SRHE *Society for Research into Higher Education*

Higher education and civil society: Exploring participation in civil society amongst graduates and non-graduates.

SRHE Scoping award 2015-2016

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Executive summary

The Scoping Project addresses contemporary policy debates about the contribution of higher education (HE) to society (BIS 2016). It aimed to examine the relationship between participation in HE and different forms of social capital, through a lens of graduates' and non-graduates' civic participation (defined here as participation in associations, clubs or societies), as well as their more informal modes of social participation, (including their social networks and neighbourly connections). The Scoping Project drew upon data derived from interviews with 64 adults, all aged 50-55, half of whom were graduates. This project forms part of a wider project which aimed to explore relationships between participation in distinct HE systems in the UK ('elite' and 'mass' systems) and civic participation.

Key findings

Civic participation

- Graduates were slightly more likely to participate in a greater number of 'civic' activities, and to engage in these activities frequently than non-graduates. Both graduates and non-graduates participated in a range of associations or organisations including religious associations comprising church-based activities, sporting associations such as sports clubs, political associations such as political parties and parent associations including school governing bodies.

- Graduates were slightly more likely to take on roles of responsibility and leadership in the activities they participated in; examples included taking on role as chairperson, treasurer, or secretary.

- Both graduates and non-graduates who were 'civically' active emphasised the role of informal social connections in initiating their civic participation; ties with family, friends and acquaintances operated as important pathways into civic participation. Civic participation was also connected to personal identity claims and religious, political or social views and beliefs, and for those who were most civically active, these contexts were most important to their civic participation.

- Graduates and non-graduates were strikingly similar in terms of the explanations they gave for disengagement from civic participation; disengagement was explained in terms of lack of time (typically resulting from employment, including working unpredictable or unroutinised hours of employment, or commitments to children or elderly parents). Non-participation was also explained in terms of a lack of desire or inclination to take part in organised activities, or a sense of disconnection between personal constructions of self and civic participation.

Informal social participation

- The emphasis on both weak-tie and strong-tie social networks, situated in local contexts, was stronger for non-graduates compared to graduates. These weak-ties were embedded in greater neighbourly connections amongst the non-graduates

(characterised by trust and reciprocity) and were reflected in their stronger sense of attachment to their localities compared to graduates. Graduates were more likely to talk about having friends geographically far-afield than non-graduates. As such, their strong-tie social connections were much more geographically dispersed, often reflecting the greater geographical movement they had experienced.

Aims of the study

The Scoping Project aimed to examine the relationship between participation in higher education (HE) and different forms of social capital, through a lens of graduates' and non-graduates' civic participation (defined here as participation in associations, clubs or societies), as well as their more informal modes of social participation, (including social networks and neighbourly connections). An extensive body of research has examined the relationship between education and civic engagement (Nie et al. 1996; Emler and Frazer 1999; Norris 2001; Egerton 2002; Dee 2004; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Dalton 2013; Sloam 2014) and the ways in which various forms of social capital are socially differentiated (Li et al. 2005). This Scoping Project contributes to both of these bodies of research by examining the relationship between participation in a specific higher education system (namely, an elite HE system in which roughly 15% of the relevant population participated in the UK (Trow, 2007)) and different forms of social capital, including civic participation and social networks. As such, the research addresses debates about the extent to which higher education plays a role in the formation of social capital and its different forms. Examining these relationships has potential to deepen understandings about how inequalities in the experience of social capital becomes reproduced. Biographical narrative interviews were used to examine this, and well as relationships between biographical life events and civic participation and informal modes of social participation. Insights gathered through these interviews have brought richness and depth in our understandings of the social patterning of different forms of social capital, thus contributing to understandings about the social stratification of social capital.

Background to the study

Whilst debates about the relationship between higher education (HE) and economic development have featured prominently within political and academic arenas for decades (DfES 2003; BIS 2011), there has been much less attention to the role that higher education plays in the structuring of social relations in society. The expansion of higher education has been one of the most profound institutional changes in the UK of recent decades, described by Trow (2007) as a transition from an 'elite' system of HE (enrolling up to 15% of the relevant age group) to a 'mass' system (enrolling up to 50%). A considerable body of sociological research has explored the consequences of the 'massification' of HE for patterns of entry to HE, for example widening and increasing rates of participation (Osborne 2003; Archer et al. 2005; Chowdry et al. 2013), employment opportunities for graduates (and the diversification of graduate employment) (Brown, 2003) and economic development and change more generally (the purported shift to a 'knowledge economy') (Brown et al. 2008). There has been much less research which has examined the consequences of 'massification' of HE for the structuring of social relations in society. Indeed, more generally, there has been a considerable paucity of research which has considered the role of HE in local civil society.

