of these as something that still increases their wellbeing, physical activity, networks, and wellbeing. This was especially the case with engaging with church and group membership, including helping at Sunday schools and events.

6.3.4 Civic engagement's reciprocal pathway with wellbeing

This diagram aims to visually articulate this theme, representing the two wat- reciprocal relationship between civic engagement and wellbeing evidenced in the interviews.

Activity

Various work experience and volunteering, including at a care home, a children's hospice

Self-reported wellbeing

'A lot was for experience in terms of what I gained academically, but I really enjoyed being a part of something, I guess? I enjoyed being part of a team, and I enjoyed feeling I am doing something good, there is a purpose and a cause for all of this it is literally saving lives. it is very gratifying, yes'

Various volunteering including Christmas cards for patients, helping arrange school events, homeless kitchen

"I think my wellbeing... doing the things I do often fulfil it and even you feel good about yourself when I volunteer I feel good I feel I have gained something"

Throughout the data collection and analysis stages, the ongoing, two-way reciprocal relationship between civic engagement behaviours and wellbeing was demonstrated, while the motivations for civic engagement were often explained by improved personal wellbeing. The life history calendars offered the opportunity to re-visit all forms of civic engagement across the participant's life course and showed a diversity of volunteering and membership in groups, especially during formative school years. This may largely be due to the expectation for high school students to gain work experience or due to sufficient time to volunteer during long summer holidays, but either way it almost always a good experience for the participants to draw on – and this could be attributed to their personal wellbeing or indeed the knowledge of them improving the wellbeing or skills of others around them.

"I think I do it for my wellbeing... Doing the things I do often is fulfilling, and when you feel good about yourself like when I volunteer I feel good I feel I have gained something, that is another thing under my sleeve for me. Now I walk every morning 2 hours, for me it is good for my body, like good impact, I walk from *** with my phone and my music" P9

Across the interviews, participants expressed a desire to continue civic engagement behaviours, mainly volunteering, helping others and group membership, directly linking this to their own increased wellbeing and increased their social networks;

"Yes, but it was like we would go there [homeless shelter] and have a prayer...it felt like the time flew kind of? Because there was so many things to do the whole time it felt like no time… I kind of bonded with. – no, it's not that I bonded but I got used to the group with which I was doing this and erm... I was feeling good (long pause) because - I was actually feeling good helping (pause) and it was kind of the only hobby I had and I kind of felt proud of it, so I wanted to keep going. I couldn't see any reason why I should stop" p5

"Basically, when I help people, I have friends. Sometimes they call me and they tell me 'I wish I could be like you were' I say how? Strong. OK that's not a very hard, but I've done it, just keeping positive. That's all. Don't lose hope, that's the main thing in life" p10

and also, to feel confident and empowered through being civically engaged in the form of volunteering and helping others:

"No with school I have been doing drama there and I have been erm because I was part of this youth organisation during summer times, I would be the kind of mentors? Or help those members of these organisations to manage play games with the children, homework and yea
*Interviewer and what was that experience like for you personally?
"It was erm it was very challenging but good. Good very challenging because erm ...I didn't think I would be able to be a leader or something to be able to tell somebody what do, and stuff like this and (pause) I realised that I actually can do that so it was kind of challenging for me but it was good and nice. It was nice" p2

Many examples of positive impacts of civic engagement behaviours were mentioned throughout the qualitative interviews.

It was also a pattern across the interviews that participants were aware they could use their own experiences as a way to connect with and help others;

"People in *** are really sort of under privileged and over-crowded and language barriers and lack of education, so if you have something to share that will give someone a better life, then why not? I have a better understanding of people after living in Ghana and UAE and working with Australians for years, I understand people and culture and background, I am in a position to really help" p6

"I think when I went when entered the place [shelter] it wasn't about my cousin it was about other nationalities who were lost, it could easily be you, I mean there were a lot of eastern Europeans there who had no-where to sleep, no job, they cannot work, and that motivated me to help. An old lady I worked with there was 90 and volunteering, and then there was me in my 40s, so I did that for about a year. I remember *** at the civic engagement team said 'you have to give back', and it was very rewarding to give back" p12

It is notable that various forms of civic engagement behaviours, including knowledge and information, volunteering, group membership and social networks, have aided this sample in living a life in which they see value. In this case, we may view these forms of civic engagement as life strategies for better wellbeing.

6.4 Discussion

The adapted calendar method worked as tool for structuring the interviews, but due to the collaborative nature, also for building rapport and establishing trust early on by sitting side by side and by working as a team to complete the calendar, thus removing potential alienating body language and perceptions of hierarchy. It was a method to be able to keep the interview focused and for remembering important content quickly. Within both the in-person and the video interviews, participants were able to input to the calendar and to see in real time what was being added and where, which could also help them to remember important details while seeing that they were being heard throughout. In a few

of the interviews, participants disregarded inputting to the calendar completely and chose not to engage with it, but to answer all questions openly without any interest in the calendar itself. In these cases, it was still a useful interview tool for structuring the interviews and for the analysis process too. These earlier memories of civic engagement, especially so in the domains of group membership, were motivators for engaging in similar activities later in life. The participants discussed various forms of civic engagement from their earliest memories to present day, especially that early life experiences and capabilities may act as predictors for civic engagement behaviours later on in life. It was evident during analysis that although family relationships and influences may serve as a pathway to becoming civically engaged, they may also act as a barrier too, and this was described in many forms. Perhaps due to the student sample being from a 'widening participation' university, twelve out of the thirteen participants who took part had experienced adverse life experiences, in some cases participants shared a large number of these, including neglect, poverty, discrimination, and abuse. Although these adverse life experiences were different and were interpreted differently across the participants, there were also many commonalities, for example all of the participants spoke of using their experiences to help others, and of their suffering as a perceived source of strength and identity, and, of course, all participants had been enrolled at a university course, which is a form of civic engagement in itself.

Twelve out of the thirteen participants talked of suffering mental health, such as suicidal thoughts, withdrawal from others, and anxiety. In many cases, this was described as a direct result of earlier traumatic experiences, and also as a barrier to civic engagement. The interviews presented a sample of students who themselves identified their early experiences as both influencing their personalities and so civic engagement behaviour later in life, but also their health and happiness.

The interviews identified a fluidity of the overall study themes, and a journey to good wellbeing and quality of life being established through not only the experiences of early life, such as determinants, familial relationships and adversities, but just as importantly the interpretations of these experiences being heavily linked to one's capability and desire

for civic engagement. In almost all cases, participants talked of various traumatic experiences in a positive light, and as a learning curve for them to progress in life stronger and wiser. Also, and simultaneously, to health and wellbeing. It should be acknowledged, however, that all interview participants were on a life trajectory of higher education and were enrolled at university, and in a different sample who had experienced the same childhood adversities this positive interpretation cannot be assumed.

Visualised _theory of change:_ life history interview component
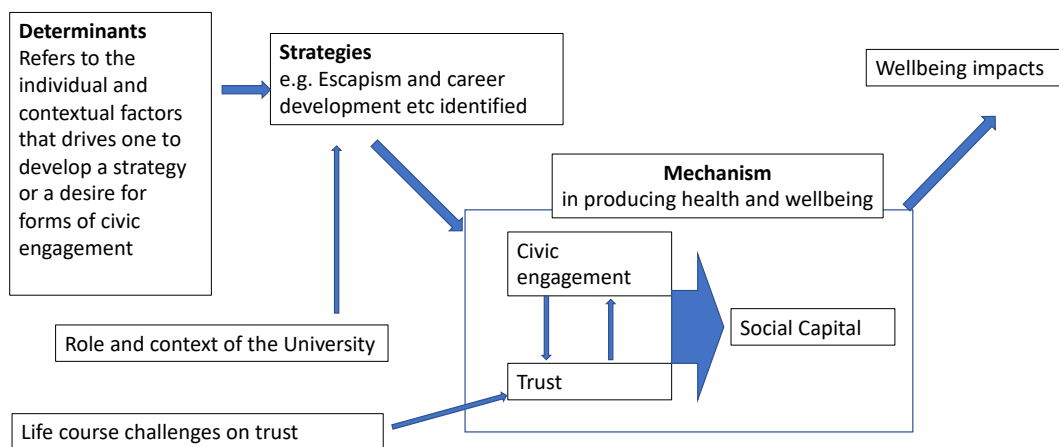
The interviews largely suggest a relationship between early life experiences, civic engagement, and wellbeing. The visualisation attempts to present the interview findings, with civic engagement as a strategy outcome or a mechanism for personal wellbeing, and trust, connected to determinants and life histories, as a crucial factor in the process. The role of the university is important, as it was evident in the interviews that many participants felt very lucky to be enrolled as university students, which, as discussed in the literature review, may not have been an obvious trajectory for them based on their life histories, but this higher education, a form of civic engagement, was itself a source of wellbeing for them.

In many of the interviews, participants themselves referred to happier times as those being when they were more civically active, but also spoke of health and wellbeing and

civic engagement simultaneously. Participants described a variety of civic engagement activities across their lives, and it was clear that those who had experienced living with active family members within the community had engaged in civic activities throughout their childhood and school life as expected and encouraged, while in some cases, as a form of rebellion or disagreement with their family's wants and desires for them. Patterns across the interviews showed that those who had experienced discrimination in their childhoods were more likely to want to use these experiences to help others through volunteering and group membership, although at the time, this experience may have caused them to withdraw and resulted in low mental wellbeing. This approach recognises the relationship between a person's development and wellbeing and their social, economic, and cultural constraints (Pogge 2002).

While participating alone may encapsulate various forms of civic engagement behaviour, decision making and having a voice may fall within political civic engagement. Taking care of others and being taking care of could echo a variety of volunteering efforts discussed within these interviews, and equally group membership, especially in the case of this sample, of church groups. Formal and non-formal education does advocate the domain of information, awareness and knowledge, and leisure activities could include group membership and teamwork. However, the capabilities and functioning's also demonstrate the necessity of freedom, autonomy, and the removal of barriers in order to achieve wellbeing and quality of life.

The findings of the exploratory focus groups were also echoed largely in the interviews, with many of the same motivators and barriers present (such as trust, lack of time and financial barriers) but also in which parenthood was identified as a motivating factor for civic engagement. It is clear that early life experiences and inherited capabilities broadly do impact people's ability and desire to be civically engaged, and this is especially so with 'trust'. Although it has been found that geographic areas who have less trust in the government are less civically engaged, this study has highlighted that those who feel less trust in family and/or society during early life are less likely to be civically engaged later on in life, perhaps more so in the form of political civic engagement.

Primary data exploring early life and civic engagement has been recommended as an area needing more research by Greenfield and Moorman (2017), and this is especially important for public health, because of the widely acknowledged salubrious impacts of civic engagement. The life history calendar interviews were a unique consideration to begin to explore methods, including remote online data-collection sue the Covid-19 pandemic, for collecting qualitative retrospective data about early life and civic engagement.

