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**A level playing field? Seeking a collaborative academic partnership between
an alternative provider of higher education and an English university – an
autoethnography**

June Dennis

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.**

July 2021

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
AB	Advisory Board
ABE	Association of Business Executives
AD	Associate Dean
AP(s)	Alternative Provider(s) (of higher education)
APG	Academic Planning Group
BA	Batchelor of Arts
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BUBC	Big University in Big City
CAB	Chair of the Advisory Board
CAP(s)	Collaborative Academic Partnership(s)
CIM	Chartered Institute of Marketing
CPC	Collaborative Partnership Committee
DAB(s)	Degree Awarding Body/(ies)
DAPs	Degree Awarding Powers
DLHE	Destination of Leavers in Higher Education
DQ	Director of Quality
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
H&SC	Health & Social Care
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act (2017)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HESPA	Higher Education Strategic Planners Association
HH	Headhunter
HND	Higher National Diploma
IHE	Independent HE
MBA	Master of Business Administration

MD	Managing Director
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSS	National Student Survey
OfS	Office for Students
OU	Open University
PVC	Pro Vice-Chancellor
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SMT	Senior Management Team
SNC	Student Number Control
SUST	Small University in Small Town
SUSC	Small University in Small City
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TUMC	Tiny University in Medium sized City
TUSC	Tiny University in Small City
UK	United Kingdom
VC	Vice-Chancellor
UUK	Universities UK

DEDICATIONS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Robin Simmons for his support over the past years. I've not been an easy student, I'm sure, having changed jobs several times through this process and constantly struggled to find time to progress my writing. You've never shown any signs of frustration as I grappled with concepts or how to structure my thesis and I've appreciated your support, guidance, and constructive feedback.

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I wish to thank my colleagues at The College for welcoming a stranger into your world and permitting me to undertake this research. Finally, heartfelt thanks go to my MD at The College. If you had not recruited me to the role of principal, I would never have had the chance to experience the quirkiness of the Alternative Provider sector or the opportunity to undertake this research. I remain an advocate for Alternative Providers. May you rest in peace.

ABSTRACT

This research was undertaken while I was principal of an alternative provider of higher education in England - 'The College'. It focuses on my experience of seeking and establishing a collaborative academic partnership with an English university to offer degree-level provision to students. It is a highly personalised account, using analytic autoethnography to chronicle the events over a nineteen-month period. I analyse this through the application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus.

The data identifies the challenges that one institution experienced in seeking a partnership. It also recognises the challenges I faced as someone new to the institution and the alternative provider sector having worked in the mainstream university sector for over 15 years previously. The study demonstrates that despite rhetoric about establishing a level playing field in the English higher education sector, it was still very difficult for the institution to establish a collaborative academic partnership with the dominant players (universities) in the field. It concludes with a consideration of the potential implications for policy and practice that this study uncovers.

This study is the first to consider collaborative academic partnerships from an alternative provider perspective, particularly in relation to how the power of the dominant subfield shapes and influences the relationship between the two parties. It also demonstrates the versatility of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus in being applied as a framework for an analytic autoethnography.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The journey begins in August 2015...

I was extremely skeptical about applying for the role of principal of an alternative provider (AP). I had concerns around my suitability for the role and the authenticity of The College. Nevertheless, I agreed to meet HH, a headhunter, in a hotel lobby in Birmingham. After a pleasant two-hour conversation discussing the higher education (HE) sector generally, I felt quite pleased when he confided that he thought I was exactly what The College wanted. When HH rang to say I had got to the next stage, I agreed to be interviewed, partly to humour him. Throughout the selection process I nearly pulled out, but each time, The College came back and met most of my requirements.

After my third visit to The College, I was offered the job. On 10th November, I advised my referees that they may be contacted by The College. 'Persistent buggers, aren't they?' my Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) emailed back. I was rather taken aback by this, but discovered subsequently, that The College had emailed at least 5 people in my university asking to discuss a collaborative partnership. Months later, I saw a copy of the original email. 'Dear esteemed Sir', it started. No wonder my colleagues were unimpressed.

When I handed my notice in, my Dean looked concerned. 'It will be difficult for you to get back into mainstream HE, you know that, don't you? Are you sure you want to do this? It could be a one-way ticket'. He advised me that he wouldn't process my resignation immediately, in case I change my mind. It did concern me, but I desperately wanted a new challenge, and I was probably too proud to change my mind - I had been offered a good financial package, anyway. I wanted to make a difference and to help The College get university partnerships and possibly degree awarding powers (DAPs) in the future. 'If this goes well, you could be our first Vice-Chancellor (VC)', the managing director (MD) confided to me. This excited me, but I was aware that I was going to 'the dark side', as some of my colleagues called it.

'The first time it really struck home to me that things were now different was when I attended a Universities UK event on 26th January 2016 about the potential impact of the Green Paper. It was the first occasion I had worn a delegate badge with my new employer's name on it. Despite still being employed by a university (...) I felt like I was in enemy territory, that I didn't belong. Most of the speakers implied that increasing degree awarding powers was not in their institution's interest – just one tried to put a positive spin on it suggesting that it would increase entrepreneurial activity in the sector. The people I conversed with were polite, but evidently did not consider me to be important enough to talk to once they realised I was from the private sector.

At lunch-time, I asked my future boss whether there had been any movement on looking for more central premises. He looked excited as he explained that he was close to completing an offer for a new campus. Would I like to see it? Leaving the conference early, we hailed a cab to take us to the location. I was extremely impressed. If all goes well, we would be in for the start of the next academic year (...) If this were a university, it would take at least a year to have meetings with the unions and student representation as well as fit out the building, I remarked.

I took the train back, invigorated, feeling as though I had a secret which I couldn't share. I realised that this day marked the start of a new adventure which featured me as one of the main characters. Later, as I walked back to my car, I started talking to a well-dressed older woman on the way. By coincidence, she worked for a network of colleges offering a range of FE/HE provision. She confided that she had had a difficult day at one of their colleges on the south coast. The regulatory bodies were closing it after 40 years, allegedly due to one issue on the last inspection. 'Private colleges', she shared, 'are vulnerable to one-off vindictive decisions that are difficult and expensive to overturn. If the Government decides to close them all down overnight, they could do'. It made me realise yet again how vulnerable the private HE sector is. I chose not to tell her that I have a new job...'

In January 2016, I decided to leave my position as associate dean (AD) at a 'post-1992' university in the Midlands to join a private, for profit college as its principal. I

was recruited for my knowledge of mainstream higher education and tasked to develop partnerships with established UK universities so The College could offer degree top-ups and full degree awards. The longer-term goal was to acquire DAPs. When I joined, The College had around 1,600 students mainly studying Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications, rising to nearly 4,000 two years later.

This research is an autoethnographic study over a 19-month period from 26th February 2016 to 22nd September 2017. It documents my experience of seeking and establishing a collaborative academic partnership (CAP) between an English AP, identified as 'The College' in this thesis, and an English university. It analyses this through the application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus.

Background

I joined The College at a time of significant change. The HE sector was nervously awaiting the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) (2017) which would announce the establishment of the Office for Students (OfS) and easier access to DAPs. This was heralded as providing a 'level playing field', a term earlier coined by David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, in the White Paper *Students at the heart of the system* (BIS, 2011), encouraging new entrants to the UK HE sector to compete with established Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and offer students more choice. In 2016, it was still unclear what the new route to DAPs would encompass and therefore APs were still reliant on establishing partnerships with 'mainstream' higher education institutions (HEIs) with DAPs (usually, established universities) for either franchise or validated provision. These HEIs could, in some instances, also be considered as competitors if they were targeting similar markets.

Prior to my arrival, The College had sought a partnership with a UK university to enable them to deliver level-6 top-up awards for HND students. However, The College was unable to get past the initial enquiry stage. The MD and Senior Management Team (SMT) had little understanding of how UK HE operated and had sent poorly written speculative letters and emails in a scattergun manner to named individuals within universities. This coincided with several high-profile investigations into the AP sector, particularly in relation to the sponsoring of international students and quality issues. Hence, universities were rather cautious to collaborate with APs.

Nevertheless, following an approach by the Chair of The College Advisory Board (CAB), a retired vice-chancellor (VC), one university did express a desire to collaborate with The College. Having submitted all the relevant documentation for the approval event and undertaken staff training at the university, the university backed out just a few days before the approval event was scheduled. It was suspected that this was due to several high-profile institutions, including a university, having their international student visa license suspended in 2014. Subsequently, the MD and CAB came to the decision that they needed to recruit someone who had UK HE experience to develop academic partnerships. This resulted in my appointment initially as academic dean for my probation period and then, several months later, as principal of The College. This research follows my journey to obtain a successful CAP for The College and starts in 2016 with discussions with a large university in the Midlands (BUBC).