The wider study of which the Scoping Project is a part sought to examine the relationships between one particular institutional change – the expansion of higher education – and the social relations that characterise local civil society. This involved a comparison of graduates of an 'elite' HE system and those of a 'mass' HE system[1] in terms of their civic participation (including their membership and activity in a range of associations and organisations[2]), and this was the focus of the wider study. An examination of the contribution that HE makes to local civic society required a comparison between graduates and non-graduates in terms of their civic participation as well as their informal modes of social participation including their social networks and neighbourly connections. This was the focus of the Scoping Project. The Scoping Project's main research question was; 'what role does participation in an 'elite' HE system play in graduates' experience of different forms of social capital?' To address this, interviews were conducted with 64 adults, half of whom were graduates and half non-graduates, all of them were in their early 50s. The age of the participants was crucial; assuming that the graduates made a linear transition from school to university (which they all did) they would have entered university or a polytechnic and graduated in roughly the early 1980s, before the HE system in the UK become 'massified' (Trow 2007)[3]. They have thus been labelled 'elite' system graduates. Attention to this age category also enabled an examination of the relationship between HE and civic participation when civic participation is likely to be at its peak in the life-course (Putnam, 2001). It also facilitated an exploration of participants' reflections on their past participation in civil society, as well as how civic participation fluctuates over the life-course, through examining participants' retrospective accounts of their civic participation. This analysis provided the basis for comparison with graduates of a 'mass' HE system, thus addressing the project's overarching aim which is to identity the consequences of the massification of HE for civic participation.

The study's research question speaks to a voluminous body of research which has examined relationships education and civic participation which is an important source of social capital (Hall, 1999; Putnam 2001; Campbell 2006). Much of this research has documented positive relationships between higher levels of education and civic participation (Hall 1999, Campbell 2006; Putnam 2001; Patterson 2009; 2014). However, given the multidimensional nature of social capital (Lowndes 2000; Li et al. 2005), it was also important to explore relationships between higher education and different forms of social participation, including social networks and neighbourly relationships (Lowndes 2000; Li et al. 2005). Exploring this is important because different forms of social participation (which are sources of social capital) are socially differentiated (Li et al. 2005). The distinction between civic participation and informal social participation has been discussed by other (namely Lowndes 2000; Li et al.

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1 In the wider project which the Scoping Award forms a part, the participants who were graduates of an 'elite' HE system were aged 50-60, whilst the 'mass' HE system graduates were aged 30-40.

2 These include (but are not confined to) trade unions, environmental groups, parents and teachers' associations, residents and tenants' associations, religious organisations, and sports clubs.

3 All of the graduates participated in an 'elite' HE system but some of them participated in polytechnics and others in universities. On the basis of the information graduates' supplied, 17 gained their degree from universities, 7 from polytechnics and 5 from colleges (teacher training or technical colleges). For the remaining 3 it was unclear where they studied.

2005). This distinction is captured in the difference between engagement in formal organisations, clubs and societies which are institutionalised, and social participation which is not institutionalised in formal constitutions and is often characterised by social networks or neighbourly connections (Lowndes, 2000). The Scoping Project sought to address these relationships in order to contribute to debate about the extent to which HE plays a role in the socially stratified nature of different dimensions of social capital.

The study's aims are empirically and conceptually important; exploring the relationship between participation in HE and different forms of social participation addresses questions about the contribution that HE makes to society at large, as well as its role in fostering social capital amongst individuals. From a policy perspective, the rationale for expansion of HE has largely been framed in terms of the social and economic benefits of HE for individuals and society (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009; BIS 2011). To date, there has been little detailed analysis of the extent to which participation in HE brings societal benefits through the contributions that graduates make to civil society. If it is the case that HE provides people with the social capital needed to contribute to civic associations, organisations and clubs and if, in turn, these institutions sustain civil society through fostering liberal views, social trust, respect and cooperation, then further expansion of HE participation would be desirable. If, however, HE plays little role in fostering civic participation, then questions may be asked about the continued commitment to expansion of HE by successive UK Governments. This would be especially so given concerns about the consequences of expansion for graduate employment due to exacerbated competition for graduate employment and credential inflation (Brown 2003; Brown et al. 2008).