The life history calendar interviewing method was adapted to include a line for civic engagement for the purpose of this study. The visual calendar as a guide or prompt was a valuable tool throughout the interviews for both the interviewer but also for the interviewee. The interviews were a vital aspect of this study and its aims. They provided a rich collection of un-represented life history experiences in this context, and highlighted the merits of using a collaborative interview tool for collecting life histories from this population of non-traditional university students. This is reflected by the very start of completing the calendar, and the experiences and adversities that participants reported. Participants would typically start with their being born:

"OK, I am originally from Ghana, I came here when I was 3 with my mum... just mum at first. I had a little brother but he was still in Ghana, he came later on" p7

"OK (pause) so I was born in Jamaica to erm to a taxi driver and a hair dresser and I lived with my mum mostly while I was younger, that was from about basic school up to primary (pause) erm I didn't spend much time with my parents. I was mainly with family and friends

while my mum was at work, I went to primary school by myself, I was pretty good with my school work and everything that didn't bother me at all. And then my mum left for the UK and while she was in the UK, I stayed with different family members, until I was 17 I was staying in different locations with different people different environments. I came to the UK when I was 17 … he [father] was with his other family members so he had his own wife and children" P13

"OK well I was raised born in Ghana in west Africa, I was raised partially in Amsterdam, and during teenage years I was in London, I moved there about 14… 12 years in Ghana. My mum was abroad with my dad so I lived with my grandparents, I had a good life, I went to primary school then I migrated to Amsterdam" P9

Further, during the latter stages of thematic analysis, the summarised calendars were again a useful reminder and guide for data familiarisation, but also for identifying patterns and life history commonalities across the three topical lines of the calendars. The use of life history interviewing led to an assembly of contextual information to be gathered, and, as documented by a qualitative life history researcher, the adoption of qualitative methods brings the uncovering of '*social phenomena concealed by other methods'* (Davis, 2006, P1).

It must also be noted that while participant's initial definitions of civic engagement were largely similar, it became clear later on in the focus group that the hierarchy of civic engagement activities, or the imagining of them, was largely reflective of (and in some cases directly stated to have been) dependant on culture. For example, whilst immediately defining civic engagement to mean engagement with society and helping others during the interview, when asked if they remember their parents were civic engaged during their childhood, they spoke at length about the social habits of their parents, and were transparent that this was just the culture and expectations in their home country. Despite later linking their civic engagement behaviour mainly to formal volunteering and group membership, retrospectively they saw civic engagement for their

parents to mean something quite different contextually. Due to the high number of participants being born outside of the UK, this was a notable realisation.

For this sample of students, it was evident considering participant's life history calendars that they had periods in their life when they were more civically engaged, which was often during schooling years and perhaps due to less barriers, for example family or work commitments, or being time rich. Also, for a number of participants, their levels of engagement were initially due to expectations from teachers or parents to be so, although motivations to continue civic engagement behaviour was down to personal choice and identified salubrious impacts such as increased status, social networks and confidence. The calendars visually demonstrated the linkage between experience, civic engagement, and wellbeing throughout the life course. For example, during teenage years and low levels of family disruption, participants reported being more engaged in a variety of ways, and happier, and often linked feelings of confidence and wellbeing to civic behaviours. One of the potential pathways identified into domains of civic engagement, such as volunteering and group membership, was education and expectations, and students were often introduced to helping others through work experience or encouraged by authority figures such as local community or religious leaders during their teenage years. Once they had engaged in these behaviours, they reported that the motivation to continue was personal development and wellbeing, followed by desires to really help others due to their empathy, but sometimes also their ability to recognise themselves in other people they were helping.

Personal factors such as socioeconomics and adverse life experiences in early life may prevent one from living a life in which they see value and achieving personal wellbeing (Mehay et al, 2021). However, civic engagement was at times a way of improving this as a direct route for increased social networks and wellbeing. Reflecting on the interview methodology adopted, there is learning about the naming of the columns used in the life history calendars. For example, while 'residential and family' may mean one thing to me (as interviewer) relating to my immediate family members alone, it may hold different, broader connotations culturally and religiously to others, and be inclusive of wider

significant people in their lives. This was also the case with adversities, whereby what might be considered an adversity to one person but not the other. Further, the naming of the 'civic engagement' theme may be altered or divided into a number of columns to allow for more details across types of civic engagement, but also, importantly, in reference to the meaning of civic engagement to the population that is being interviewed. For example, in this case, the incorporation of the broader conceptualisation and global perspective identified within this thesis. Lastly, the inclusion of the 'external dates' column is subjective. Whilst very useful for some participants and a good source for memory recall, it was practically ignored by others, usually younger participants. Upon reflection, this column may serve as an optional column for life history interviews being conducted with younger age groups, or one which requires careful consideration.

Despite the survey data indicating that a number of these participants were not civically active, we can infer from the life history calendar interviews that this is not necessarily the case. While the survey did present an accurate albeit prescriptive measure of present levels of civic engagement and an overall measurement score based on averages, it did not take into account non-formal acts of civic engagement, or the more in-depth details qualitative research offers, especially with tools such as probing, memory re-call, interviewee disclosure, and rapport. Many of the participants reported civic engagement activities throughout their life course or that they are currently engaging in, that were not picked up quantitatively. This highlights the merits of a mixed methods approach.

While political civic engagement, and the ability to have a voice and to input to decision making are vital in the capability approach to one's wellbeing, it may be that disregarding these rights is indeed a researched and viable form of having a voice in this case. An integral aspect of the capability approach is the acknowledgment that one's wellbeing and ability to live a life in which they see value may depend as much on their personal interpretations of their experiences as on their inherited capabilities, evolving capabilities, and functionalities. It was evident during analysis that participant's choices and motivators surrounding civic engagement behaviors were likely to depend on their early life experiences and inherited capabilities, but equally on their interpretation of these. In many cases, despite suffering poverty, abuse and neglect, participants talked of these

experiences as difficult and emotional, but in almost a positive light, and as situations which they learnt from and made them into stronger and more capable individuals today.

Further, while sampling took civic engagement scores into account, it should be noted that these scores are a prescriptive and current measure of civic engagement, which was a dynamic and non-prescriptive part of the interviews and showed higher levels of civic engagement.

6.5 Limitations

Retrospective studies are important contributions to the field of research, but may be open to recall bias and interpretation, and more studies are needed that examine reliability of retrospective data (Hardt and Rutter 2005). Collecting retrospective data can be problematic, especially when participants are recalling daily information or experiences based on memories from years ago.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ethical amendments had to be submitted in order to finish data collection remotely. While remote video interviewing allowed the removal of logistical barriers for many (as detailed above) it also threw up obstacles for a few participants, who wanted to include contentious issues in their life histories, but felt unable to do so from their homes with concerns family members may hear. In this situation, the 'chat' function was used (voluntarily) which was incorporated into the transcript and data analysis, however, due to the inability for expanding at these moments or drawing on these experiences further, this experience should be noted as a limitation.

7 Chapter seven: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction and overview

The significance of civic engagement, its health and wellbeing impacts, and the use of the term is increasing worldwide (WHO, 2016) yet the term itself carries wide-spread definitional ambiguity (Flanagan, 2010). Revisiting the definition of civic engagement for the purpose of this thesis (please refer to chapter one) civic engagement may be defined as engagement in the civil society, inclusive of team playing, formal and informal activities to improve conditions or lives, and gaining knowledge and information. Despite acknowledgement that early life experiences are likely to impact civic identity (Rotolo et al, 2019) there is an ongoing paucity of literature exploring the relationship between early life and civic engagement (Zaff et al, 2010). Further studies are needed to better understand the inequalities of civil participation within marginalised groups in the UK (Mehay et al, 2021), and how these are associated with life trajectories (Ferrarro et al 2009) especially in the context of a London based widening participation university. Very little previous research carried out in the UK was found, and even less was found within widening participation universities, and none in the context of a diverse, London student population. As a result of this gap in the literature, the aim of this study was to explore the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing.

This chapter will revisit the study aims and research questions key findings of the empirical programme of work in relation to these. The findings from each component are compared and contrasted before a final conclusion and recommendations for further research.

7.2 Summary of key findings in relation to research questions

The empirical work undertaken for this thesis consisted of three elements using a mixed method approach. The first element was a focus group study, the second was a cross-sectional cohort study, and the third was in-depth life history calendar interviews from a purposive sample of the cohort study participants.

The empirical work highlighted the complex, nuanced relationship between civic engagement, life history and wellbeing, and brings to light the experiences and barriers faced by a sample of diverse, non-traditional university students. The key findings of the empirical work in relation to each research question are summarised below. The findings are also explored in more detail throughout this chapter in relation to previous literature.

1. **What does civic engagement mean in the context of a widening participation university?**

This was explored within the focus groups and also the life history calendar interviews, and showed that although the meaning in the context of non-traditional university students at a widening participation university did tally with the current literature on the concept, there were new perceptions in the reality of what civic engagement may look like in practice, for example intervening when walking past local youths behaviour badly, or engaging in local community groups. Students challenged the literature and often deviated from recognised civic engagement behaviours, by questioning and then affirming that informal daily acts such as helping an elderly neighbour were indeed significant and valuable examples of civic engagement. The conventional political forms of civic engagement were sometimes perceived as secondary to other forms within which the goal was protecting, empowering and helping others, and supporting voices to be heard. This was the case in both of the qualitative studies, which is not reflected in the wider literature, whereby political forms of civic engagement are very consistently used as examples. Further, while one might become involved in civic engagement for

personal self- interest in addressing personal problems, by doing so this may lead to more engagement, and helping others, and this is important in terms of underpinning involvement in and conceptualising civic engagement behaviours. Parenthood and familial relationships were identified as both pathways and motivators for wanting to improve society for loved ones through civic engagement, which was not witnessed in the literature, and was a direct route to some forms of civic engagement reported in the qualitative elements such as volunteering at local schools. Throughout this research, civic engagement was largely understood by the participants to be an essential communal behaviour for the welfare of all, but especially for protecting and supporting disadvantaged or vulnerable pockets of society. Civic engagement was perceived by this cohort of students to carry connotations of class and to reflect socioeconomics and a class- based society. Rather than civic engagement meaning engagement in democracy and politics, these students recognised situations that presented need for civic engagement, such as protecting those suffering multitude forms of abuse, supporting the homeless, or newly arrived migrants. This perspective is a unique one, and reflects the cohort who participated in the research and their lived experiences. The role of the university is important, as it was evident in the interviews that many participants felt very lucky to be enrolled as university students, which, as discussed in the literature review, may not have been an obvious trajectory for them based on their life histories, but this higher education, a form of civic engagement, was a itself a source of wellbeing for them.