This initial partnership did not get to approval stage. HH subsequently introduced The College to several other institutions that expressed interest in working with it. In Summer 2017, The College was successful in gaining approval to launch two top-up degrees for September 2017 start and, despite the late launch, enrolled nearly 100 students on its first intake. Most had completed their HND qualification at The College and nearly all were mature students from the European Union (EU) or UK students from ethnic minority groups.

Research Aim

To document my experience of seeking and establishing a collaborative academic partnership between an English alternative provider and an English university through an autoethnographic lens, using Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus as an analytical framework.

Research Objectives

1. To critically review my experience of the English higher education landscape in relation to alternative providers and degree provision.
2. To critically reflect on my experience of the process of seeking and establishing collaborative academic partnerships between universities and English alternative providers of higher education through the application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus.
3. To use autoethnographic methods in combination with Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus to develop novel and critical insights into collaborative academic partnerships.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does a 'level playing field' within UK higher education exist?
2. How did I address any challenges I experienced as I sought to develop a partnership with an English university to offer degree top-up awards?
3. What challenges did I experience in engaging with The College and the wider HE field as a leader of an alternative provider?
4. To what extent did the use of an autoethnographic approach and application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus contribute to the understanding of the research objectives?

Due to the different legislative landscapes of the individual countries of the UK, in particular, the remit of OfS, this study focuses on English HE only. The title 'university' is a protected term in law and the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) (2017) gave the OfS the power to authorise the use of the 'university' title from 1st April 2019. Prior to the launch of the single register of HE providers in 2019/20, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) defined alternative providers as:

‘Alternative providers are Higher Education providers who do not receive recurrent funding from Office for Students (previously HEFCE) or other public body and who are not further education colleges.’

(HESA, no date a)

HESA no longer separates student data between different provider types. However, the term ‘alternative provider’ is still commonly used to define those institutions which do not receive recurrent funding from OfS. This term includes for-profit and not-for-profit organisations as well as some with charitable status. It is acknowledged that there is some overlap between the two categories as some APs have obtained DAPs and university status, including Buckingham University, Arden University and, University of Law and therefore receive recurrent funding from the OfS. This will be discussed more fully in chapter 3.

Potential contribution

Little has been written on the English AP sector generally (Barnard, 2013). The current literature regarding collaborative academic partnerships between APs and universities is scant and none address the process of establishing and developing collaborative relationships. This research sheds light on the process by investigating my experiences, as principal of an English AP, of obtaining a collaborative academic partnership. The application of Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, and habitus as a theoretical framework to help understand and evaluate the autoethnography is also a distinctive element of this thesis. It is anticipated that the evaluation of this approach may also contribute to the understanding of how Bourdieu’s concepts can be applied as a theoretical framework for data analysis.

Many published autoethnographies are described as ‘evocative autoethnographies’. They tell a story that the authors believe is important and it is left to the reader to determine what they take from it. These autoethnographies are rarely aligned to a theoretical underpinning nor offer significant analysis of their work (e.g. Ellis, 2001; Wilson, 2011). A review of the extant literature could find no similar work which applies Bourdieu’s concepts as a framework for an autoethnographic study.

About me

Given that autoethnography is, by nature, subjective, my writings will be based on my own perceptions and experiences. The purpose of this mini biography is to help the reader make an informed judgement about how my professional experiences and social and cultural background may influence my writing style and observations.

As a child and young person, I recall always having the wrong accent and feeling that I did not fit in, especially at school. When I was four years old, I moved from tenement buildings in Govan, Glasgow to a council estate in Surrey. In addition to a strong Glaswegian accent, I had a significant speech impediment and was painfully shy. When I started school, I quickly lost my accent to try to fit in and be understood. A year after my family moved to Dorking, Surrey, I entered grammar school. I was still very shy and discovered yet again that I had the wrong accent. Most pupils in my class appeared to be more articulate and posher than me. I hated any classes where I had to speak in front of the class but enjoyed maths, where I would be left to solve problems by myself. I have always been numerate and studied engineering management at university. People who know me are often surprised when they discover I have chosen to undertake an autoethnographic study as it is not what comes naturally to me. However, it makes sense, given the nature of the topic under consideration and my relatively novel position as someone who straddles two sectors of HE – the university and AP sectors – to apply autoethnography to investigate this issue.

As part of my first degree, I undertook two, six-month placements with my sponsoring company. The first was in production management and the second was as a marketing assistant. These placements were key in determining my future direction as I realised I much preferred marketing to production management. After graduating, I worked my way through various marketing management roles and subsequently obtained my Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) professional qualifications, an MBA in strategic marketing and finally became a Chartered Marketer and Fellow of the CIM. I accepted my first full-time academic role when I was 34 years old, progressing from a temporary 1-year teaching contract to AD within one institution where I stayed for 11 years. I then moved to another university for a further 5 years. During this time, as part of a business school, I gained

significant experience of working with partner institutions in England and overseas. I chaired partner approval events and acted as an external academic for partnership approval events in China, India, Nepal, Mauritius, Singapore, and England. I had also been part of the decision-making process for agreeing or declining new partners at faculty level. Often, it took up to a year before a decision was made about the suitability of a partner and then more time to get through the university approval stages. On several occasions, the business school would be directed to work with a partner by university executive but in other cases, seemingly good, financially viable, partnerships would not be approved by the senior team.

My remit as principal was to initiate opportunities to work with university partners to develop top-up degrees for HND graduates. I quickly noted how difficult it was for APs to partner with universities to offer top-up degrees and other awards and how this had affected colleges like my own. From an AP's perspective there appeared to be no 'level playing field'. Reflecting on Bourdieu's concept of field, I perceived that APs were, at best, considered a subset of the HE field or even a separate field. Certainly, it appeared that universities had determined the rules of the game and that these rules disadvantaged newcomers. During this period, I also became aware of how I, as a senior representative of an AP, was perceived as inferior or untrustworthy by some university staff. Had my habitus changed? I noted that the voice of APs was not heard at HE conferences and similar events. The lack of capital, especially social and cultural capital, meant that many APs were not able to engage with the wider field of HE in the same way as universities could. This thesis considers the challenges of working with universities and the wider HE sector, from my perspective of someone with substantial university experience working in the AP subfield.

Thesis outline

Chapter 2 focuses on the theoretical underpinning for this thesis. I critically evaluate Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus as a potential framework for my research and how they might be applicable to HE. I argue that HE in APs is a subset of a larger HE field and that APs usually possess less capital than most universities.

Despite some concerns about the lack of precise definitions of the concepts, I conclude that field, capital, and habitus provide a useful framework for data analysis.

In Chapter 3, an overview of the HE sector is provided. The first section of the chapter situates HE provision in APs within the wider field of HE and considers issues that have shaped the AP sector in England. The next section provides a background to The College, its origins, size, and culture as well as where it is positioned within the AP and wider HE sectors.

Chapter 4 explains the rationale for the chosen methodological approach and critically assesses the perceived benefits and possible pitfalls of undertaking autoethnographic research. It determines that an analytic autoethnographic approach fits with the application of Bourdieu's theoretical framework and my preferred writing style. It details the process for undertaking the research, including data collection and analysis. This section also considers how any ethical issues have been addressed when planning and undertaking the study, particularly in relation to the potentially conflicting role of researcher and subject.

The results of the study are provided in chapter 5. These follow my experience of The College's journey to find a university partner over a 19-month period. My autoethnographic writing is interspersed throughout. The data, presented in chronological order, outlines how The College worked with five universities during this time resulting in a successful partnership for the 2017/18 academic year. The autoethnography highlights some of the challenges I experienced from both external and internal sources. I also make observations regarding the position of APs within the field of English HE and my own changing personal experience of working in a new sector.

In chapter 6, I apply Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus as a framework for the analysis and discuss the themes that emerge from the data analysis. The concluding chapter addresses the original aim, objectives, and research questions and considers how emergent observations during the course of undertaking the research expanded the original scope of the research questions. I also identify a number of potential implications for practice and policy based on my research. Finally, I reflect on how the autoethnographic approach and application of Bourdieu's

concepts enabled me to come to my conclusions and might impact or stimulate future research.