Design of the study

In order to explore the relationship between HE and civic participation, the Scoping Project drew on data derived from interviews with graduates and non-graduates aged 50-60. Some of this data was drawn from secondary qualitative interviews, and some of it from interviews conducted with a supplementary sample of 'graduates' which the Scoping Award funded. The secondary qualitative data was derived from a separate study called the 'Social Participation and Identity Project'[4]. This separate study drew upon a sub-sample of 220 respondents who had participated in the National Child Development Study (NCDS) from birth[5] and aimed to explore relationship between social participation and identity. This sub-sample of respondents were identified as part of the 2008 Sweep of the NCDS (and as such, they were all born in 1958, were aged 50 at the time of interview, and lived in England, Scotland or Wales). The interviews took a biographical approach, exploring a range of topics including 'neighbourhood and belonging', 'participation', 'identities', 'friendships and life trajectories'.

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4 This project was conducted in 2010 by researchers at the Centre of Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University of London and the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD).

5 The NCDS is a birth cohort study which began in 1958. It followed the lives of 17,000 people born in a single week in 1985, in England, Scotland and Wales. Since the survey began in 1958 there have been nine further 'sweeps' of all cohort members at aged 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42, 46, 50 and 55.

From within this sub-sample, 50 Welsh-domiciled[6] respondents were identified (in order to address the wider project's aims which were to explore the relationship between HE and civic participation in Wales). Of these 50 Welsh respondents, 18 were graduates and 32 non-graduates. Given that the majority of these adults were non-graduates, the Scoping Award enabled an additional supplementary sample of 'graduates' to be interviewed. Thus, interviews with 14 graduates were conducted, all of whom were aged 50-55, resident in Wales and had graduated from HE prior to the mid-1980s. In total, there were 64 participants aged between 50-55 years, half of whom were graduates and half non-graduates. Pseudonyms are used for participants throughout.

Amongst the 64 participants, 33 were female and 31 were male. All participants were resident in Wales at the time of interview. The majority were born in Wales (41), 21 were born in England, one was born in Scotland and one was born in India. The majority were married (50), 12 were divorced, one was single and had never been married and one was widowed. Almost all (57) had children (their children's ages ranged between 12 and 25 years old) and eight had no children. The sample was dominated by those in managerial or professional occupations or higher technical or supervisory occupations; over half of them (35 out of 64) held higher or lower managerial/professional or higher technical or higher supervisory occupations. 13 out of 64 were employers of small organisation, own account workers or were in intermediate occupations, 11 had occupations which were categorised as lower supervisory or semi-routine/routine and five were not currently working. In all, the sample was over-represented by people in 'middle-class' occupations. This is likely to be accounted for by the recruitment of additional graduates to the study, who were also largely in 'middle-class' occupations (i.e. they overwhelmingly had higher or lower managerial/professional or higher technical or higher supervisory occupations), to the sample. Amongst the 64 respondents there was one full-time student (whose occupational classification was 'lower professional' based on her previous employment), the majority worked full-time (47), 12 worked part-time or less than 5-days a week and five were currently not working.

Table 1: Occupational category of sample (N=64)

Occupational categories	Number of participants
Middle-class: Higher managerial/higher professional, lower prof/higher technical, lower managerial/higher supervisory	35
Intermediate: Intermediate, employers in small organisations/own account workers.	13
Working class: Lower supervisory/lower technical. Semi-routine/routine	11

6 Welsh domiciled respondents were identified because the wider study which this Scoping Project feeds into is interested in the contribution of HE to Welsh 'civil' society. The Scoping Project funded the collection of data from interviews with Welsh adults only, to be consistent with the wider study.

Not working	5

In terms of the occupations of the graduates, the majority of them (26 out of 32) were in lower or higher professional or managerial occupations or higher technical or supervisory occupations. Only four did not have these types of occupations and none were in routine or semi-routine occupations. A further two graduates were not working, but even these two had formally been employed in lower professional occupations. Thus, the graduates were overwhelmingly in 'middle-class' occupations, including teachers, nurses, academic researchers, principles of colleges or school head-teachers. In comparison, the non-graduates were much more socially heterogeneous; just less than a third of non-graduates were in higher or lower professional or managerial occupations, and roughly a third each were in intermediate or working-class occupations and three were not currently working. Thus, whilst the non-graduates were more socially heterogeneous than our overwhelmingly middle-class graduates, they also had a greater proportion of people from working-class occupations than the graduates.