2. How is this sample civically engaged?

In the survey element, almost a quarter of this cohort were categorised as being 'moderately' civically engaged, meaning that their scores fell within the middle quantile, and they had reported various civic engagement behaviours. Combined, all three elements found evidence to suggest that participants were civically engaged, although

civic engagement prevalence and behaviour reported in the survey was very different in comparison to the life history calendar interviews. This is discussed in the results chapters and limitations but is likely due to the interviews being able to draw out informal and daily acts of civic engagement. The findings again challenged and broadened what civic engagement means, and the challenges to developing a standardised measurement. Within the survey, students reported political forms of civic engagement to have the least amount of quality in comparison to all other domains included within the survey. This is interesting because much of the literature sites political engagement as a key form of civic engagement. Despite having the lowest frequency amongst this cohort, volunteering scored highly in comparison to the other domains for quality, suggesting that it is one of the most meaningful forms of civic engagement to this cohort of students. Participants showed low levels of engagement in the form of political engagement. When this was explored during the interviews, it was reported at times to be a conscious choice, linked to not understanding politics, not feeling their engagement could change anything for the better, or, most significantly, lack of trust.

3. How can early life influence civic engagement?

Early life was found to significantly influence civic engagement. Predominantly this was demonstrated through the in-depth interview component. The qualitative life history interviews explored motivators of civic engagement experienced throughout participant's life histories. In the interview component, early life was reported as a vital factor when considering the shaping of civic identities and civic behaviour in adult life, in a nuanced, sometimes positive and sometimes negative way. While determinants and adversities such as abuse and poverty were reported to be barriers to civic engagement through withdrawal and low wellbeing, adversities were also reported to be motivators, in the form of escapism and supporting others they empathised with later in life. It should also be noted that trust (significant for civic engagement identified in the literature, the focus group element, and the in-depth interviews) is likely to be developed or formed during early life

(Mehay et al, 2021) and this presents a clear relationship between early life and civic engagement.

It must also be noted that while participant's initial definitions of civic engagement were largely similar, it became clear later on in the focus group that the hierarchy of civic engagement activities, or the imagining of them, was largely reflective of (and in some cases directly stated to have been) dependant on culture. For example, whilst immediately defining civic engagement to mean engagement with society and helping others during the interview, when asked if they remember their parents were civic engaged during their childhood, they spoke at length about the social habits of their parents and were transparent that this was just the culture and expectations in their home country. Despite later linking their civic engagement behaviour mainly to formal volunteering and group membership, retrospectively they saw civic engagement for their parents to mean something quite different contextually. Due to the high number of participants being born outside of the UK, this was a notable realisation, and again highlights the significant influence of early life experiences on civic engagement.

4. How is civic engagement associated with health and wellbeing?

Regression analysis of the cohort study data demonstrated a significant relationship between early life variables and the wellbeing score; therefore confirming that early life factors should be considered as predictors for wellbeing later in life. These findings were further supported within the qualitative interview component, whereby participants consistently related motivation for various forms of civic engagement behaviour to wellbeing outcomes. The calendars visually demonstrated the linkage between experience, civic engagement, and wellbeing throughout the life course. For example, during teenage years and low levels of family disruption, participants reported being more engaged in a variety of ways, and happier, and often linked feelings of confidence and wellbeing to civic behaviours. The relationship between civic engagement and wellbeing has been explored in depth in the review of the literature (please refer to chapter two) and was evident within the interviews, within which periods of the participant's life during which

they reported feeling unhappy were also periods lacking in civic engagement. It should also be noted here that the literature corresponds to a global perspective of theory and findings, which may not always be transferable or may not always apply to a diverse population of students in at a widening participation university, which highlights the significance of this research.

The participants often linked their examples of civic engagement, especially volunteering, with increased confidence and happiness, but also spoke of engaging in community activities or school activities as a way of escaping various difficult home-lives. Equally, a pattern in this sample was withdrawal from others and low mental wellbeing as a barrier from engaging in things they would have liked to during difficult periods of their lives. Overwhelmingly, in most interviews, this was partly linked to experiencing racism or prejudice after moving to the UK and the impacts that this had. It has been found in a study also conducted in London that experiences of adversity within minority groups can lead to a decrease in physical and mental health, and that lower socio-economic status can have impacts on health inequalities across the life course (Mehay et al, 2021) and that immigration status, class position and life history may influence civic engagement in London (McIlwaine and Bermu 2011). The early life histories collected within this study included experiences of homelessness, neglect, bullying, racism, and abuse, and were reported by participants themselves to result in feelings of anger, crying, and withdrawal from a multitude of social activities during early and teenage years. This is a significant finding in relation to civic engagement, because we know that engagement in activities during early and teenage years is likely to lead to pro-social activities later (Rotolo et al, 2019) especially because, in some cases, civic engagement was in fact a tool to change these difficult times and to help themselves (and others around them) positively. This indicates that while civic engagement has increased participants' physical activity and general health and happiness, their mental wellbeing may also act as a facilitator or barrier to their engagement levels, in a reciprocal relationship.

7.3 Detailed discussion of findings: Integration of finding across empirical components

The amalgamation of the three components of empirical data presented in this study further highlight significant theories and findings identified in the wider literature. For instance, examples in previous studies of identified barriers of participation were echoed, as well as experiences of various wellbeing outcomes of civic engagement. The merits of adopting a mixed method approach were highlighted within this thesis. The empirical data collected offers new perceptions and avenues for future research, as well as methodological learning from an unexplored sample of university students to add to the current knowledge base. The cross-sectional survey component evidenced the relationship between socioeconomics, socio-demographics and early life relationships when exploring pathways to civic engagement and to wellbeing.

The survey data alone was able to statistically evidence the lower levels of mental wellbeing within this sample in comparison to other nationally represented samples of the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Score. This finding was later strengthened when gathering and analysing the life history calendar interviews, whereby low mental wellbeing, suicidal thoughts, as well as mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety were disclosed by the majority of interview participants. Results of ordinary least square regression showed a strong significance with family disruption and civic engagement score, and the survey data evidenced that family stability during early life was likely to relate to higher levels of civic engagement, as well as higher levels of wellbeing (see section 5.4).

Low levels of political engagement, in terms of voting and campaigning, were evidenced within the empirical research conducted within this thesis. This could relate to engagement in the civil society being of an exclusive, class-based 'bourgeois' nature, but also, in some cases, represented a conscious rejection of politics and mainstream media. At times this rejection of political forms of civic engagement was explained by a lack of trust, by learnt behaviour, as an output of growing up in a country with a corrupt government, or by the inability to see any politicians or political parties as viable choices that would make a meaningful difference. The significance of trust - which surfaced within

both qualitative elements of this thesis - in relation to civic engagement has been noted in the wider literature as being related to civic engagement behaviours (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Personal factors such as socioeconomics and adverse life experiences in early life may prevent one from living a life in which they see value and achieving personal wellbeing (Mehay et al, 2021). However, civic engagement was at times a way of improving this as a direct route for increased social networks and wellbeing.

In bringing these empirical elements together, it becomes apparent that while the participants were sampled carefully from the pool of interview respondents to include perspectives from a range of experiences relating to health and wellbeing, civic engagement and life course experiences, the interview component in fact showed an overwhelming number of similarities across the interview participants, that were not anticipated. While the participants were expected to have a breadth of different lived experiences, backgrounds, and levels of civic engagement based on their survey scores, when digging deeper during the interviews, it became apparent that many of the participants were civically engaged but in informal and daily ways that they did not pay much thought to, and this was also the case in the focus groups. Therefore, the significance of seeking a way to capture daily acts of civic engagement or of using qualitative techniques to collect data focusing on civic engagement is again highlighted.

The aim of the maximum variation sampling was to establish a greater understanding of the responses collected in the survey component, for instance how and why some participants reported high family disruption, high civic engagement and high wellbeing, while others reported a stable and happy early life with low civic engagement and low wellbeing. Based on their survey responses, participants were categorised into groups. While the sampling method was carried out to identify interview participants based on including a representative and varied sample from the survey respondents, the similarities between the participant's life histories became apparent in the data collection, familiarisation, analysis and reporting stages. Further, while the survey data showed low levels of volunteering in comparison to the other four domains of civic engagement, it was established in the interview component that almost all the participants had engaged in volunteering or were currently doing so.

While the survey had collected data on civic engagement behaviours across the five specified domains identified in the literature, upon interviewing, participants frequently remembered more about their civic engagement during conversation where they were reminded and aided by the use of the calendar tool. These reminders happened when explaining a memory, or by the external dates' column, or by the discussions in the health and wellbeing domain. Civic engagement was also sometimes captured through confusion and questioning about what it meant, or even coincidently (for example, in one of the interviews conducted remotely with a new mother who was breastfeeding, a family member came in to check on her and asked her about a painting, after when asked she explained she goes to art groups and teaches but had not thought to include this in the interview). It became apparent that collecting civic engagement behaviours by survey alone may not be as reliable in this context as collecting qualitative interviews, whereby participants' calendars were a prompt for the interviewer, but also the interviewee. While levels of engagement in the calendar tool varied across the participants interviewed, the calendar worked as a tool to reduce recall bias for the interviews in terms of their history, and as a prompt to remember further details and to enjoy the interview process, which may help to explain why details were not present within the survey where an iterative to-and-fro process was not present. The interviews strengthened the findings of the survey, whereby periods of the participant's lives where they were feeling low or unhappy were mirrored by lower levels of civic engagement, and times when they were happy were reflected by higher levels of civic engagement. This is interesting as the focus groups presented barriers such as lack of trust or being time poor, but the interviews imply that civic engagement is often time well spent in terms of happiness and increasing trust in others. This method of collecting retrospective interview data allowed for a deeper, more detailed exploration and representation of life history, levels of civic engagement and wellbeing across the life course, but also how one is civically engaged, why, and what it really means to them personally. While a number of the participants recruited into the qualitative interviews reported very low civic engagement in their survey, as stated, this may be a misunderstanding, or possibly a lack of confidence in their actions in terms of viewing them as forms of civic engagement. For example, a participant who was very active in her local church and organised the Sunday school for a number of years had not

thought to report this in the survey because it was seen as something she had always done and that just happened rather than a formally appointed volunteer contract. Similarly, it could be argued that a number of participants who had volunteered in a variety of ways had not reported those actions in the survey because it was expected of them to do so by parents or teachers for their personal development or their career paths which poses confusion in the term civic engagement again. In any case, these are nonetheless sound forms of civic engagement behaviours in their own right, considering the literature, in terms of engaging in the civil society, as well the empirical components conducted within this thesis. Further, participatory youth activities have been found to be positively associated with civic engagement in adult life (Perks and Hann, 2011). In some cases, participants had forgotten a multitude of civic engagement activities they had engaged in until discussing their lives in detail during the qualitative interviews.

Further, the life history interviews showed how forms of civic engagement, especially volunteering and group membership, may be employed by individuals who had suffered adverse childhood experiences as a mechanism to help and protect others in need, thus contributing to the improvement of society, whilst at the same time by benefitting them personally in terms of wellbeing and networks. This is of particular interest when considering the positive impact that participatory activities have on youths, that may influence civic engagement levels in adult life (Hann, 2014). The overwhelming magnitude of adverse life experiences reported by participants has been confirmed statistically by a recent study performed at the same institution, which showed that the high levels of adverse life experiences at this widening participation university may be linked to issues with degree completion (Davies et al, 2021). Interesting, while previous studies have found that acts of civic engagement that include socialising or collaborating with others are least popular, and people prefer to participate alone, this thesis suggests the opposite for this cohort.