CHAPTER TWO

A BOURDIEUSIAN APPROACH

Introduction

Having decided to investigate the development of CAPs between APs and universities, I sought a theoretical framework that would enable me not only to understand the nature of organisational relationships within the field of HE but also analyse my personal journey as I transitioned into my new role. For me, the phrase 'level playing field' used in the BIS report *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System, Higher Education* (BIS, 2011) resonated with the Bourdieusian concept of field. On further investigation, I identified that Bourdieu's theory of practice and the concepts of field, capital, and habitus, (Bourdieu, 1977, 1993b), in particular, have been applied to both the micro (personal) and macro spheres. They have also been applied to a range of different situations, including individual, institutional, sectoral, and education, including HE (Thomas, 2002; Naidoo, 2004; Zembylas, 2007). However, this initial literature search found no Bourdieusian-inspired studies of APs nor examples of autoethnographic research applying the concepts as a framework for analysis. These gaps in the literature intrigued me and, as a result of the following literature review, a framework for undertaking my primary research and data analysis became evident and forms an integral part of my research.

I begin by identifying and explaining Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus and how they interact. These concepts are intertwined and so it is inevitable that there will be some reference to each whilst focusing on one. I then explain how others have reviewed the HE sector using Bourdieu's theory of practice and determine how I might apply them in the context of this thesis. I then discuss how field, capital, and habitus can be applied as a framework to give shape to my narrative and subsequent analysis. Finally, I consider Bourdieu's stance on autoethnography and how to apply his concepts to an autoethnographic study.

Field

It was the concept of field that first attracted me to Bourdieu's work, despite Naidoo's (2004) assertions that it has 'received relatively less attention than Bourdieu's other concepts such as 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' (Naidoo, 2004, p.457). Field enables the researcher to make sense of interactions between people or to explain why something happens in a way that cannot be achieved by just looking at what was said or observed (Thomson, 2012).

The term 'field' relates to 'the social space in which interactions, transactions and events occurred' (Thomson, 2012). The French word used, '*champ*', describes a piece of land which may be used to play competitive sport or a battlefield. It can also be used in the sense of a force-field. These descriptions seem to suggest that Bourdieu's field relates to some form of social arena where participants compete to exert power over others in the field (Thomson, 2012).

Participants or players can be individuals, groups or institutions and their relational and hierarchical position in the field is determined by the capital that is conferred to them. This capital can be economic, social, or cultural and is identified in many ways, such as power, status, or knowledge and is used to determine position in the competitive arena of the field. All fields have boundaries (Lingard and Christie, 2003; Grenfell and James, 2004). There will be some agents who will be included in the field and other who are excluded, although there may be movement between adjacent fields. Not all players are necessarily conscious of their place in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Wacquant, 2004).

There are constant movements and power struggles within the field as agents seek to gain possession of their desired position within it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The imagery of tensions, struggles, even battles, within the field is prevalent in Bourdieu's writing (Martin, 2003; Wacquant, 2004) but so too is the connectivity and mutual dependency of agents in the field (Hodkinson, Biesta and James, 2007; Bathmaker, 2015). The relative power of each agent is determined by the different forms of capital they have at their disposal (Bathmaker, 2015). Like a game, a field is governed by rules, some overt and others implicit or unofficial. There are winners and losers, with some agents being more dominant than others and determining the rules of combat which less dominant firms have to go along with (Swedberg, 2011).

My research will consider these dynamics between the mostly newer and usually smaller APs and the (generally) more established universities drawing on my experience over an intense period of involvement. These dynamics are constantly in flux so what we see or experience within a field is a moment in time. Wacquant eloquently describes fields as 'historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish over time' (Wacquant, 2007, p.268).

Grenfell and James (2004) identify two further time-related features of field relevant to this study. Firstly, that changes occur at variable speeds with some participants passing through quickly, whilst others have relatively established positions which move more slowly. This is evident with The College, where decisions could be made rapidly by the executive without having to go through layers of accountability meetings to gain approval, whereas the more formal university structures slow down decision making. Secondly, they acknowledge that on occasions, there can be a collective movement, an *avant-garde*, that might challenge the status quo of the field and create a new order. For example, the impact of Covid-19 has not only created instability in the field of HE due to financial issues but also accelerated the development of on-line provision. Those that have not adapted might be at risk of lower student satisfaction and may recruit less students (Gallagher and Palmer, 2020; Martin-Barbero, 2020; Moore, 2021). Such changes in positioning and relationships can result in a shift in the entire structure of the field (Ferrare and Apple, 2015). Ultimately, this *avant-garde* may become an established element of the field. My research takes place in one of these moments of change – where the status quo was, at least in theory, being challenged, to some extent, by APs – and the opening up of DAPs and university status.

One of the attractions of field is that it effectively creates a confined space for investigation. However, in reality, there are multiple fields. Mendoza et al (2012, p.559) note that '(f)or Bourdieu, the social world is a multidimensional space of fields structured hierarchically by the distribution of powers or forms of capital'. One of the biggest challenges when applying Bourdieu's field theory is determining the scope of the field – what should be in? What should be out? Is 'HE' a field? If so, where does HE in Further Education (FE) fit? Do APs offering HND qualifications operate in this field or are they part of another field? Are there 'subfields', and, if so, what are they? There appears to be little transparency about what to consider when determining the

extent of a field, yet there are significant implications when deciding what to include or exclude (Bathmaker, 2015).

The following characteristics of field have been noted:

- Fields can be of varying sizes and interact with one another at the margins. They can cross countries and be industry wide or as small as an organisation (Thomson, 2005);
- There can be 'fields within fields' (Grenfell and James, 2004; Rowlands, 2013);
- The degree of autonomy a field has is dependent on how it sets itself apart from external influences (Bathmaker, 2015) and is insulated from external influences (Wacquant, 2007);
- Boundaries can be redefined to open up the field to significant changes in the field (Swedberg, 2011);
- A firm with a large workforce may be considered as a field if it meets Bourdieu's definition (Bourdieu, 2005; Atkinson, 2010).

Bourdieu's concept of field enables HE 'to be examined as a distinct and irreducible object of study' (Maton, 2005, p.687). It provides a framework for studying organisations within the field. Bathmaker (2015) gives some considerable thought to the definition of the 'higher education field' as she studies HE provision in Further Education. She questions whether HE in FE is in the HE field or FE field or 'a 'hybrid' space created by porous borders between fields...' (Bathmaker, 2015, p.69). Each of these options could result in a different outcome. For example, one definition of a field might imply that certain types of capital are valued, resulting in agents operating in certain ways to maximise capital. However, being '...positioned in a different field might challenge and conflict with those ways of thinking, being and doing' (Bathmaker, 2015, p.69). If my field of study is 'Alternative Providers', then my institution would be considered a medium-sized player with some power relative to its size. However, it would have no significant position or power in the larger, more established field of HE, dominated by universities.

Bathmaker (2015) identified different rules of the game in FE and HE and concluded that HE in FE is a subfield of the overall field of higher education, overlapping both

fields of FE and HE. Bathmaker also observed that boundaries between fields and subfields in HE are more permeable than perhaps envisaged by Bourdieu. Bathmaker (2015) and Marginson (2008) warn that despite policy attempts to change the dynamics and boundaries of the English HE field, they may not be successful.

‘Marginson sees opportunities here for hybrid academic forms to develop, and there are certainly policy attempts in England that could be seen as encouraging a new field of ‘higher vocational education’ (...) with greater independence from the existing field of HE. However, as Bourdieu’s work emphasises and Marginson also acknowledges, redefining the boundaries between fields, and/or creating a new hybrid field, does not automatically change overall relations of power.’

(Bathmaker, 2015, p.73)

Fields are always in a state of flux, but the field of HE has experienced and is continuing to experience significant shifts as a result of government policies (Thomson, 2005). Maton (2005) provides insights from the creation of new universities in the 1960s and 1980s in the UK and critically examines the ‘usefulness of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework for empirical analysis of policy debates in higher education’ (Maton, 2005, p.688). Defining the field will be important for my research on APs.

One might argue that while there may be a field defined as English HE, there may also be several subfields within this broader field dominated by the established university sector. These subfields may include HE in FE and APs. However, as already noted, there can be layers or dimensions of fields, identified by Marginson (2008) who considers HE in a global setting. In this setting, English HE is a subfield of a much larger field which spans continents. Marginson (2008) also identifies a number of ‘autonomous subfields’ within global HE including the ‘elite’ subfield, the ‘mass or popular’ subfield and a range of ‘intermediate institutions that combine the opposing principles of legitimacy in various degrees and states of ambiguity’ (Marginson, 2008, p.305).