Table 2: Occupational categories of graduates and non-graduates

Occupational categories	Graduates (32)	Non-graduates (32)
Middle-class: Higher managerial/higher professional, lower prof/higher technical, lower managerial/higher supervisory	26	9
Intermediate: Intermediate, employers in small organisations/own account workers.	3	10
Working class: Lower supervisory/lower technical. Semi-routine/routine	1	10
Not working	2	3

Discussion of findings

The interview asked participants to talk about the activities they took part in in their 'spare time.' Participants were also asked more direct questions about their involvement in a range of organisations, societies or clubs including political groups, religious or church organisations, trade unions and charitable organisations. Participants were located in one of six 'participation categories' which combined information about the number of activities participated in and how often they participated in these activities (see Table 1, Appendix) based on their accounts of their participation in 'civic' activities. The 'participation categories' have somewhat distinctive social characteristics; those who participated in the most number of activities tended to be graduates in professional or managerial occupations.

That said, the relationship between graduate status and civic participation was subtle, and when categories five and six are combined, graduates and non-graduates are the same in terms of their civic participation (there were 10 graduates and 10 non-graduates within these categories combined). Category one was dominated by non-graduates, suggesting that non-graduates were more likely to not participate at all. However, when categories one and two are combined, similar numbers of graduates and non-graduates were located in these categories (18 graduates and 17 non-graduates). Categories one and two are somewhat socially heterogeneous; people in these categories came from a wide range of occupational categories, including routine and higher managerial and professional occupations, and equal numbers of graduates and non-graduates were in these categories. Likewise, categories three and four were also socially heterogeneous, although there was a slightly greater representation of people from professional and managerial occupations in these categories than in categories one and two.

There were also subtle distinctions between graduates and non-graduates in how they participated; graduates were slightly more likely to participate through roles of responsibility and leadership[7] than non-graduates, whilst non-graduates were more likely to participate through membership or attendance at organisations or clubs. This distinction is, however, subtle as many non-graduates also took on roles of responsibility and leadership.

There were also differences between graduates and non-graduates in terms of the areas of social life they participated in. Non-graduates (particularly males) dominated participation in trade unions and sports activities, and graduates dominated participation in activities categorised as arts/music, charities and religion, perhaps reflecting differences in cultural capital experienced by graduates and non-graduates. Indeed, amongst our 64 respondents, those who engaged in a greater number of activities, and took part in these activities regularly, tended to engage in cultural activities associated with the arts such as choirs and drama groups, and they were slightly more likely to be in middle-class occupations.

Examining informal social participation

Whilst graduates were slightly more likely to participate in civic activities and to participate in them frequently, this distinction was subtle. There were, however, striking differences between graduates and non-graduates in terms of the patterns of their informal social participation, namely, the scope and strength of their social networks which were connected to their localities. The non-graduates more likely to report spending time with local friends or neighbours, suggesting that they drew more heavily on social capital derived from strong-tie social networks, particularly those in local contexts. Sharon, a non-graduate reflected on her close relationship with her two friends, both of whom lived locally, and who she clearly had strong-ties associated with emotional support:

> It's the same with me two friends, they've very close, because if I've ever needed anything, they'd be here. You know, when me back was bad they were there… we're always there for each other in a trauma…Yeah, that's, them two are very, very good 'cause they--, with them being local they, I can get them, you know (Sharon, non-graduate).

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7 For example, these roles including chair person, secretary, treasurer, leader of various groups, societies, or organisations.

Sarah, a non-graduate, also reflected on how she regularly goes to the local pub where she meets local friends. Her social networks were characterised by strong ties in local contexts:

> I mean we go to the pub, even if we don't have a drink because it is like a meeting place there (Sarah, non-graduate).

These locally bound strong-tie networks featured prominently in non-graduates' narratives and whilst they were also characteristic of graduates' accounts, they featured somewhat less prominently. Graduates were more likely to reflect on their friendships with people in more distant locations compared to non-graduates. Whilst Paul reported having friends locally, he also talked about his friends associated with earlier parts of his life who lived in distant geographical locations:

> I guess University friends, I've still got some of those. Still people I see less often these days but still very close friends. Who we go on holiday with. Every New Year we rent a house somewhere, er that usually sleeps between twelve and sixteen or something (Paul, Graduate).