Within the civic engagement element of the survey component, the 'quality' element of the FDQ-CE was designed to collect data for every civic engagement activity a respondent had reported to engage in. The survey showed quality was reported to be higher in cases where the civic engagement activity in question required one to engage

with, work and collaborate with others, for instance social networks, volunteering and group membership, rather than political engagement or knowledge and information, while the highest domain the sample reported to engage in was knowledge and information, which was not anticipated and may be due to their enrolment as university students. However, this is again ambiguous, as levels of engagement in groups (for instance sports groups) were reported, and it has recently been argued that this may loosely fall under political civic engagement in some ways too (Sage et al. 2018).

Further to this, the interviews showed that - in some cases - the motivation to be civically engaged, and the meaning of civic engagement, may not be related to the good of a community or others separately, but may, for some, be an interlinked combination of this and the use of civic engagement as a strategy for personal wellbeing in a variety of significant ways. The ability for the political engagement to protect and help people is not as obvious, or quick to lead to personal wellbeing outcomes, or even guaranteed to. This may also be due to the barriers identified by this sample, such as lack of trust and understanding when it came to politics and politicians, as well as logistical barriers such as having the right to vote. However, all elements of empirical data collected as part of this thesis show the participants to be civically engaged, just not so much politically. This poses a contradiction, as previous studies have found civic engagement to be more prevalent in affluent populations and affluent geographical locations, but maybe this is due to the way data is collected or the categories of civic engagement included (Beetham, 1994).

In conclusion, during the qualitative elements of this study, participants would often not see themselves as civically engaged. However, it became apparent that they were in fact very active members of their communities, often helping their local church, advocating for others, helping neighbours in need, or being active parents at their children's schools. These are all understood to be acts of civic engagement, both within the literature but also as identified by students in the exploratory focus groups. This cohort identified civic engagement as something that happens in the civic society, and acknowledged the significance of politics in this, but were less engaged in the form of political civic engagement than other categories. Students perceived civic engagement to mean

something perhaps more participatory and something that takes place at the individual, interpersonal, social and community level, and less so at national, political state level, although this was acknowledged as being important to some extent.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

It is recommended that future research in the area continues to seek to understand civic engagement among non-traditional university students in the UK, including the impact of life history on specific forms of civic engagement, and civic engagement as a pathway or mechanism to increased wellbeing.

Recommendations for further research, policy and practice have been summarised below:

- Further qualitative research to better understand what civic engagement means (in a variety of contexts and sub-groups) followed by the development of quantitative tools that attempt to measure civic engagement behaviour

- Further research, particularly qualitative research, to explore impacts of adverse life experiences on civic engagement behaviour in adult life

- Further research into the adoption of civic engagement as a life strategy and mechanism for self-improvement and wellbeing

- Further research into civic engagement in the context of widening participation universities with an international, non-traditional student sample

- Further research into parenthood and family as a motivator for civic engagement

- Further research that explores the concept of trust a barrier to civic engagement

- Further research that develops and pilots tools to incorporate and measure informal civic engagement behaviours, and account for informal civic engagement acts as specified in this study, including informal volunteering, consistent helping of community members, and online activities that fall under the sphere of civic engagement without necessarily a conscious civically minded decision

- Further research that seeks to explore the impact of technology (and the digital divide) on forms of civic engagement, and that ensures online civic engagement is captured in measurements, especially with reference to the global shift online during the Covid-19 pandemic

- The exploration and co-production with relevant groups of tangible policy recommendations to tackle the barriers identified in this thesis, in terms of socioeconomics and adversities, to address inequalities in civic engagement

- The incorporation of credited and supportive local civic engagement projects offered within the healthcare system to take isolation and low levels of wellbeing

- One of the key barriers identified within this thesis to civic engagement, especially in relation to political engagement, was lack of trust and of understanding. Based on this, the incorporation of modules focused on politics and democracy into the educational system alongside core subjects may tackle current barriers faced by this population

- Policy changes that explore and acknowledge barriers faced by different societal groups and seek to encourage civic engagement across the population in mind of these, using outreach and tailored approaches to do so. It is not a 'one size fits all' approach

- Both the literature and the empirical research conducted within this thesis show a relationship between civic engagement and wellbeing. Civic engagement has the potential to improve wellbeing, self-esteem, confidence and more. For this reason, civic engagement may be re-framed as a positive behaviour for improving health and wellbeing.

- Changes in practice that seek to tackle barriers faced and increase flexibility, such as financial or language barriers and tailored support and outreach, especially during times of austerity (or for example during the recent global pandemic) where civic engagement is vital for communities and societies to function, but especially so for marginalised groups.

7.5 Overall Study Limitations

The development, delivery and analysis of this research echoes all the known challenges in measuring civic engagement behaviours, and this must be recognised as a limitation for this study overall. There were also ongoing challenges in terms of recruitment, and with time constraints, this ultimately meant that less data across the components was gathered than was initially hoped.

The generalizability of this research may also be considered a limitation, as might the retrospective nature of it. While retrospective studies are important contributions, they may be open to recall bias and interpretation, and this is a limitation of this study overall (Hardt and Rutter 2005). It should also be noted here that all participants chose to take part in this research, and that all data is self-reported.

The use of technology should also be noted as a limitation for this study overall. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ethical amendments had to be submitted in order to finish data collection of the interviews remotely. While remote video interviewing allowed the removal of logistical barriers and meant data collection could continue, it did present obstacles for some participants being able to take part properly in the calendar method, and in some cases being at home could be distracting for participants. Equally, the survey was completed online, and some participants who were close to the end did not complete the survey in full because they weren't sure how to pick back up where they had left off. This led to incomplete data and could have been avoided with the use of paper surveys only.

7.6 Conclusion

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The potential mediating role of civic engagement in a life histroy timeline

| Life course factors
Including demographics and determinants | → | Life histories
Including adversities, familial relationships | → | Civic Engagement | → | Post life experiences | → | **Wellbeing Outcomes**
• Health &Wellbeing
• Confidence
• Embeddedness
• Resilience
• Social Networks
• Hope & Satisfaction |

Population Level: Public Health Outcomes
A democratic society where students become engaged in decision making processes, are healthier, happier and informed

The above conceptual framework attempts to visualise the contents and conclusionary statements of this thesis. This thesis, through wider literature and qualitative and quantitative research methods, demonstrates there to be a relationship between early life, civic engagement, and wellbeing. Empirical data suggests early life can impact civic engagement behaviour (see section 5.4) and that civic engagement may play a medicating role between early life and wellbeing, but also wellbeing outcomes may be a significant motivator for civic engagement. The cross-sectional cohort study showed that early life relationships and networks impact self-esteem in adult life (see table 17) and that socio-demographics and socioeconomics, early life and civic engagement (see table 18) count for movement in the Warwick and Edinburgh mental wellbeing score at 16%. This confirms the thesis hypothesis that civic engagement has life course determinants.

Despite the acknowledgment that early life experiences are likely to impact civic identity (Rotolo et al, 2019), there is paucity of literature surrounding the development of civic engagement in adulthood (Zaff et al, 2010) and further studies – especially retrospective qualitative studies - are needed to better understand the inequalities of participation within marginalised groups in the UK (Mehay et al, 2021), and how these are associated with

life trajectories (Ferrarro et al 2009) especially in the un-explored context of a London based widening participation university.

Despite the lack of theory development and measurements, scholars have characterised research into civic engagement across the life course as a *'prime example'* for understanding the progression or rejection of civic behaviours (Sherrod, 2015) highlighting the significance of collecting early life data in the journey to understanding the impact of early life on civic engagement and psychological wellbeing. There is a persisting gap between low-income and high-income households when it comes to civic engagement, and, although it has been found that participation in an array of extra-curricular activities may help to equalise this gap, more research is needed to better understand how early life impacts on civic engagement behaviours (Astuto and Ruck, 2017).

This thesis used quantitative and qualitative empirical data to explore and add knowledge regarding the relationship between early life, civic engagement and wellbeing. Through bivariable regression analysis it was found that adverse childhood experiences, especially *family disruption*, were predictors for wellbeing in adult life. The survey component offered a plethora of data and findings, while the life history interviews indicated the choice to reject civic engagement in the political domain, and the negative impacts on wellbeing this domain may hold.

Qualitative analysis showed that that civic engagement may be a pathway or mechanism for improved wellbeing across one's life history, in multiple ways. The life history calendar interviews showed that life history may act as a motivator for civic engagement over time, in terms of wanting to use an experience to help others in adulthood, or as a form of escapism. Further, parenthood and family were reported to have an impact on civic engagement, with participant's remembering civic engagement behaviours from their parents in their early life fondly and continuing those behaviours through choice, desiring to recreate said memories in adulthood. This was especially the case with churchgoing. However, for some participants, adverse life experiences also represented a direct

barrier, physically or mentally reducing or even preventing their engagement in youth and teenage years. This barrier was particularly the case when participants experienced low levels of wellbeing, or as a result of migration to a new country, changing schools, adapting to new environments or changing family dynamics. When considering the life history interviews alone, it can be concluded that life history, civic engagement, and wellbeing have a strong, interlinked, and fluid relationship throughout the life course.

When considering civic engagement, and the influence of life history, Rotolo et al, (2019) argued that future research must consider wider factors of socialisation, and rely on the collection of retrospective data from adult populations, whereby the impacts of early life will be identifiable and collectable. The life history calendar component reflects the wider research that is called for.

Higher levels of familial and social trust are associated with civic values, while close family values, experiences and witnessing civic participation and civic beliefs are influential in children's uptake of civic engagement (White and Misty 2015) which was evident in the life history interviews carried out. As stated, there is very little data available in either this geographical or this student demographic context. A recent study has used qualitative interviews to explore the social, cultural and historical context of civic engagement in an area relatively close to London (Hart et al, 2021) with a focus on psychological wellbeing, findings from participant's lived experiences will be applied in a 'recovery college' setting. However, data was collected from tutors without a focus on life history and early life. In the same vein, while a university case study was found conducted in the South of England (Hart et al, 2010) no similar studies were found that explored early life, civic engagement and wellbeing at a widening participation university, with a diverse group of international students, and very few studies were found focused on civic engagement conducted in the UK at all.

The mixed method amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative life history data analyses (Laub and Sampson 2013) is likely to result in a better understanding of civic engagement behaviour across the life course. This thesis presents a collection of new knowledge, in

empirical data and findings to add to the field of civic engagement research, and novel methodological approaches for doing so. It has confirmed and added new perspectives to the current understandings of the meaning of civic engagement within the literature. The thesis has further tested a relatively recent piloted and validated survey tool (developed at The University of East London) for starting to measure civic engagement, and the new empirical work has been conducted in a unique setting. The survey data shows this sample to report low levels of wellbeing. Furthermore, the programme of work in this thesis has involved the adaptation of the life history calendar method to aid the study aims and collect rigorous, in-depth, retrospective, diverse and non-prescriptive life history data. The amendment to virtual data collection due to the coronavirus pandemic led to learning in collecting life history calendar interviews online and allowed logistical barriers to participation in the interviews to be removed. It also allowed the collection of data on mistrust in the reporting of coronavirus updates in the mainstream media and the desire to be civically engaged during the pandemic in protecting and supporting those in need through local food and medicine deliveries.