Bourdieu’s field theory also provides a framework to consider how organisations or individuals behave or adapt when they move from one field to another, or from one part of a field to another. Such moves can create contradiction and instability and

affect individuals' capability to act in a particular field (Bathmaker, 2015). A particular critique of Bourdieu's field concept in relation to HE is that it was developed at a time when universities were largely protected from direct market pressures (Naidoo, 2004; Maton, 2005). The influence of neo-liberal policies mean that this is now no longer the case and has arguably 'resulted in the undermining of cultural capital and the valourization of economic capital' (Naidoo, 2004, p.469). In recent years, several HE institutions have moved from the AP subfield into the dominant university sector, including Regent's University, a non-profit organisation and BPP University, a for-profit institution, both gaining university status in 2013. Some FE colleges have also gained university status, including Leeds College of Art and Design which became Leeds Arts University in 2017, demonstrating that movement within and between fields is possible. There is, however, no recent example of a university moving from the English HE field to another adjacent field or subfield. My study considers my experiences of the AP subfield of English HE and how it relates to members of the main HE field. While much of the research considers field from an organisational perspective, this theme of moving between fields or subfields becomes pertinent for me, the researcher and participant, as I move from the dominant university subfield into the AP subfield.

A field can be defined broadly or specifically. As Thomson (2012) notes

'... an analysis of education might look at the field of power, the field of HE, the discipline as a field, the university as a field and the department or school as a field. Perhaps this is too many fields altogether! ... (*It*) may be better to do as Bourdieu did himself in relation to education, and reduce the number of fields in play at any one time.'

(Thomson, 2012, p.77).

It would appear, therefore, that I have ultimate say on how I define 'field' for the purposes of my study, provided I can justify that it has the appropriate characteristics identified earlier. As already noted, borders between fields are often fuzzy and contested. This can be problematic for researchers as they try to determine where they should draw the line, but it can also give great flexibility, provided the borders are clearly defined and explained, and the impact of such decisions is understood.

Capital

As I dug deeper into Bourdieu's work, I perceived that 'capital' and 'power' would help make sense of what I was experiencing. Bourdieu (1986) was concerned about how social inequality is 'perpetrated and maintained through the use of capital' (Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012, p.560) and this is a common theme in the work of others using Bourdieu's concepts (e.g. Naidoo, 2004; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012). While social class and status are relevant to HE, my research focuses on how I experienced organisational inequality in the HE sector that was perpetuated and maintained through the use of capital, despite the introduction of legislation which claims to level the playing field.

Bourdieu defines economic capital as material assets that can be 'immediately and directly convertible into money' (1986, p.242). This not only includes financial assets such as property and belongings but also rights to access capital. However, Bourdieu's use of the term capital is much broader, and he perceives it to be a 'wider system of exchanges whereby assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields' (Moore, 2012, p.99). These social, cultural, and symbolic assets can be invested or exchanged to create value in the field and enable membership to the field (Naidoo, 2004, p.458). Often such forms of capital can be seen as 'transubstantiated forms of economic capital' (Moore, 2012, p.99). Bourdieu also asserts that economic capital can be institutionalised, for example, in the form of qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). This could also be considered as symbolic capital. To achieve a certain qualification or study at a particular institution might mean that one has had to pass certain economic thresholds. In addition, by attending a particular college or university or studying a particular subject, social capital can be generated through the connections made during the period of study, illustrating the interrelationship between forms of capital. In other words, the different forms of capital interact. This helps determine the hierarchical position of the various agents and actors in a field, and the amount of choice or options they might have. All forms of capital can be owned individually or corporately (Bourdieu, 1986).

The concept of social capital is not unique to Bourdieu and is used by other authors to describe different concepts both prior and subsequent to Bourdieu's use of the term (e.g. Putnam, 1993). Bourdieu defines social capital as:

‘...the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.’

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119)

One could summarise this as ‘who you know’, or the network one shares through membership of a group. Such groups have a shared sense of identity, norms and values and a shared understanding that enables trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. An example might be the shared experience of individuals who have studied at the same Oxbridge college and who continue to support each other throughout their careers. Those with the ‘right’ networks are more likely to succeed in their field as they have more resources to call upon. Similarly, those in different social groups may not have the same level of access to power and resources and may struggle to gain status and power within the given field. Bourdieu (1986) notes that such relationships can also be institutionalised through a family name, attendance at a particular school or university, membership of a society, or formal title. The size of the network and the amount of capital held by members of an individual's networks can also have a multiplying effect on their social capital (Moffat, 2018). Some networks are relatively easy to join, often for a fee, but others are impossible to join if one does not have the right ‘credentials’ or ‘pedigree’. For example, one might be able to pay to join a professional networking group, but it might be more difficult to join a professional body without the right qualifications or experience and impossible to gain the benefits of an influential family name (unless one marries into it). Our social networks also help us to understand how we should respond to various stimuli and situations, and what is expected of us.

My autoethnography outlines how I perceived The College seeking to acquire social capital through joining networks, such as the Chambers of Commerce and building connections with mainstream HE providers through appointments to its advisory board (AB).

While it may be relatively easy to identify what social networks one might need to join (assuming access is possible), cultural capital is somewhat more difficult to acquire, although it is possible over time (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009).

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three types of cultural capital – embodied, objectified and institutionalised:

- Embodied cultural capital is accumulated over time. This could include one's accent, vocabulary or even a way of thinking (Sullivan, 2002, p.145). Education and upbringing are key here. The 'right' education may develop a student's ability to think, speak, and behave in a certain way which might suggest a particular upbringing or intellectual status, thus ensuring 'class reproduction' (Sullivan, 2002; Grenfell and James, 2004; Naidoo, 2004).
- Objectified cultural capital could be considered as the trappings of a cultural upbringing – the physical artefacts of a culture. For example, what I drink, what music I listen to or even where I shop and what furnishings I choose, give signals to others about my cultural capital. A successful businessperson who may never have felt the need to drink wine or play golf, may do so once they can afford them to demonstrate their rise up the social classes. They may never really appreciate such items nor be able to discuss the subtleties with others who are more comfortable with such trappings. An academic might take pride in displaying shelves of academic books. However, while cultural objects can be used as proxy for economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), Moffat (2018, p.170) notes that '...the owner must also have access to embodied cultural capital...to use them for their specific purpose'. Over time, one might learn to appreciate items initially purchased as 'trappings'. Some artefacts may also identify a person's or organisation's perceived lack of cultural capital (rightly or wrongly).
- Institutionalised cultural capital includes recognition received from an organisation, usually in terms of a qualification. These include degrees (and, to some extent the perceived value of the degree, such as subject area and where obtained) and professional qualifications. It can also include awards and titles given to individuals, such as an MBE. Many APs seek to employ or recruit to their

board of governors, people with doctorates and professorships to raise their institutionalised cultural capital.

Symbolic capital is perhaps the most disputed form of capital, mainly as it is difficult to define precisely. Moore notes (2012, p.99) that Bourdieu described symbolic capital as ‘...the values, tastes and life-styles of some social groups ...(*which*)...are, in an arbitrary manner, elevated above those of others in a way that confers social advantage (e.g. in education)’ However, some argue that this definition is not precise enough and that other forms of capital, in particular, cultural capital, are also symbolic in nature (Grenfell and James, 2004; Moore, 2012). Examples of symbolic capital are usually given as concepts such as prestige, honour and recognition (Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012). Economic and symbolic capital are “inextricably intertwined’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.119).

In the HE sector, the reputation of institutions is often linked to symbolic capital. Universities invite high profile, and often internationally recognised, individuals to join their teams and board of governors. They seek recognition for their research centres. In turn, they bestow honorary doctorates as a symbol of honour and prestige to individuals and alumni who are expected to sing the praises of the institution in return. Vice chancellors and senior academics are regularly included in the Queen’s New Year and Birthday honours lists. Such activity creates a virtuous cycle which sees the institution’s reputation and attractiveness increase, resulting in more rewards and recognition. These institutions are then more likely to recruit ‘better’ staff and attract applications from high-achieving students, and those from affluent backgrounds. Some APs, especially specialist institutions such as Norland College and RADA are able to replicate symbolic capital but, in the main, APs lack cultural and symbolic capital.

There is significant overlap and interplay between the forms of capital. For example, a title of nobility could be considered social capital or institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Zembylas (2007) notes that one form of capital may be exchanged for another. So, for example, private schooling, purchased via economic capital, can open up social networks and help students acquire cultural capital.

Established universities possess large amounts of capital, including economic, and all three forms of cultural capital. However, there are significant differences between most Russell Group and Red Brick universities and the former Polytechnics and other 'new' universities. In the main, newer universities possess less economic and cultural capital than the older institutions.

APs may have significant economic capital, depending on the owners and backers of the institutions. At one extreme, Global University Systems (GUS) owns several APs in England. It has an international presence and can support institutions in difficulty for some time. At the other extreme, Markfield Institute of Higher Education, a much smaller organisation offering specialist Islamic programmes, relies on grants, donations, and student fees to survive. However, most APs lack social and cultural capital. My research considers how one AP sought to address this through, for example: the development of a strong advisory board, including university VCs; attempting to buy in cultural capital through key appointments; inviting dignitaries to events; and creating symbolic capital through designing academic gowns and hoods, and graduation ceremonies.