Similarly, Ralf, a graduate living in mid-Wales, reflects on having friends geographically dispersed, yet seeing little of them:

> I: And how often do you get to see friends?
>
> R: Not very often. So for instance, we saw a few of them last weekend because they were down here staying in a holiday cottage. Oh, very occasionally we'll go, spend a weekend with friends back down in the wider Cardiff area but that's, yeah that doesn't happen very often, six/seven times a year (Ralf, Graduate).

Perhaps an even sharper distinction between our graduates and non-graduates was in the emphasis they placed on weak-tie local social networks manifest in neighbourly connections. Weak-tie social networks are those which are more diffuse and connect people belonging to one social network with people in other through acquaintance ties (Granovetta 1993). Weak-tie networks, tied to local places, featured more prominently in non-graduates' narratives than graduates'. This was reflected in the way non-graduates were more likely to socialise with larger groups of local people often involving close friends as well as acquaintances and friends-of-friends. Mikey, a non-graduate and builder, reflected on his connections with people in the local area. His local social connections were more diffuse and less intense reflecting situational social capital of weak-tie networks (Li et al. 2005). This theme was present in the narratives of other non-graduates, especially men, who talked about knowing and socialising with (relatively) large numbers of people locally but not singling people out as especially close friends;

> No it'll just, it's a bit like Crocodile Dundee, if you've got a problem you go down to the pub and tell other people what the problem is, end of problem (Mikey, non-graduate)

This 'situational' social capital (Li et al. 2005), derived from weak-ties located in local contexts was frequently alluded to by our non-graduates and was also present in a particular type of local social relationship, defined here as 'neighbourliness'. 'Neighbourly' connections are not so much characterised by intense 'strong-tie' emotional friendships, but rather, by relationships of support and reciprocity manifest in behaviours such as looking out for neighbours, helping them or exchanging favours. Whilst both graduates and non-graduates alluded to these kinds of relationships, non-graduates did so more readily. In many cases, the

'neighbourly' relationships experienced by our non-graduates reflected a lengthy duration of residence in the area in which relationships of support and trust had built up amongst local residents over a long time. This is reflected on by Louise, a non-graduate, in particularly visceral terms:

> We've got really good neighbours, really good neighbours. Half the street have lived here all their lives. You know, you've got two sisters living across the road, next to each other, you've got, there's somebody else living down the road and her cousin lives this side. This is a small street, there's only about 30 houses in the street and it's really a good community feel here. You know, so it's, yeah. You know, I wouldn't--, we all trust each other, you know, practically. It's like a little village I think, you know. We're not into each other's houses or anything like that, it's just that, you know, we just--, I think if it came to it, we would all help each other type of thing and even people who have moved out of the street, since we've lived here, if I see them in town now, they still stop and talk, you know, so it was a really good community feel here. (Louise, non-graduate).

Reflecting this more prominent situational social capital of weak-ties amongst non-graduates was a greater sense of belonging and attachment to the local area expressed by them as well. Here, we catch glimpses of the way in which weak-ties, built up through living in an area for a long time, underpin strong feelings of belonging and attachment which embed people in local contexts. This was reflected in the way in which our non-graduates placed a much greater emphasis on their sense of connection and belonging with the area in which they lived. Annette and Jeanette's excerpts exemplify these weak-tie neighbourly connections which featured more strongly in non-graduates' interviews than they did in graduates':

> But, you know, it's nice up here because we are all friendly, you know, we're all sort of good neighbours as well, so. Well if anything went wrong or they needed help, they know they can come and knock on our door, even the old people in the flats down there. (Annette, non-graduate).

> The people around you have stayed the same for a long time so it's very much that sort of community feeling, although we're not in each other's houses all the time I feel if something was wrong I could knock on my neighbours' door and also being part of the church in the village, gives you that sense of belonging I think. (Jeanette, non-graduate).