This study evidences the significance of early life on wellbeing both statistically and qualitatively, highlighting how aspects of early life may works as motivators and as barriers to civic engagement in adult life, but also emphasising the importance of better understanding the complexities of this sample's life histories when attempting to explore pathways to civic engagement. Revisiting the hypothesis in relation to the re-conceptualisation of civic engagement as a health behaviour, it must be noted more research is needed, although findings demonstrate civic engagement to improve psychological wellbeing. Early life does influence civic engagement, both positively and negatively, while civic engagement may be a mediating pathway to wellbeing, and all three concepts hold a significant relationship with one-another. The adverse life experiences reported within this study may serve as a start to understanding civic engagement better within this context. However, if society strives to remove barriers, and address the complex factors that prevent specific groups in disadvantaged areas from engaging and living happy and healthy lives (Mehay et al, 2021), then more research is needed in this context. Following this, more research is needed that positions civic

engagement as a possible pathway to wellbeing and that explores the barriers reported within this study further. This study evidences the vitality of adopting life history methods, and especially qualitative life history methods, for gathering empirical research to better understand civic engagement and wellbeing. As Winston Churchill said, "*the further backward you can look, the further forward you are likely to see*".

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9. Appendices

9.1 Life history interviews: data collection materials

Topic guide

Life History Interview Topic Guide

Time scheduling – between 1-2 hours.

Introduction

The life history calendar tool will be used as a tool for exploring the interviewee's life experiences in their words. The interview will be heavily centered on <u>active listening</u> in order to ensure that the interview is as participant led as possible when completing the calendar. Prompts and probes will be used, and to cover the interview aims, but the relationship between the themes will aim to be covered with as little input from the researcher as possible.

Interview Aims and Questions

Map participant's (early) life using the calendar tool. To use the calendar tool to build rapport, to support the life history recall and to reflect the participant's account of their life experiences over the years.

To have a rich account of the participant's life history, in their words, and specifically in relation to the main themes of this research.

Further questions:
- *Is the participant civically engaged? How?*
- *Does the participant volunteer any pathways to, or barriers and facilitators of civic engagement in their own experiences?*
- *Is civic engagement linked to individual health and wellbeing (in their words)?*
- *Why are they more civically engaged in some domains than others?*
- *How do participants explain their pathway to civic engagement, and what they think influenced it?*
- *Can the pathways/journey of a (non)-civic engager be mapped? Is there a pattern? A typology?*
- *Can a non-civic engager become an active citizen? How?*

Remember:
Both qualitative and quantitative primary data are considered within this study; it is hoped that may result in methodological plurism and stronger and richer findings by considering all findings together. (Johnson et al 2004). This study falls between a transformative paradigm (Mertens 2010) and an interpretative paradigm. It seeks to enhance civic engagement and social equality by producing a better understanding of what may prevent or induce civic behaviour across groups, ontologically assuming that while there are many realities which may be considered to be real, these must be explored efficiently and equally during analysis with personal and epistemological reflectivity, and thus without structural prioritization of opinions or researcher biases. Recommendations for increasing civic engagement among university students will be produced within this study. A transformative paradigm also invites both qualitative and quantitative methods, and ontological assumptions within this paradigm accept that participants may evidence multiple realities that may be shaped by their societal, political and economic values (Kawulich 2012). The importance is to collect their life history as they remember it – not the verifiable truth.

Topic Guide

Introduce yourself. Explain the context of the interview, the confidentiality and the participant's right to withdraw from the interview process at any time.

**discuss civic engagement to avoid confusion?

Main themes: Early life experiences, civic engagement, health and wellbeing.

Use the prepared life history calendar and support the participant through filling out the calendar. Allow them to lead.

This can be a tool to cross-reference between the accuracy, improving recall and can help interviewees to talk through their experiences.

Icebreaker: Begin with: *Could you tell me a little about yourself?*

Prompts: * cover all domains of civic engagement
• *Could you talk me through your childhood?*
• Where did you grow up? Who with?
• What was your childhood like?
• Did you enjoy your childhood?
• What was good about your childhood?
• How was your relationship with your family?
• Would you say your parents were civically engaged? Why? How?
• Describe the first memory you have that you might consider civic engagement?
• What was your experience with school?
• Could you tell me about the community you grew up in?
*Cover 5 domains of CE
• Do you see yourself as civically engaged? How?

• How important is it to be civically engaged?
• In what ways to you consider yourself an active citizen?
• Is there anything that makes you want to be civically engaged?
• Is there anything that stops you from wanting to be civically engaged?
• Has anything ever prevented you from being civically engaged?
• Why are you/ aren't you civically engaged?
• How does (domain of CE) make you feel?
• Barriers and facilitators?
• Could you tell me about your health and wellbeing from childhood to now?
• How have your experiences impacted your health and wellbeing?
• Can you describe a time in your life you were happiest? Why?
• What are your plans for the future?
• How do you feel about the future?

De-brief: Thank you, confidentiality, potential to be notified re future publications or reports, and referral phone numbers for additional support.

Consent and information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET University of East London Water Lane, Stratford, London, E15 4LZ

Research Integrity

The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of rigor and integrity in all aspects of research; observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks. The University is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing and as such it is a mandatory requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

University Research Ethics Committee

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact: Catherine Fieulleteau, Ethics Integrity Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD (Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk).

The Principal Investigator(s)

Professor Gopalakrishnan Netuveli Institute for Health and Human Development, Water Lane, Stratford, E15 4LZ London 0208 223 4530 g.netuveli@uel.ac.uk

Student Researcher

Ruby Farr
Institute for Health and Human Development, Water Lane, Stratford, E15 4LZ London 0208 223 4530/07837155360 farr@uel.ac.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

June 2017

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title
Civic engagement combined-method life history interviews Project Description

The Institute for Health and Human Development (IHHD) based at University of East London would like to invite you to take part in an interactive one-to-one interview session that includes questions about childhood experiences, levels and types of civic engagement, and your health and wellbeing. As part of this research, we would like you to complete a semi-structured conversational interview about these three topics, followed by a collaborative exercise during which you will be asked to fill in a life grid with the student researcher (Ruby Farr) building on the conversation had during the interview. The interview will be audibly recorded. No answers are right or wrong, and this is an attempt to understand your life journey through a lens of civic engagement and health. All in all, including both sections, the interview can take anything up to 1.5 hours, but you are free to withdraw from the process at any given time without having to give a reason for your withdrawal.

Referral for support:

If you would like support following some of the content in the questionnaire or would appreciate someone to talk to, please email or phone the student life team at UEL:

0208 223 7611 / studentlife@uel.ac.uk

Confidentiality of the Data

Important information: any information you are giving us will be treated as strictly confidential and no details about your identity will be made public. The results of this study (but not your identity or the content of what you will saying to us) may be published in the form of a report

/university promotional materials/presentations/and/or a journal article. We will not disclose any information that may lead to reveal your identity. All data will be de-identified. All personal information will not be directly related to data given, and will be stored instead with a code. Participation in the research will have no impact on university assessments. You are able to withdraw your data up to the point of analysis stage, when this may no longer be possible.

Completed life grids will be kept in a lockable cabinet at the Institute for Health and Human Development. Raw data, including audio recordings, will not be shared beyond the evaluation team (the student and their supervisory team) and access to all data collected is restricted to members of the research team. Data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the

June 2017

University's Data Protection Policy. Electronic data will only be accessible to member of the research team and restricted by a password, unless consent has been given to allow the data collected to be used in the institute's future research, in which case it may be made available to them in anonymized format.

If you wish to receive a copy of the report, please notify one of the members of our research team (see above for details).

Location

The research is being carried out at the University of East London, on the Stratford Campus.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time during tests. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

This research has received formal approval from the University of East London Research Ethic Committee (UREC).

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher (s) or any other aspect of this research project, please contact Catherine Fieulleteau, Ethics Integrity Manager researchethics@uel.ac.uk.

For general enquiries about the research please contact the student researcher on the contact details at the top of this sheet.

June 2017

Annexe 2

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON
Consent to Participate in a Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants. Project Title: Civic engagement combined-method life history interviews

Named Researchers: Professor Gopal Netuveli Ruby Farr

Please tick as appropriate: YES NO

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I give consent for this interview to be audio recorded

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential as far as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. I understand that maintaining strict confidentiality is subject to limitations such as a small sample but that my personal details such as my name will not be made public.
I understand that if I indicate during the interview that myself or someone else is at serious risk of harm such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority

I give consent for anonymized quotes to be used in publications, reports and outputs

I understand that I will be de-identified by the research team using a code, and that none of my data will be directly related to my personal information

I give permission to use the data in future research by the named researcher's team
June 2017

I understand that dissemination of research findings may be in the form of a journal publication, report or presentation

It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the research without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I understand that my data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis and that after this point it may not be possible.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
....

Participant's Signature ....

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
....

Investigator's Signature ....

Date: ....