Habitus

Habitus lies at the heart of Bourdieu's theoretical framework but hides a multitude of complexities. This is exacerbated by Bourdieu's use of the term developing over time (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu, in one of his earliest definitions of habitus defines it as:

'A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences functions at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfer of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems.'

(Bourdieu, 1969, p.xx)

These dispositions are developed by social agents, whether individual or collective, in response to the objective conditions they encounter. While field can be described

as having a recognisable boundary (Grenfell and James, 2004), habitus is the subjective internalisation or incorporation of social structure – it underpins the actions we undertake without conscious planning, and has the effect of making the social world seem natural (Lingard and Christie, 2003). Bourdieu (1993b, p.88) also described habitus as ‘a power of adaptation’. Reay (1998, p.521) notes how this ‘enables us to understand individuals as a complex amalgam of their past and presentbut an amalgam that is always in the process of completion. There is no finality of finished identity’.

Habitus is created via interplay between social structures, including the family, and individual will or choice (Bourdieu, 1984). Reay (2004) notes three distinguishing roles of habitus: as embodiment; as agency; and as a compilation of collective and individual trajectories.

Edgerton and Roberts (2014) agree that cultural capital and habitus overlap and believe it is often difficult to distinguish between them. Yet, they also claim, both concepts are helpful. Bourdieu viewed habitus primarily as the physical embodiment of cultural capital which frames not just how we think about the world (our attitudes and perceptions), but also our dispositions, habits and skills that we accrue through our life experiences (Devine, 2012). Things that we do or say, perhaps unknowingly; for example, the way we eat, walk or sit, how we tilt our head, tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Connolly, 1998; Reay, 2004). These dispositions are a product of the opportunities and constraints an individual experiences throughout life (Reay, 2004). Joining an organisation with a strong South Asian culture meant I had to interpret various gestures, such as what the flick of a hand and sideways nods meant. Bourdieu often noted that this embodiment, the ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.11) is so ingrained within a person’s identity that it is often mistaken as being natural rather than culturally developed.

Bourdieu describes habitus as the ‘embodied history’ of the individual/agent (Bourdieu, 1990b). Reay expands this to describe habitus as ‘a collective interplay between past and present’ (Reay, 2004, p.434). A person’s historical experiences can become so deeply rooted in who they are at an unconscious level that they may not be aware of their influence on current and future choices (Obembe, 2013). Hence my own personal habitus is important. My upbringing, educational

background, and my work experiences within universities and with CAPs, is important as this determines the lens through which I experience a new subfield and the habitus of work colleagues. A person's habitus will constantly develop as each experience adds another layer to existing layers (Reay, 2004). However, despite shifts in the environment/social structures, a person's habitus is unlikely to change significantly over time and one may continue with behaviours and responses that might no longer be appropriate or useful (Rowlands, 2013). My autoethnography, written over a 19-month period identifies the importance of my university habitus and how my habitus adjusts or otherwise as I work within the AP subfield.

To understand the purpose of habitus and its initial appeal, it is important to understand the context. There was significant debate in the mid-20th century France about whether agency or structure dominated social life. In other words, to what extent were individuals' choices/actions limited by social structures such as class, religion, and gender? At one extreme, existentialists, (see Sartre, 1958), asserted that everyone was free to choose what they want to do, whereas Lévi-Strauss (1963) advocated social structures and attempted to apply mathematical formula to how people might act. Bourdieu offered habitus as a mediation, or bridge, between agency and structure (Nash, 1999). Hence, whilst habitus does not intend to determine or predict what an individual will do, it helps shape the options someone is likely to consider or exclude from the decision-making process. Yet, despite predisposing individuals towards particular forms of action, the individual still has a range of options they can take.

While habitus is individualised as each person experiences a distinct social journey (Bourdieu, 1990b), individuals belong to groups with their own distinctive habitus (Obembe, 2013). Bourdieu describes habitus as a multi-layered concept – an individual has their own habitus, as will the family they belong to. They may also be a member of various groups or organisations, which in turn will have different habituses. The individual might influence group habitus which may, in turn, affect the individual (Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Reay, 2004; Obembe, 2013). While young people who attend a school and their families bring their own habitus to the institution, the school itself possesses an institutionally-based collective habitus, influenced by that of each individual student and member of staff, and which also

affects the student's habitus (Reay *et al.*, 2001). Despite this, an individual's habitus is likely to change little or slowly.

This duality as being both collective and individual and the interplay between the two is perceived as one of the strengths of the concept of habitus. Reay *et al.* adopted the term 'institutional habitus' to describe '...the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation' (Reay *et al.*, 2001, p.2).

For someone to break free from these structures they need to be conscious of the impact of the structures on their own habitus (Moffat, 2018). However, most people are not aware of the source of their actions as habitus is 'forgotten history' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.56). Like a fish in water, we take our habitus for granted and are unaware of the weight of the water surrounding us until we encounter a field which is unfamiliar (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). I was not aware of my existing habitus until I moved into the AP sector and experienced the discomfort, friction and pressure on my individual habitus (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). My autoethnography provided me with an opportunity to examine how I both influenced and adapted to this new habitus.

Inter-relationship between habitus, field, and capital

Initially, I assumed I would be able to focus my research solely on 'field' with occasional reference to habitus and capital. However, while many academic writings on the theory of practice focus on just one element (see Naidoo, 2004; Reay, 2004; Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012), the concepts of field, capital, and habitus are dynamic and fluid, always evolving (Grenfell and James, 2004) and inextricably linked. Indeed, Bourdieu developed a formula to illustrate this:

'(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice'

(Bourdieu, 1984, p.101).

Habitus is a 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.53) which can predispose an individual, often unconsciously, towards certain actions. However, habitus may lead to different actions depending on the nature of the field (Reay, 2004). The field shapes the habitus, but habitus, often in some small way, will shape the field. Power and value in the field is determined by capital and the relative importance of the different types of capital vary within fields, and this impacts on the habitus of the agents within the fields (Grenfell and James, 2004). Reay notes that '...disjunctures between habitus and field occur for Bourdieu when individuals with a well-developed habitus find themselves in different fields or different parts of the same social field' (Reay, 2004, pp.437–8). These resulting disjunctures can, on one hand, generate change and transformation but can also create disquiet, insecurity and uncertainty (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009, p.1105). This becomes a strand in my own research as I consider how my habitus is both influenced by and influences the habitus of the institution I work in, particularly in relation to cultural issues. My autoethnography helps my self-questioning and understanding of the environment in which I operated as I encounter a subfield I am unfamiliar with. The impact of the habitus of the agents within the field of HE and its subfields and how the forms of capital are valued differently in these subfields form part of the discussion and analysis in subsequent chapters.

One of the challenges of working with Bourdieu's concepts is that while he describes his concepts, he does not necessarily define them in a way that provides a common understanding to others. Nash notes that Bourdieu had a '...dislike of definitions which makes a critical approach to his work all the more necessary if anything worthwhile is to be gained' (1999, p.176). Securing definitions for terms such as habitus is a common thread amongst critics (Sullivan, 2002), although some appreciate that Bourdieu's own perceptions of the term develop/change over time (Grenfell and James, 1998; Martin, 2003; Warde, 2004; Bathmaker, 2015). Linked to this is the concern that Bourdieu tried to encompass too much with the concept of habitus so that it becomes 'ambiguous and overloaded' (Nash, 1990, p.446). Another criticism of habitus is the perception that it appears deterministic and suggests that agents have little choice (Jenkins, 1992; Reay, 2004; Adams, 2006). However, Adams (2006, p.515) acknowledges that Bourdieu does 'allow for the possibility of reflexivity'. Bourdieu claimed that such criticism demonstrated an 'inadequate

understanding of his overall theoretical framework' (Rowlands, 2013, p.1277) and was adamant that habitus did not assume determinism and all agents had choice, whether they realised it or not (Reay, 2004).

Applying Bourdieu's theory of practice to higher education

Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus have been applied to the HE sector on many occasions (Grenfell & James, 2004; Reay, 1998; Reay, 2004). Bourdieu published three major works on education: *La Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970) which observed how cultural capital was produced and the role of education in the reproduction of inequality in France; *Homo Academicus* (1988), which analysed the French education system, and *La Noblesse d'Etat* (1989) which focused on how French HE was changing (Grenfell, 2012).

Bourdieu acknowledged that individual universities are positioned within a broader HE field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and they create and possess cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993b). His writings tend to focus on universities rather than other providers of HE. In recent years, some researchers have argued for a broader definition of the field of HE to include all tertiary education (Duke, 2005; Garrod and Macfarlane, 2007; Bathmaker, 2015).