Of course, some graduates did experience these kinds of weak-tie 'neighbourly' connections yet they featured less prominently in their accounts, reflecting the way in which they less readily derived situational social capital from weak-ties based in local contexts. Indeed, graduates were more likely to say very little about their neighbours, or to report not knowing neighbours at all or having very little contact with them. For some graduates this reflected the nature of the location in which they lived (i.e. living in relatively isolated rural areas which meant that contact with 'neighbours' was minimal). This emerged from Anne's interview (who lives in a rural part of Wales). Anne reflected on her relationship with neighbours in these terms:

> Yeah, they're [neighbours] quite friendly. We haven't really got any close ones because we're out in the countryside now so we know the immediate neighbours and we know two of the farmers. There's only one neighbour really (Anne, graduate).

For other graduates, their minimal contact with neighbours reflected their working lives, including working long hours or working outside the community. This appeared to undermine their chances of having informal contacts with local residents and neighbours. Bronwyn reflected:

> The majority are older people. People that have retired, not all, but most. They are fine but we don't see much of them. Some, like us, are out at work all day. There is no socialising like visiting each other's houses. Except with some that have been here for many years perhaps (Bronwyn, graduate).

Thus, whilst the non-graduates derived situational social capital from weak-tie networks manifest in neighbourly connections characterised by trust and reciprocity as well as a sense of local attachment and belonging, the graduates' were less likely to derive social capital from these sources. Non-graduates also derived social capital from strong-tie social networks characterised by deep friendships with people in local contexts more so than graduates. The prominence of both weak and strong-ties connected to the localities in which they lived for the non-graduates is likely to reflect their relatively lower rate of geographical mobility compared to the graduates and the nature of the communities in which they live. Many of the non-graduates had either moved minimally throughout their lives or had moved back to live in or near the areas they grew up. Mirroring this, they were more likely to allude to a sense of connection to local people through kinship or social networks, having lived in or near the area for many years. Whilst the graduates also experienced these weak-tie local social networks, they did so much less readily, and by contrast they experienced strong-ties characterised by strong friendships both within local contexts but also geographically far-flung in a way that our non-graduates were less likely to do so.

Conclusions

The research has suggested that the relationship between higher education and social capital is complex, reflecting the multidimensional nature of social capital. Based on the insights gathered from interviews with 64 Welsh adults, aged in their early 50s, the research suggests that graduates and non-graduates derive social capital from different sources. Whilst graduates derive social capital more so from civic participation, non-graduates derived it from informal modes of social participation, particularly informal social networks based in local contexts and neighbourly connections. This is both reflective and constitutive of social class distinctions in the distribution of resources and capitals on which different forms of social capital rest.

The difference between the graduates and non-graduates in their civic participation is likely to reflect distinctions between them in the resources (material, social and cultural) and capitals (human, social and cultural) to which they have access. Civic participation requires cultural, social and human capitals (Wilson and Musick 1997), which are socially differentiated (Bourdieu 1984; 1997). Thus, the graduates in this research, who were largely in middle-class occupations, were likely to have enjoyed privileged sets of social and financial resources and capitals which facilitated their civic participation. Further research is needed to examine in detail the role of HE in the formation of these resources, as well as the development of skills and knowledge which are mobilised for civic participation. However, since research has indicated that a lengthy duration of education helps develop the sorts of skills and knowledge needed for participation in civic activities (including linguistic and cognitive skills, or specific skills such as forming and presenting arguments and debating) (Verba et al. 1995; Brady et al. 1995), this might throw light on why the graduates, who were

generally amongst the most socially and economically privileged in the sample, were most likely to enjoy high levels of civic participation.

Civic participation may therefore serve as an important site for the reproduction of social inequalities, whereby those most privileged in society enjoy social capital derived from civic participation. Since social capital is a resource which individuals and families use to pursue personal interests and secure advantages (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1997), civic participation may be a means through which the advantages already enjoyed by those most privileged in society are exacerbated. Thus, if higher education is associated with greater civic participation which is a source of social capital, then policy drives for further expansion and widening participation, particularly amongst groups most under-represented in HE, are well justified. This may be particularly so given that HE is associated with greater democratic engagement which in turn fosters liberal and tolerant views which are, according to some commentators, crucial for a stable democracy (Nie et al, 1996; Bynner et al. 2003).