June 2017

Life History Calendar Template

 *This grid is to capture your personal life story. Please make use the left-hand 'public events' column to jog your memory when completing the following columns. Words, pictures, colours, fonts and post-it notes can be used to complete the life grid. Please begin from the date you feel appropriate, whether that is your date of birth, your first memory, or later. We will start with the 'Residence and Family' column

Age	Dates & Public Events	Residence and Family *Where were you living? Who with? What was home like?*	Civic Engagement *Were you involved in CE?* *(Group membership, networks, volunteering, voting, learning) How?*	Health and Wellbeing *How were you feeing?*

1980 John Lennon assassinated. Pac-Man game arrives at arcades.			
1981 Brixton Riots Royal Wedding, Charles & Diana AIDs first identified			
1982 War erupts with Argentina over Falkland Islands Michael Jackson's Thriller, Disney Land Florida opens			
1983 Thatcher Re-elected Sally Rise - 1st American Woman in Space			
1984 IRA bombers strike at Conservative Conference, Michael Jackson's first moonwalk on MTV			
1985 'Back to the future' released Titanic Wreckage found			
1986 US space shuttle exploded, deadliest nuclear power incident Chernobyl (Ukraine)			
1987 Thatcher elected for 3rd time, first appearance of 'Simpsons'.			
1988 Pro-democracy protest in Burma, release of film 'Die Hard', end of the £1 note, original Globe theatre			

uncovered, Hawkins 'brief history of time'			
1989 Invention of the world-wide-web, Berlin wall comes down, release of the Gameboy.			
1990 Thatcher resigns, John Major becomes Prime Minister, Nelson Mandela released after 27 years			
1991 world wide web becomes public with internet, President Bush declare victory over Iraq and orders a cease-fire			
1992 conservatives win again, channel tunnel opens with rain from London to Paris			
1993 Release of 'sleepless in Seattle', the Cranberries are a hit, death of Audury Hepburn.			
1994 first women priests in church of England, Quentin Tarrintino's 'Pulp Fiction' hit cinemas			
1995 Nelson Mandela became South Africa's President, TLC 'waterfalls' song is in the charts, the 'macerena' went viral, Friends most popular TV show			
1996 Death of American rapper Tupac Shakur, Spice Girls no1 with 'Wannabe'			

1997 Labour wins UK Tony Blaire as Prime Minister, Spice Girls and Titanic films released			
1998 President Clinton denies affair with intern, Britney Spears becomes famous, Google was founded and the launch of furbie toys			
1999 Britain decides not to join European currency, Bluetooth and Blackberry phones invented			
2000 celebrations of the new millennium			
2001 Terror attack on the twin towers, foot and mouth outbreak in rural Britain			
2002 Euro enters circulation, Department of Homeland Security created in US, Britney Speaks and Timberlake break up			
2003 Armstrong wins his fifth Tour De France, Britain joins US in invasion of Iraq, Finding Nemo film is released, Myspace is launched			
2004 Facebook launched 10 new states join EU, fox-hunting outlawed in UK, huge Indian Ocean earthquake and			

	Tsunami, Shaun of the Dead film released			
	2005 labour wins third turn, terror attack on London transport kills 52, same-sex marriage legalised			
	2006 Saddam Hussein sentenced to death by hanging for crimes against humanity, Pluto downgraded to a 'dwarf plant', Borat firm was released			
	2007 George Bush orders a troop surge in Iraq, student's mass shooting spurs gun law talks in US, Wembley Stadium, completed			
	2008 Obama becomes president in the US, Global Financial crisis hits			
	2009 Michael Jackson dies, outbreak of swine flu, Jade Goody dies with cervical Cancer.			
	2010 Mass oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Gordon Brown resigns and Cameron becomes Prime Minister, Royal engagement of William and Kate			
	2011 Osama Bin Laden is killed, Royal Marriage of William and Kate, Amy Winehouse dies.			

2012 Obama is re-elected, Olympics in London.			
2013 Death of Nelson Mandela and birth of Prince George			
2014 in US failure to charge a police officer for murder of Michael Brown results in riots-police brutality			
2015 same sex marriage legalised in 50 US states, refugee crisis in Mediterranean			
2016 Donald Trump elected as 45th President of US, David Bowie died, Brexit in the UK			
2017 Sir Tony Atkinson died, Campaigns about the privatisation of education in the UK			

Resources used to complete the 'public events' column of the above grid:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/timeline/present_timeline_noflash.shtml

https://www.thoughtco.com/1980s-timeline-1779955

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_United_States_history_(1990%E2%80%93present)

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/whats-on/events/10-big-news-stories-happened-2006-when-openlearn-was-born

https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/important-events-in-the-whole-world-from-2000-until-2012

https://www.vogue.com/article/pop-culture-1995

http://www.nme.com/photos/25-moments-that-defined-1994-1422189

http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/2004.html

http://www.preloved.co.uk/blog/inspiration/18-things-happened-1998/

9.2 Focus group data collection guide

Civic Engagement Qualitative Research Focus Groups (FG) Autumn 2015

Details of each step for the FG:

1. Information sheets and consent forms given and signed (10 minutes)
2. Ice breaker activity (5 minutes)

•Shopping list – each person adds a word repeating the sentence from the beginning each time. Starting word 'civic engagement'

- What does CE look like?

- Can you give me examples of CE?

- Where does CE happen?

- Do you consider yourself to be civically engaged?

- What values do you need to be civically engaged?

- How does someone become civically engaged?

- Is being civically engaged important? Why?

- Who is CE important for?

- What are the benefits of CE? Are there any negatives?

9.3 Ethics

University of East London

Dear Ruby

Application ID: ETH2122-0062

Original application ID: UREC 1516 165

Project title: Exploring the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing: A mixed methods study with a diverse sample of university students

Lead researcher: Miss Ruby Farr

Your application to Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee was considered on the 7th of December 2021.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 4 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.□□

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

University of
East London

Dear Ruby

Application ID: ETH2122-0063

Original application ID: UREC 1516 07

Project title: Exploring the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing: A mixed methods study with a diverse sample of university students

Lead researcher: Miss Ruby Farr

Your application to Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee was considered on the 2nd of December 2021.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 4 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.☐☐

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

University of
East London

Dear Ruby

Application ID: ETH2021-0132

Original application ID: ETH1920-0188

Project title: Exploring the relationship between civic engagement, early life, and wellbeing: A mixed methods study with a diverse sample of university students

Lead researcher: Miss Ruby Farr

Your application to Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee was considered on the 15th of November 2021.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 4 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.☐☐

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

9.4. Cross sectional cohort survey

Institute for Health and
Human Development

UEL
University of
East London

The 2016 UEL Civic Engagement Health Survey

Administered by the Enrolment Team on behalf of The Institute for Health
and Human Development based at UEL.

Survey Developed by:
Professor Gopal Netuveli & Ruby Farr (PhD Student)

UEL
University of
East London

Welcome Page

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the UEL Civic Engagement

Survey.

The survey is in three parts and each part will take you 8-10 minutes to complete.

Your involvement with this study will include you completing this questionnaire in full. If you would prefer to complete the survey by paper or with support, please contact the researcher on the information sheet: farr@uel.ac.uk. You can withdraw from this study at any time with no negative consequences to yourself, and participation in this study will not affect your grades.

Any information you are giving us will be treated as strictly confidential, and no details about your identity will be made public.

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Survey Information Sheet (please email farr@uel.ac.uk for an electronic copy of the following sheet)

University of East London, Water Lane, Stratford, E15 4LZ London

Research Integrity:The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research; observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks.The University is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing and as such it is a mandatory requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study:The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title: Civic Engagement and Health and Wellbeing: A Life Course Perspective

Project Description: This is an online survey. The Institute for Health and Human Development (IHHD) based at University of East survey which includes questions about childhood experiences and measures civic engagement and health. This survey forms the part of a program of research supported by a UEL Excellence PhD studentship held by Ruby Rosemarie Farr

The Principal Investigator: Professor Gopal Netuveli, Professor of Public Health, IHHD,UEL Stratford Campus, 0208 2236342 / g.netuveli@uel.ac.uk

Named Researcher: Ruby Rosemarie Farr, IHHD, UEL, Stratford Campus, 0208 223 4530 / farr@uel.ac.uk

Referral for support:If you would like support following some of the content in the survey or would

appreciate someone to talk to, please contact student life at UEL: 0208 223 7611/studentlife@uel.ac.uk

Confidentiality of the Data: any information you are giving us will be treated as strictly confidential and no details about your identity will be made public. The results of this study (but not your identity or the content of what you will saying to us) may be published in the form of a report /university promotional materials and/or a journal article. We will not disclose any information that may lead to reveal your identity. Participation in the research will have no impact on assessment. Ethical Review Application Form as approved by UREC on 12.08.16. This research has received formal approval from the University of East London Research Ethic Committee (UREC). Completed questionnaires will be kept in a lockable cabinet at the Institute for Health and Human Development. Raw data will not be shared beyond the evaluation team and access to the cabinet is restricted to members of the research team. Data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. Electronic data will only be accessible to member of the research team and restricted by a password.

Disclaimer: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis – after this point it may not be possible.

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact: Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43, UEL, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD. 020 8223 6683/researchethics@uel.ac.uk

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Survey Consent

* 1. This is a consent form as approved by the University Research and Ethics Council (UREC).

Please read and tick below. Note that consent will need to be given in the final statement in order to continue with the survey.

	yes	no
I have the read the information sheet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep.	☐	☐
The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information.	☐	☐
I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.	☐	☐
I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential as far as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data.	☐	☐
I understand that maintaining strict confidentiality is subject to the following limitations: unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to authorities	☐	☐
I understand that anonymized survey responses may be used in publications or in the University's promotional materials	☐	☐
I consent for the research team to use the data obtained in future research if relevant	☐	☐
I consent to be contacted by the research team for future studies	☐	☐
It has been explained to me what will happen once the survey has been completed.	☐	☐
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the research without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason	☐	☐
I understand that my data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis and that after this point it may not be possible.	☐	☐

* 2. I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.

○ Yes

* 3. Your Date of Birth:

	DD	MM	YYYY
Date / Time	☐	/ ☐	/ ☐

* 4. Please type your full name in the box below to be taken as your signature

[   ]

4

* 5. Contact information

Email Address	
Phone Number	

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

PART ONE OF THE SURVEY

Participant Information & Early Childhood Experiences

Please note that the * symbol indicates that a response is required.

* 1. UEL Student ID Number

* 2. Title of the Course you are Enrolled on?

* 3. Gender:

* 4. Nationality

* 5. Your Ethnic Group

* 6. Your Country of Birth

○ I was born in the UK

○ II was not born in the UK, I was born in (please specify country of birth below)

7. If you were not born in the UK, what year did you start living in the UK?

	DD	MM	YYYY
Date / Time		/	/

* 8. Marital Status:

[▲▼]

* 9. Are you parent?

[▲▼]

* 10. Are you a carer for any one?

◯ yes

◯ no

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

1. If you are a carer what is your relationship to that person? Please answer Family member OR non-family member

[▲▼]

2. If you are a carer to you receive any finances for this role?

[▲▼]

* 3. What is your living arrangement:

◯ Alone

◯ with family

◯ in a multi-occupancy household (including halls of residence)

* 4. How many people are living in your household?

[▲▼]

* 5. During your childhood did you live in a family home?

[⬍]

* 6. If you lived in a family home during childhood, was this home

[⬍]

[   ]

* 7. As a child were your parents together or separated / divorced?

[⬍]

* 8. If your parents are divorced or separated, what age were you when they separated?

[⬍]

* 9. When growing up did you have a positive relationship with the family you were living with?

[⬍]

* 10. When you were growing up did your family have a good relationship with your local neighbors?

[⬍]

* 11. During your childhood did you feel connected to/part of your local community?

[⬍]

* 12. During your childhood and until the end of high school, did you enjoy school?

[⬍]

* 13. If you have siblings, how many siblings do you have?

[⬍]

* 14. When you were growing up, how much of the time was your mother in paid employment?

[⬍]

* 15. If your mother did work, did she work...

[⬍]

[   ]

* 16. What was the highest level of education your mother reached?

[dropdown]

* 17. When you were growing up how much of the time was your father in paid employment?

[dropdown]

* 18. If your father did work, did he work...

[dropdown]

[text field]

* 19. What was the highest level of education your father reached?

[dropdown]

* 20. How old were you when you left your family home to live alone or with others?

[dropdown]

[text field]

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

PART TWO OF THE SURVEY

Civic Engagement

Civil society may be described as the public sphere external to the state and the market but interacting with both. It provides a space where individuals can participate with their social networks, neighborhoods and wider communities. This participation is called civic engagement.