Another issue to consider, when determining the scope of the field is whether it is national or international. While there has always been an element of internationalisation within the HE sector, until around 20 years ago, it was mainly limited to international students attending universities that had significant reputational capital. Now, some English universities have campuses in other countries, most have CAPs throughout the world and some overseas universities have a presence in England. There are also world rankings of universities such as The Times World University Rankings (2021) and QS World University Rankings (2020). Marginson (2008), therefore argues that higher education is a global field, whereby domestic HE is a subfield. In contrast, there are examples of academic fields being defined as small as academic departments (Grenfell and James, 2004; Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012).

There does not appear to be any research undertaken on APs in relation to field. The closest is a study undertaken by Bathmaker who applies the concept of field to examine HE in FE in order to understand and analyse changing practices in English higher education. She notes that the field of HE is changing as a result of 'expansion and diversification' (Bathmaker, 2015, p.61) and that HE in FE struggles to achieve the same status as 'mainstream' higher education. She identifies that '...the rules created for the 'selective' part of the HE field can have perverse effects on other parts of the field, creating barriers rather than bridges for students seeking to participate in HE via alternative routes' (Bathmaker, 2015, p.61). I noted this when working with universities, some of whom created hurdles for students where they were not necessarily needed. For example, one institution The College worked with required a distinction at level-5 HND for entry onto level-6, when a pass should have been sufficient.

Having examined the literature on field and the structure and dynamics of the HE sector (see chapter 3), I have chosen to define the parameters of the field to be the field of English HE. I acknowledge that this could be seen as a subfield of a much larger international field of HE, but I believe it is sufficiently distinct to be considered in its own right. Universities are the dominant subfield of this field with APs of HE considered as a smaller subfield of English HE and, HE in FE, spanning the fields of HE and FE. Had I done this research a decade ago, then it is likely that I would have kept the AP provision of HE as a separate field. However, with the introduction of the Office for Students and other Government interventions in recent years, there is rhetoric, at least, of a level playing field. Additionally, several APs and ex-FE colleges now have university status (such as University of Buckingham, University of Law, Leeds Arts University) which illustrates an overlap of provision in the field. There will inevitably be some overlap between other fields, such as an international institution which has an English presence (like Amity University) or an AP with significant FE provision, but these are limited. My research focuses on my experiences within one organisation within the AP subfield and its position within the larger field of English HE. I acknowledge other options could be considered as valid and this will be considered when evaluating the research methodology and results towards the end of this thesis. The use of field theory will enable me to consider the positions of various agents within the field and subfield and to consider how the AP

sector subfield relates to the established mainstream university sector, 'shining a Bourdieusian light on an area which has previously seen very little exposure to it, and may benefit from this approach' (Moffat, 2018, p.178).

While all types of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – exist within the field of HE, Bourdieu (1989) identified three types of symbolic capital among academics: academic capital; scientific capital; and intellectual capital. Those who have control over academic resources are said to have academic capital, whilst scientific capital refers to the reputation gained through research and scholarly publications. Intellectual capital is often a product of scientific capital and is the ability to influence public opinion. Reputation and prestige are considered to be of great value in academic circles, more so than economic capital in some situations (Becher, 1989). Universities may also compete for certain types of capital which are often interrelated, such as economic capital acquired from research grants which are gained as a result of scientific and intellectual capital (Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012). HE is especially hierarchical in nature due to the disparate distributions of capital, especially economic and symbolic (Naidoo, 2004; Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012). A self-fulfilling prophecy that the rich get richer due to a form of 'accumulative advantage' is evident (Bourdieu, 1986; Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012). Mendoza et al argue that:

'Conversely, departments with less symbolic capital in the form of departmental prestige have less ability to convert that prestige into the financial and material resources needed to support their work. This pragmatically leads to different strategies and subsequent consequences in the choices faculty must make to pursue funding that supports their work...'

(2012, p.578)

Most new entrants into the sector, such as APs and FE institutions, are unlikely to possess any of these three forms of symbolic capital, an exception possibly being The New College of the Humanities, launched by Grayling in 2011/12. Similarly, many universities have significant historical artefacts, buildings and alumni that cannot be replicated by most APs.

This study will consider how possessing little or no social, cultural, and symbolic capital affects how an AP interacts with universities as it seeks to develop a

collaborative academic partnership and how it attempts to address its lack of academic, scientific, and intellectual symbolic capital.

There have been many studies which consider issues relating to habitus and education, so much so that Reay (2004), questions the 'habitual use of habitus in educational research' and Nash (1999) wonders if it's 'all worth the candle?'. Bourdieu contended that the formal education system is structured to legitimate the position of those who possess cultural capital (determined by the dominant hegemony) and to maintain the status quo of a hierarchical social system (Bourdieu, 1977). 'Hence the cultural capital that the schools take for granted acts as a most effective filter in the reproductive processes of a hierarchical society' (Harker, 1984, p.118). This affects many aspects of the education process, including: the impact of a school's/college's institutional habitus on students' aspirations for HE (Reay, David and Ball, 2001; Smyth and Banks, 2011); the types of admission systems and assessments adopted by institutions (e.g. Naidoo, 2004; Devine, 2012); student retention (e.g. Thomas, 2002; Lehmann, 2007), and lifelong learning (e.g. Atkin, 2000). Habitus, often discussed alongside cultural capital, is used to investigate inequalities in education such as: access to HE, international foundation years and widening participation (James, Busher and Suttill, 2015; Jones *et al.*, 2020); race and class (Simon and Ainsworth, 2012; Scandone, 2018); access to educational technology (Czerniewicz and Brown, 2012), and transnational education (Waters and Leung, 2012).

While many such studies are located within the HE sector, none include APs or their students. To date, no research has been undertaken in the UK on the interplay between the habituses of universities and APs as CAPs. Indeed, no research has been identified that considers collaborative academic partnerships from a Bourdieusian perspective nor the institutional habitus of APs more generally. My research is therefore ground-breaking in terms of the application of field, capital, and habitus to the AP sector and CAPs.

Grenfell and James identify four reasons why they consider Bourdieu's theory of practice to be an appropriate model for educational research:

- The relationship between and mutual independents of social constraint and individual agency;

- The focus on culture and ability to work across disciplinary boundaries;
- Reflexivity of Bourdieu's approach;
- Being 'enabled rather than constrained by 'theory''.

(2004, p.515).

This latter point resonates with my own philosophy. The terms 'framework' and 'model' are not often referred to in sociological research, but are inferred by Grenfell and James when they assert that Bourdieu's social theory offers '...a way of understanding some of the most important features of the field of educational research, whilst also providing educational researchers with a rich conceptual apparatus for their practice' (Grenfell and James, 2004, p.507). It is this enabling approach I intend to follow.

A number of academic papers apply Bourdieusian 'principles' to their research almost as an afterthought, as part of the data analysis rather than make a conscious decision to use a Bourdieusian approach prior to data collection (Tooley and Darby, 1998). However, some authors (see Reay, 2004; Devine, 2012; Gale and Lingard, 2015) perceive this to be a misuse of Bourdieu's theories, which, they claim, should underpin a research methodology and inform the nature of the investigation rather than '...overlying research analyses with Bourdieu's concepts' (Reay, 2004, p.432).

Lingard and Christie (2003) list a number of works which cover different areas of educational leadership using Bourdieu's concepts, but none relate to the broader HE sector and movement within it. They note that '(m)ost educational utilization of Bourdieu have been interested in how schools contribute to social reproduction and the production of inequality' (Lingard and Christie, 2003, p.318). The primary intention of my research is to consider my experiences of the production of inequality within the field of HE rather than at organisational level. I shall also reflect on my own relationship with the social environment.

Using field, capital, and habitus as a theoretical construct/methodology

I initially felt uncomfortable that many academic papers citing Bourdieu's concepts rarely critiqued them nor their application. To some extent, I felt there was something

of an 'emperor's new clothes' scenario in place inasmuch as no one would admit to having concerns about them. My initial engagement with the literature indicated that some researchers used Bourdieu's concepts to add perceived weight to their work rather than incorporating them as an integral part of their research. Tooley and Darby's review of the quality of educational research (1998) was particularly damning concluding that '...these thinkers (*Bourdieu, Lyotard and Foucault*) did not have much to contribute to the educational enterprise...' (Tooley and Darby, 1998, p.74). Their review was critical of Reay's application of Bourdieu's concepts, in particular, yet Reay herself criticises '...the contemporary fashion of overlaying research analyses with Bourdieu's concepts, including habitus, rather than making the concepts work in the context of the data and the research settings' (Reay, 2004, p.432). The strength of habitus, in particular, is that it is broad and adaptable enough to cope with the 'complex messiness of the real world' (Reay, 2004, p.438) but Reay warns that there is a danger of applying habitus to whatever the data reveals, regardless of its appropriateness (Reay, 1995, p.357). Jenkins (1992, p.130) describes this as '(t)he ontological mysteries of the habitus'. It is important to me that my research cannot be subjected to this critique.