However, the Scoping Project has illuminated the importance of acknowledging the various forms that social capital takes (Li et al. 2005). Whilst the middle-class graduates in this study were more likely to participate in civic life through their membership and activity in formal associations, the non-graduates derived social capital from their weak and strong-tie social networks, particularly those based in local contexts. These strong and weak-tie social networks are hugely valuable; they are not only important sources of social, emotional and practical support, particularly for those living in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Forrest and Kearns 2001; MacDonald et al. 2005), they are also important in fostering a sense of belonging and attachment to a place. What's more, according to Li et al (2005), situational social capital, derived from informal social networks and manifest in neighbourly connections and a sense of local belonging is more important in fostering trust than civic engagement. The insights gathered from the Scoping Project which suggest that non-graduates derive social capital from their weak and strong-tie social networks may suggest that they also enjoy a greater level of social trust than graduates, as well as a rich supply of locally based social and emotional support. This would in turn suggest that further expansion of HE would do nothing to improve this very valuable form of social capital.

There is, however, another side to weak-tie networks. According to Granovetter (1973; Putnam 2001), weak-tie networks bridge people of one close-knit social network with people of another, enabling people of different networks to pass information and hear of different views and opinions outside their own networks. This can have beneficial consequences in terms of enabling individuals to access information about opportunities (i.e. relating to jobs, education or training) which they might not otherwise access (Granovetter 1973). However, since the non-graduates' weak-ties tended to be located locally, and to consist of friends, relatives or acquaintances, these sorts of weak-ties might not so much bridge to other social networks but to people who share similar social resources, experiences or points of view. As such, the extent to which these sorts of weak-ties connect people to greater opportunities, information or knowledge is questionable (Kearns and Parkinson 2001; MacDonald et al. 2005). In this sense, social inequalities are reproduced through the way in which this form of social capital, derived from locally-based social networks which do not necessarily open-up opportunities, but instead, narrows and curtails them, are experienced by those less privileged in society (MacDonald et al 2005; Li et al 2005). The task of policy makers is therefore to pursue agendas which promote local attachments without stymying the formation of social networks which operate as 'bridges' to other social networks, and to opportunities, resources and ideas associated with them. Perhaps, one mechanism for achieving this would be through universities taking responsibly to promote a sense of attachment and belonging to their

localities amongst students and graduates, thus fostering both strong and weak-tie locally based social networks amongst them. This may serve as an important source of social capital for both graduates and non-graduates in university towns and cities, through social networks developed between them.

Issues for further research

Following completion of the Scoping Project, a small piece of qualitative research will be conducted which explores how particular experiences of HE, including the degree discipline studied as well as the experience of extra-curricular activities whilst at university, informs civic participation amongst adults. Further research would benefit from an examination of this using large-scale surveys. This would address questions about the extent to which particular HE courses, programmes or degree disciplines, as well as extra-curricular experiences, are more or less important in fostering different forms of social capital (including civic participation and the formation of social networks). Further research is also required on the impact of post-graduate study on the formation of different forms of social capital.

Dissemination and planned outputs

Outputs to date:

Civil Society and Higher Education: Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), *Celtic Manor: Newport.* December 2016

'Civil Society and Higher education'. European Conference on Educational Research (ECER). *University College Dublin, Dublin.* August 2016

Civil Society and Higher education: Comparing graduates and non-graduates. British Sociological Association (BSA). *Aston University, Birmingham.* April 2016

Civil Society and Higher Education: Social capital amongst graduates and non-graduates. Society for Research on Higher Education (SRHE). *Newport, Wales.* December 2015

Planned Outputs:

Paper: Civic participation amongst 50 year olds, how do people 'participate'? *Journal of Civil Society* (Intended submission date, February 2017).

Paper: Why do people participate? A mixed methods examination of explanations for civic participation and non-participation. *Sociology.* (Intended submission date, March 2017).

Paper: A comparison of 50 year old graduates and non-graduates' 'civic participation' *Studies in Higher Education (*Intended submission date, April 2017)

Conference: British Sociological Association (April 2017) Exploring the role of university in graduates' civic participation.

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Appendix

Table 1: Participation categories (N=64)

Participation categories.	Graduates (32)	Non-graduates (32)
1= No current participation	9	14
2=Engage in one activity but this one thing not frequently (i.e. less than once a month)	9	3
3=Engage in one activity and engage in it frequently (i.e. at least once a month)	2	3
4=Engage in more than one activity but does not engage in them frequently.	2	2
5= Engages in more than one activity but engages in only 1 or 2 things frequently	7	10
6=Engages in more than 3 activities and does more than three things frequently.	3	0