Instructions: In this questionnaire, there are five main sections (A, B, C, D, E) each representing a facet of civic engagement, and each section has three parts: part one asks whether you have engaged with this aspect of civil society; part two asks you to mark on a scale how often or how much your engagement was; part 3 asks you to rate the quality of your experience of engagement in a similar scale. Please complete all 3 parts of each answer included in each of the five sections.

In the scale, extreme left is for the minimum (0 or never, negative etc.) and the extreme right is the maximum (e.g. always, positive). Please mark in accordance to your response by dragging the slider along the scale or clicking your response directly on the line.

*

1. **A**   In this section we ask about your involvement with**POLITICS**

Have you ever voted?

◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to answer

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section A continued: Politics
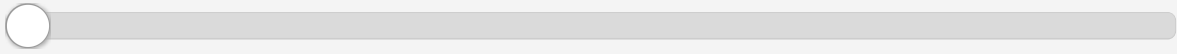
1. If you answered 'yes', then how often have you voted? please mark on the scale.

Never	Always
◯———————————————◯	

2. How do you rate your experience of your involvement in these activities?

Negative	Positive
◯———————————————◯	

* 3. Have you expressed your political opinion by communicating with the government at any level?
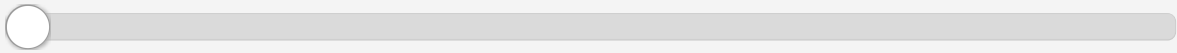
◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section A continued: Politics

* 1. If you answered yes to the question above, how often have you expressed your political opinion?

Never   Always
◯▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

0   100
◯▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

* 3. Have you signed petitions, both online and in paper formats?
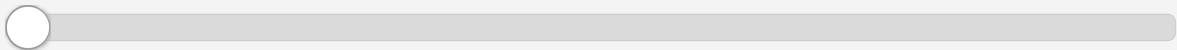
◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section A continued: Politics
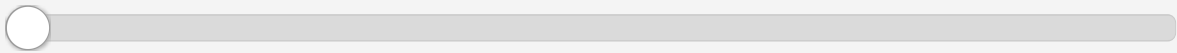
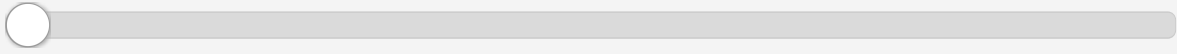* 1. If you answered 'yes', then how often have you signed petitions?

Never   Always
◯▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

* 2. How do you rate your experience of signing petitions?

Negative   Positive
◯▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

* 3. Do you participate in conversations about local or global politics?

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

Section A continued: Politics
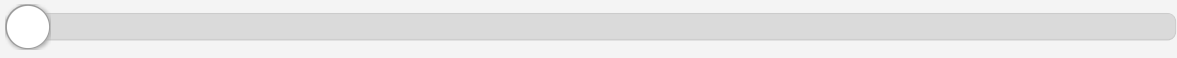
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in such conversations?

Never	Always

* 2. How do you rate you experience of being involved in such activities?

Negative	Positive

* 3. If you hear about issues arising in your local community (for example fly tipping, changes to the local community center, changes to the park) do you get involved?
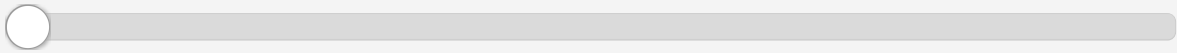
( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you get involved?

Never   Always

⭘───

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in such activities?

Negative   Positive

⭘───
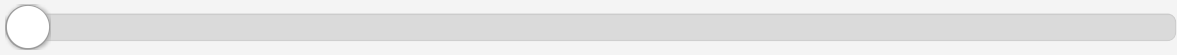
3. Are you involved in politics in any ways which haven't been mentioned already? If so, please specify your involvement below:

```

```
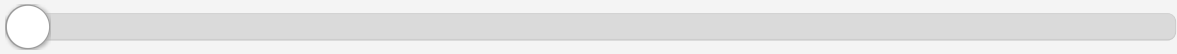
4. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you get involved?

Never   Always

⭘───

5. How do you rate your experience of being involved in such activities?

Negative   Positive

⭘───

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section B Continued: Groups and Societies

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*
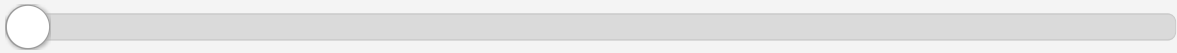
1. **B**   In this section we ask about your membership in<u>groups</u>.

Are you a member of any social groups?

◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say
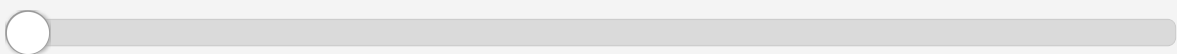
* 2. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in social groups?

Never	Always
◯————————————————	

* 3. How do you rate your experience of being involved in such activities?

Negative	Positive
◯————————————————	

* 4. Are you a member of any groups or societies within the workplace or an educational setting?
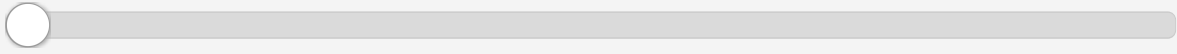
◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section B Continued: Groups and Societies
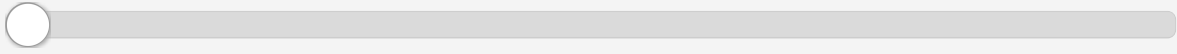
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question about groups at work, how often have you participated in these activities?

Never   Always

○

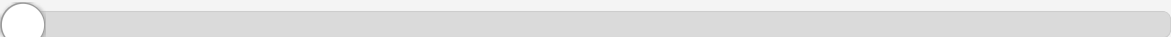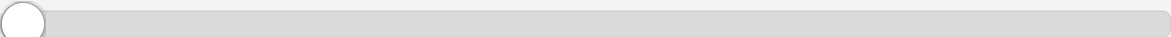* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in such activities?

Negative   Positive

○

* 3. Are you a member of any sports groups which haven't already been included in this section?
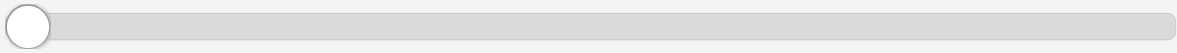
○ yes

○ no

○ don't know

○ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section B Continued: Groups and Societies
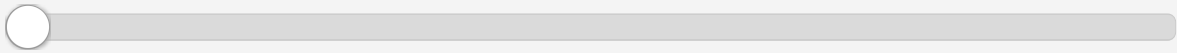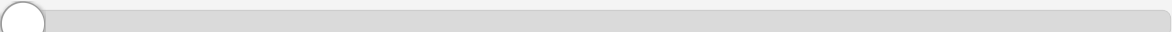
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in sports groups?

Never   Always

○

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in such activities?

Negative   Positive

○

* 3. Are you a member of any religious groups?

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to answer
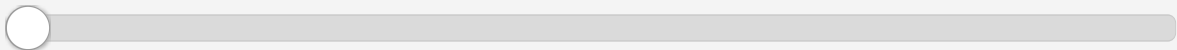
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in religious groups and/or societies?

Never	Always
◯	

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive
◯	

* 3. Are you a member of any creative groups, including the arts and book clubs?

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in these creative arts groups?

Never   Always

○───○

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

○───○

* 3. Are you a member of any environmentally focused groups, including gardening in your local area?
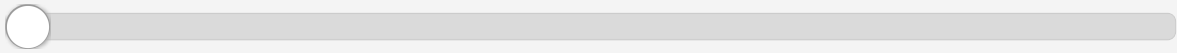
○ yes

○ no

○ don't know

○ prefer not to say

Section B Continued: Groups and Societies
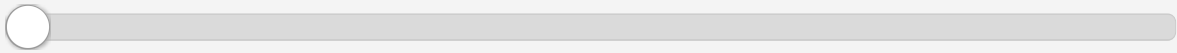
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in gardening groups?

Never   Always

○───○

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

○───○

* 3. Are you a member of any human rights / equal opportunity groups?
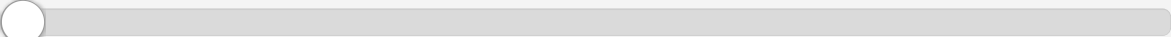
( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section B Continued: Groups and Societies
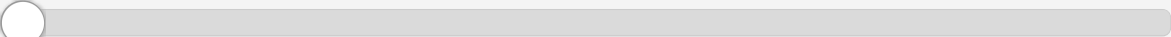
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in human rights groups?

Never	Always

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive

3. If you are a member of any groups or societies which haven't been mentioned here, please specify below:

[   ]

4. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in these activities?

Never	Always

5. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

*
1. **C**   In this section we ask you about **volunteering.**
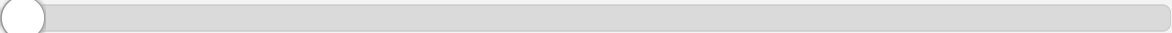
Are you involved in any volunteering local to where you live? (including supporting a local religious group)

◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in local volunteerining?

Never	Always
◯	

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive
◯	

* 3. Are you involved in any volunteering activities to help others who are in need? For example shopping for the elderly, supporting a local charity shop or homeless shelter.

◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

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* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in volunteering for others in need?

Never	Always

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive

* 3. Are you involved in any volunteer fundraising, including taking part in worldwide charity days, marathon running or coffee mornings to raise money?

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section C continued: Volunteering

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in volunteer fundraising/world wide charity days and such?

Never	Always

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive

3. Are you involved in any volunteering activities which haven't been mentioned? If so, please specify

[   ]
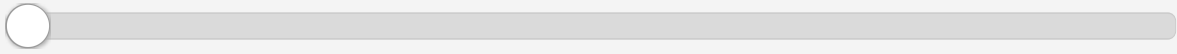
4. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in these activities?

Never   Always

○───

5. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

○───

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Section D continued: Social Connections and Networks

*
1. **D** In this section we ask about your social connections & networks
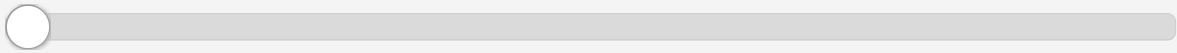
Do you interact with your neighbours?

○ yes

○ no

○ don't know

○ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey
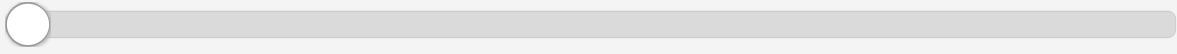
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you interact with your neighbours?

Never   Always
⦰▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬○

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive
⦰▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬○

* 3. Do you interact with your peers?
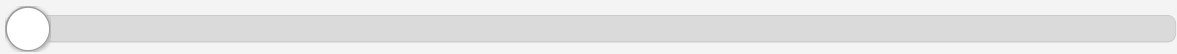
◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section D continued: Social Connections and Networks
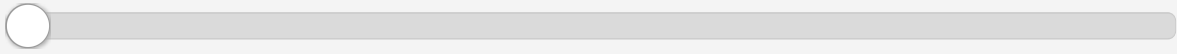
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you interact with peers?