Nevertheless, there is a strong body of opinion that considers Bourdieu's work is a useful way of theorising changes in society and is, '...quite adequate to describe the academic field in light of academic capitalism'(Mendoza, Kuntz and Berger, 2012, p.559), while Jenkins considers it to be 'good to think with' (Jenkins, 1992, p.11). While these comments are not particularly complimentary, on a pragmatic basis, they suggest that Bourdieu's work is useful as a framework, despite implied limitations. According to Reay (2004, p.439), the concept of habitus is less problematic if considered more fluidly as both method and theory – the model becomes the method. She reminds us that Bourdieu perceived his concepts as a continual work in progress, being constantly reworked. Bourdieu challenged readers to use the concept (of habitus) to interrogate their data rather than apply it retrospectively (Rowlands, 2013). He also perceived that the changing notions of habitus was a positive attribute considering his concepts to be 'open concepts designed to guide empirical work' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.107).

'I blame most of my readers for having considered as theoretical treatises, meant solely to be read or commented upon, works that, like gymnastics

handbooks, were intended for exercise, or even better, for putting into practice....one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality.'

(Bourdieu, 1993a, p.271).

Obembe (2013, p.359) considers that habitus can be useful as both a conceptual and analytical tool for 'understanding the dynamics of individual predispositions and action in their knowledge-sharing choices'. Additionally, Reay (2004) believes it can help the researcher consider issues that might not be addressed in empirical research. This might include: how well adapted the subject (individual or organisation) is to the context they find themselves in; how personal or organisational history shape their responses; or, pertinent to this research, the meaning of non-verbal behaviour and use of language. Moffat adds that the framework is ideal for 'highlighting subtle, hidden and complex issues' (Moffat, 2018, p.178), which will be identified as I continue my research journey.

There is some debate about whether field, capital, and habitus can be considered to constitute a form of research methodology or methodological approach. However, Thomson (2012) notes:

'[H]is approach produced different outcomes, alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world, to those offered by mainstream social science. Field is one part of a trio of major theoretical tools. Together with its stablemates, habitus and capital, it offers an epistemological and methodological approach to historicized and particular understanding of social life. Field was not developed as grand theory, but as a means of translating practical problems into concrete empirical operations.'

(Thomson, 2012, p.79)

Bourdieu described his methodology as having three distinct levels or stages. He uses field as the starting point but illustrates the interaction of capital and habitus within the field under investigation. These are summarised by Grenfell (2012, p.221) as:

1. Analyse the position of the field vis-a-vis the field of power;
2. Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms or specific authority of which field is a site. This position is expressed in terms of capital and its configurations;
3. Analyse the habitus of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a deterministic type of social and economic condition. The actual individual agent within the field is analysed including their background, trajectory, and positioning.

(Adapted from Grenfell, 2012, pp. 221–222)

Grenfell (2012) notes, that in level 3, the focus should be on the analysis of relationships or interactions between individuals as they relate to the field and should not focus on individual idiosyncrasies, unless they influence the interactions.

Therefore, researchers should give greater attention to participants' back stories such as their biographies, and career and personal trajectories. Hence, every piece of research will be as unique as the individuals included in it. Grenfell claims that it is these links between individuals and their habitus, the structure of the field and positions within and in relation to the field under investigation, forms the conceptual model for research.

I shall begin considering levels 1 and 2 in the following chapter on the field of English HE. My qualitative research will consider all three levels but focuses on levels 2 and 3.

Grenfell (2012) identifies four main 'principles' in undertaking such research:

1. '*beware of words*' - Grenfell warns against giving 'Bourdieuian gloss on a more conventional narrative' (Grenfell, 2012, p.226). As noted earlier, this is one of the most common criticisms of the application of Bourdieu's concepts to educational literature;
2. '*deploy the three-stage methodology*' - including 'construction of the research object', 'three-level field analysis' and 'participant objectivation' (Grenfell, 2012, p.227);

3. '*participant objectivation*' - one cannot rely solely on personal awareness or experience as the main form of data collection. Grenfell notes that it is a beginning and is helpful but that the researcher should attempt to 'objectify their own field position and the dispositions and presuppositions that are inherent with that positioning" (Grenfell, 2012, p.227). He advocates the need to work from a reflexive stance;
4. *Focus on the research, not Bourdieu* – this is an interesting statement to make but Grenfell (2012, p.227) implores researchers not to '...make Bourdieu more interesting than the research to which his ideas are being applied'.

I apply the three-stage methodology and therefore I am less likely to fall into the trap of being superficial in my approach. While it is rather daunting to apply well known concepts as a construct for my research, I take some comfort in Nash's conclusion that '...the struggle to work with Bourdieu's concepts...is worthwhile just because to do so forces one to think. Without concepts – the tools of thought – we will not make much progress' (Nash, 1999, p.185).

Bourdieu and Autoethnography

To many, Bourdieu's status as a macro-sociologist appears contrary to an ethnographic or autoethnographic approach. In a number of his writings, Bourdieu made clear his dislike of some methodological approaches, such as phenomenology and evocative autoethnography (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b). However, he acknowledged much of his work was ethnographic in nature (Blommaert, 2005). Wacquant (2004) considers Bourdieu to have made a significant contribution as a major practitioner of ethnography and demonstrates how critical ethnographic studies were to Bourdieu in developing his theories. Blommaert (2005, p.228) explains that 'ethnography to him (*i.e. Bourdieu*) is the epistemological tool to arrive at theory. He does so by repeatedly emphasizing the biographical, experiential ethnographic basis of his own theorizing'. Bourdieu regularly used ethnographic vignettes in his works (see Bourdieu, 1988, 1990) to help develop or illustrate his theories.

Bourdieu never used the term 'autoethnography' and arguably considered autoethnography to be narcissistic and self-indulgent (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Reed-Danahay, 2017). Yet, Reed-Danahay (2017) identifies similarities between what Bourdieu called 'reflexive sociology' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and autoethnography. She notes that Bourdieu

'... used the notion of reflexivity to refer to social science writing that does not privilege the individualism of the author (which he felt was the misguided standard approach of autobiography) but, rather, reflects an awareness of the researcher's positioning in various social fields and social spaces, as well as a broader critique of the ways in which social science constructs its objects.'

(Reed-Danahay, 2017, p.147).

Reed-Danahay (2017) asserts that both *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1988) and *The State Nobility* (1989) are critical autoethnographies rather than 'reflexive sociology'.

I have not identified examples of autoethnographic research which integrate Bourdieu's concepts as a framework for analysis. Some, like Wake (2018) and Hauber-Ozer (2019), refer to one of the concepts, such as capital, within their literature review, but not as a tool to provide a framework for data analysis. The closest example is Moffat (2018) who applies both an autoethnographic approach and Bourdieusian concepts in his PhD thesis, but does not combine them. The first section of his thesis is an autoethnography from which he selects one theme for further investigation. He then uses Bourdieu's concepts to frame his subsequent discussion (Moffat, 2018, p.267). This second part analyses the engineering profession through a Bourdieusian lens is conducted mainly through a literature review due to "an abundance of literature" (Moffat, 2018, pp. 268–9). Moffat refers to his work as a thesis of two parts: "I struggled through what sometimes felt like a second PhD, rather than a second part!" (p. 268). While his autoethnography informs the second part of his thesis, he separates the autoethnographic approach from the application of Bourdieu's concepts.

Yet, arguably, an autoethnographic approach to examining habitus has significant benefits. Bourdieu himself asserts that '...one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical

reality' (Bourdieu, 1993a, p.271). There is no more immersive methodological approach than that of autoethnography where one can have 'dialogues with oneself' (Crossley, 2000, p.138) and literally undertake research '*in the field*' (Thomson, 2012, p.79).

It is this combination of an autoethnographic approach, using the Bourdieusian concepts of field, capital, and habitus as a framework that I adopt for my primary research. This will represent a contribution to knowledge in relation to methodology. Having gained an understanding of field, capital, and habitus, the following chapter focuses on English HE and provides a backdrop to the primary research.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the field of English HE and its components. I provide a historical overview of higher education to identify the development and distinctiveness of the different groupings of institutions and how this has affected the dynamics and interrelationships within the field. Following an overview of the AP sector, I outline the relevant legislation that has helped shape the interactions between APs and universities in relation to CAPs. I also assess the different forms of CAPs relevant to this study. The chapter concludes with background information regarding The College which provides context for the results section.