Never   Always
◯▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬○

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive
◯▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬○

* 3. Do you interact with family members who are not living with you?

◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section D continued: Social Connections and Networks
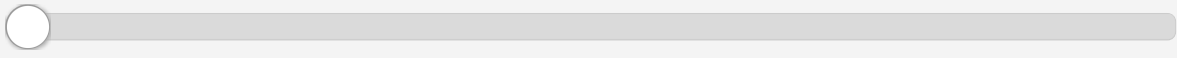
* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you interact with these family members?

Never   Always

◯───

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

◯───

* 3. Do you interact with you local community?
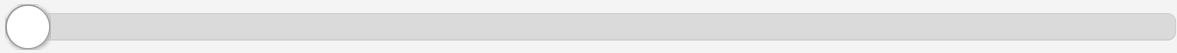
◯ yes

◯ no

◯ don't know

◯ prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section D continued: Social Connections and Networks

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you interact with your local community?

Never   Always

〇━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

〇━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━
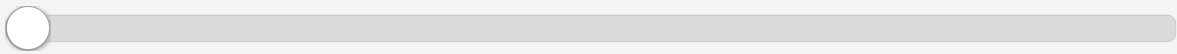
3. Do you have social interactions with groups which aren't mentioned within the section? If so please specify:

[   ]

4. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in these activities?

Never   Always

〇━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━

5. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

〇━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section E continued: Knowledge and Information.

*

1. **E** In this section we ask about activities relating to <u>knowledge and information.</u>

Do you read newspapers, including online newspapers?

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

* 2. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in these activities?

Never	Always
O————————————	

* 3. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive
O————————————	

* 4. Do you listen to the radio?

( ) yes

( ) no

( ) don't know

( ) prefer not to say

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section E continued: Knowledge and Information.

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you listen to the radio?

Never	Always
O————————————	

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

* 3. Do you surf the internet for news and information?

- ( ) yes
- ( ) no
- ( ) don't know
- ( ) prefer not to say

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you surf the internet for this information?

Never   Always

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative   Positive

* 3. Do you watch documentaries and news channels to keep up to date on national and global issues?

- ( ) yes
- ( ) no
- ( ) don't know
- ( ) prefer not to say

* 1. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often do you watch these documentaries?

Never	Always
⬤━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━○	

* 2. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive
⬤━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━○	

3. Do you engage in any other activities to gather information about the national or global civil society? If so please specify

[   ]

4. If you answered 'yes' to the above question, how often have you participated in these activities?

Never	Always
⬤━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━○	

5. How do you rate your experience of being involved in these activities?

Negative	Positive
⬤━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━○	

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Section Three (final section of the survey)

Health and Wellbeing

* 1. General Health

In general, would you say your health is:

[▲▼]

* 2. During the <u>past 4 weeks</u>, have you had any of the following problems with your work or other regular daily activities as a result of any <u>emotional problems</u> (such as feeling depressed or anxious) as follows;

	yes	no
cut down the amount of time you spent on work or other activities?	○	○
Accomplished less than you would like?	○	○
Didn't do work or other activities as carefully as usual?	○	○

* 3. Thinking about the last 4 weeks...

	not at all	slightly	moderately	severe	very severe
During the past 4 weeks, to what extent has your physical / emotional health interfered with your social activities? (like visiting friends, relatives)	○	○	○	○	○
How much bodily pain have you had during the past 4 weeks?	○	○	○	○	○
During the past 4 weeks, how much did pain interfere with your normal work (including both work outside the home & housework)?	○	○	○	○	○

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* 4. These questions are about how you feel and how things have been with you over the past 4 weeks. For each question, please give the answer that comes closest to how you have been feeling.

	all of the time	most of the time	a good bit of the time	some of the time	a little bit of the time	none of the time
Did you feel full of pep?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you been a very nervous person?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you felt calm and peaceful?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Did you have a lot of energy?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you felt downhearted and blue?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Did you feel worn out?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have you been a happy person?	○	○	○	○	○	○
Did you feel tired?	○	○	○	○	○	○

* 5. How true or false is each of the following statements for you?

	definitely true	mostly true	don't know	mostly false	definitely false
I seem to get sick a little easier than other people	○	○	○	○	○
I am as healthy as anybody I know	○	○	○	○	○
I expect my health to get worse	○	○	○	○	○
My health is excellent	○	○	○	○	○

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

SECTION THREE CONTINUED - just one page left after this one! Almost finished

Wellbeing
During this section we would like to learn about how you feel generally. We would like to know how your health has been in general over the <u>past few weeks.</u> Please answer all of the questions by choosing the answer which most applies to you (tick one option only)

* 1. you have been able to concentrate on what you are doing

( ) better than usual   ( ) less than usual   ( ) prefer not to say

( ) same as usual   ( ) much less than usual

* 2. you have lost much sleep over worry

( ) not at all   ( ) rather more than usual   ( ) prefer not to say

( ) no more than usual   ( ) much more than usual

* 3. You have felt you are playing a useful part in things

( ) more so than usual   ( ) less so than usual   ( ) prefers not to say

( ) same as usual   ( ) much less so

* 4. You have felt capable of making decisions about things

( ) more so than usual   ( ) less so than usual   ( ) prefers not to say

( ) same as usual   ( ) much less so

* 5. you have felt under constant strain

( ) not at all   ( ) rather more than usual   ( ) prefer not to say

( ) not more than usual   ( ) much more than usual

* 6. you have felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties

( ) not at all   ( ) rather more than usual   ( ) prefer not to say

( ) not more than usual   ( ) much more than usual

* 7. you have been able to enjoy your normal day to day activities

( ) not at all   ( ) rather more than usual   ( ) prefer not to say

( ) not more than usual   ( ) much more than usual

* 8. you have been able to face up to your problems

( ) not at all   ( ) rather more than usual   ( ) prefer not to say

( ) not more than usual   ( ) much more than usual

* 9. you have been feeling unhappy or depressed

○ not at all   ○ rather more than usual   ○ prefer not to say

○ not more than usual   ○ much more than usual

* 10. you have been loosing confidence in yourself

○ not at all   ○ rather more than usual   ○ prefer not to say

○ not more than usual   ○ much more than usual

* 11. you have been thinking of yourself as a worthless person

○ not at all   ○ rather more than usual   ○ prefer not to say

○ not more than usual   ○ much more than usual

* 12. you have been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered

○ not at all   ○ rather more than usual   ○ prefer not to say

○ not more than usual   ○ much more than usual

* 13. The following questions are about feelings and attitudes towards the future. for each question, please decide how true or false it is for you.

	definitely false	mostly false	somewhat false	slightly true	mostly true	definitely true	prefers not to say
I can think of many ways to get out of a jam (a difficult situation)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I energetically pursue my goals.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There are lots of ways around any problem.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I've been pretty successful in life.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I meet the goals that I set myself.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

* 14. Please select one option from the following questions that best describes your experience over the past few weeks.

	none of the time	rarely	some of the time	often	all of the time
I have been feeling optimistic about the future	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling useful	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling relaxed	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling interested in other people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've had energy to spare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been dealing with problems well	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been thinking clearly	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling good about myself	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling close to other people	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling confident	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling loved	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been interested in new things	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I've been feeling cheerful	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

* 15. Taking all things together, would you say you are

◯ very happy   ◯ not very happy   ◯ don't know

◯ quite happy   ◯ not at all happy   ◯ prefer not to say

* 16. Please tick the box which most applies to you for each of the two statements below

	definitely true	mostly true	somewhat true	not very true	not true at all	prefer not to say
I have lots of close friends around me who support me	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have lots of friends and family around me who I can trust	○	○	○	○	○	○

Welcome to the UEL Civic Engagement & Health Survey

Health and Wellbeing continued: Final Questions Page

This is the final page of the survey

* 1. In this question we ask about your general attitude and orientation to life.

	Yes, usually	Yes, sometimes	No
Do you see a solution to problems and difficulties that other people find hopeless?	○	○	○
Do you feel that your daily life is a source of personal satisfaction?	○	○	○
Do you feel that things that happen to you in your daily life are hard to understand?	○	○	○

* 2. Please choose an option that most applies to you for each of the statements below

	Not at all	Hardly True	Moderately True	Exactly True
I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	○	○	○	○
If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	○	○	○	○
it is easy for my to stick to my aims and accomplish what I want	○	○	○	○
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	○	○	○	○
thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	○	○	○	○
I can solve problems if I invest the necessary effort	○	○	○	○
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	○	○	○	○
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	○	○	○	○
If I am in trouble I can usually think of a solution	○	○	○	○
I can usually handle whatever comes my way	○	○	○	○

* 3. I have high self esteem

1 - Not very true of me   7 - Very true of me

○————————————

* 4. How likely are you to take part in civic engagement related projects / student societies and or sports teams during your time at UEL?

[⬍]

END OF SURVEY!

Dear Student,

Thank you for completing your questionnaire! We really appreciate your time and support.

As stated, the Institute for Health and human Development (based at UEL) will use these responses to inform their knowledge of civic engagement and health. As this is London's leading university for civic engagement, we also anticipate that these responses may be used in promotional materials and research outputs. All responses will be anonymised.

Thank you for completing this survey which will help us to understand the part civic engagement plays in one's health and wellbeing. In filling this form you had an opportunity to reflect on your own health and wellbeing. As a result if there are concerns you will find below contact details of university and external agencies who will be of help to you should you wish to contact them.

- **UEL Student Support Hub: (0)20 8223 4444 or email thehub@uel.ac.uk. Student support can help with advice around financial debt, counselling, dyslexia and more.**
- **Newham Carers Network, 107 The Grove, Stratford London E15 1HP, 020 8519 0800**
- **MIND Mental Wellbeing, Granta House, 15-19 Broadway, E15, 020 8519 2122**
- **Newham Food Bank, 218 Tollgate Road, Beckton, E6 5YA, tel: 020 7474 3060**
- **Newham Transitional GP Practice, 30 Church Road, London, E12 6AQ, 020 8553 7460**
- **Newham Hospital and Urgent Care/A&E, Glen Rd, Plaistow, E13 8SL, 020 7476 4000**
- **VoiceAbility, Stratford Advice Arcade, 107-109 The Grove, E15 1HP, 020 3355 7142**
- **Deaf Roots, Stratford Advice Arcade, 107-109 The Grove, E15 1HP, 020 3355 7142**
- **Rainbow Refugee Network Newham, 90 Greengate Street, Plaistow, E13**
- **National Debt Helpline 0800 808 400**
- **London Borough of Newham Council, Customer Services, 112-118 the Grove, E15 1NS. Housing advice, social care, mental health and more.**

Many thanks and best wishes,

Ruby Rosemarie Farr

(Institute for Health and Human Development, Water Lane, UEL, E15 4LZ)