It has already been acknowledged that there are many approaches to defining the field of HE. Each definition has an impact on what falls within and outside the field and thus impacts our observations of the dynamics operating within it. One might argue that the field of HE is global as both academics and students travel the world to join their institution of choice and research collaborations are often international in nature. Some UK universities have overseas campuses while international institutions have a presence in the UK. If this is so, then the English field of HE is a subset of this much larger field. While I do not disagree with this proposition, the resultant 'field' would be extremely large and complex, and this might hinder analysis of one relatively small element of the field. In addition, the scope of this thesis does not cover how the English field of HE interacts with overseas institutions and partners. Hence a more compact definition is beneficial. Others might argue that universities are a field by themselves and that HE in FE and APs should not be included in this field. However, this is difficult to justify given the constantly shifting field of HE over the centuries, and in particular, the past 100 years. Higher education has always encompassed more than just universities. What is meant by the term 'university' has also shifted over time. Barnett (2000, p.27) notes that '...what counts to be a university continually slides and widens' meaning that if one is to be

consistent across time, then the widest definition of English HE is likely to be most useful.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the field being observed is the field of English HE which includes APs of HE. This thesis does not rehearse research on the concept of what a university is (for further reading in this area, see Delanty, 1998; Marginson, 2007; Barnett, 2011, 2013, 2016) nor, on the impact of policies encouraging mass participation in HE. These are important issues but are not within the remit of this thesis which focuses on the field of HE and my experiences of the relatively under-researched interrelationship between universities and the so-called AP sector.

This chapter, based mainly on secondary research but including some personal observations, sets the scene for the primary research and provides a bridge between theory and research.

A historical overview of English HE

English HE is complex and diverse, both in terms of its structure and offering (Cook, 2014). Although the sector is nearly 1,000 years old, it remained small and elite until relatively recently, with much of the growth taking place in the last 100 years. Williams (2013) outlines the history of English universities, starting with the establishment of Oxford University in 1096 followed by Cambridge in 1209. Both universities were founded by the Catholic Church designed for young men to study theology. The Scottish 'Ancient Universities' followed in the 15th century. All universities in the UK were religious institutions until the Reformation and until 1829, England still only had the two universities. By 1840, two further universities were established – Durham University and the University of London (with University College and Kings College as founding colleges). It was not until 1871 that the Universities Tests Act permitted students reading for lay academic degrees not to have to demonstrate active commitment to a particular faith group (Williams, 2013). At this point, most universities were funded by business, private benefactors, and student fees. Thus, in essence, universities were private providers of HE until 1889

when the British government awarded the first grants to universities which accounted for around 1/3 of university income (Williams, 2013).

By the end of the First World War, there were 10 universities in England. These included most of the original red brick universities, a term coined Peers in 1943 (Peers, 1996). While definitions vary, most agree that the original redbrick universities include Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, and Sheffield which all obtained university status prior to the First World War. They are also often referred to as 'civic universities' as the redbricks had strong connections with their local communities (Whyte, 2015). A second wave of 'civic universities', characterised by their common origins as local university colleges, includes Exeter, Hull, Leicester, Nottingham, Reading and Southampton which were established between 1926 and 1957. These are also often referred to as red brick universities. Despite being established with strong ties to the local community, over time these civic universities transitioned to become more like the established institutions (Cook, 2014), thus evidencing the power of the established institutions to determine the norms of the field and the rules of the game.

Universities were, however, not the only providers of higher education. Teacher training colleges and other technical colleges existed, the former existing since the 1830s (Cook, 2014). However, a hierarchy within the field was already well established with Oxford and Cambridge perceived to have higher status than the red brick universities, which in turn would look down at other providers of HE.

In the 75 years since the end of the second world war, the HE field has grown and developed significantly and expanded the breadth of curriculum offer. Hardly a decade has gone by without some significant change in the field. Following the publication of a White Paper on technical education in 1956, 'colleges of advanced technology' were established to address a perceived lack of technological and scientific training (Ministry of Education, 1956). In 1966, these colleges were expanded and awarded university status, following the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). These became part of what is now identified as 'plate glass' universities established during the 1950s and early 1960s. Seven new universities were also established in the 1960s prior to the Robbins Report (East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Sussex, Warwick, York).

One of the most significant changes to the field of HE was the introduction of the so-called 'binary system' following the publication of the policy document 'A plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges' (Department of Education and Science, 1966). Polytechnics were established to focus on applied learning in sciences and engineering and offered HNC, HNDs and degrees as well as postgraduate awards. They were intended to be equal in status to universities, but different in purpose. However, in practice, polytechnics were seen as inferior to universities due, in part, to their focus on vocational education and lower entrance requirements. Also, polytechnics did not have degree awarding powers – all degrees were validated by the Council for National Academic Awards. While there were many benefits of a polytechnic education, over time, polytechnics expanded to include humanities, social sciences, creative disciplines and business, evidence of so-called 'academic drift' (Pratt and Burgess, 1974). To some extent, they opened HE to female and more mature students (Williams, 2013), in effect taking on the original role of the red-brick civic universities. However, the 'polys', to a large extent, continued to be seen as a lower tier of the HE system. Following the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), the polytechnics obtained university status and were able to award their own degrees. These newly formed universities were still not perceived as equivalent to more established universities due, in part, to their lack of cultural and symbolic capital. 'Like it or not, universities are typically differentiated in terms of prestige, with antiquity and research reputation being its primary determinants' (Brennan, 1999, p.7).

There remained some organisations outside of the formal university sector, including colleges of HE and specialist institutions such as art colleges, agricultural colleges, and the few remaining teacher-training colleges. These institutions argued that a binary system of HE continued which kept colleges of HE in the 'second division' (Cook, 2014, p.41). One can still see the historical legacy of English HE which is characterised by multiple layers of hierarchy. Each new layer or strata tends to possess less power or capital than the established universities and it seems there is always a lower layer seeking entry to the field. In the 1980s, this was the colleges of HE but as most either merged with other institutions or obtained university status, independent providers of higher education and HE in FE now hold the lowest positions in the hierarchy. Some four of the five universities which The College

worked with were originally colleges of HE. The fifth had been a polytechnic institution.

It is evident that the historical development of HE in England is an important factor in the dynamics of the field and how the dominant habitus was established. It identifies that even within the university subfield, different strata exist and there have always been providers of HE which have struggled to gain university status. The field has become more complex as independent providers have become universities, spanning the divide between universities and APs. And yet, these new universities are generally not seen as equivalent to more established institutions. In my role as principal at The College, I recall conversations with two Vice Chancellors of private universities who acknowledged that they felt they had to maintain a higher external profile and work harder to achieve excellent metrics in order to be accepted into the community of university Vice Chancellors. Other institutions exist that have been awarded DAPs but do not have university status. Examples include Norland College and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Additionally, some FE colleges also have DAPs, the Newcastle College Group being the first college to obtain these in 2006.

Another way to segment the HE field is to consider 'mission groups'. A mission group is a collection of universities usually with similar origins, ethos and ambitions (Scott, 2013). Typically, they reflect the historical development of the university sector in England, but there are some nuanced differences. A university chooses to join a group but can only do so if approved by other members of the group. Hence, mission groups may be more indicative of the culture of the organisations within them. The main groupings are: The Russell Group; MillionPlus Group; University Alliance; and, Independent HE (IHE).

The Russell Group currently consists of 24 (as of June 2021) '...world-class, research-intensive universities' (Russell Group, no date). There is a significant emphasis on the provenance of the constituent institutions and their focus on research, with these 24 institutions producing more than two-thirds of UK universities' world-leading research. The Russell Group focuses on maintaining the distinctiveness and competitive advantage of its members '...to help ensure that our

universities have the optimum conditions in which to flourish...'. It makes no comment about its obligations to higher education more generally.

The MillionPlus Group claims it is 'the Association for Modern Universities in the UK, and the voice of 21st century higher education' (MillionPlus, no date). Its 23 members (as of June 2021) include many of 'post-92' big city universities and its title derived from the fact they originally accounted for over a million students between them. However, some smaller, more recently established universities are also members, such as Bath Spa University, Leeds Trinity University, and University of the Highlands and Islands. The group's values are broader in scope than those of the Russell Group and appear to aim to benefit the wider HE sector. The University Alliance also comprises of mainly post-92 institutions. Its 12 members include large post-92 institutions such as Leeds Beckett, Birmingham City and Coventry Universities. It positions itself as 'the voice of professional and technical universities working at the heart of their communities' (University Alliance, no date) and its principles are similar to those of the MillionPlus group.

Independent HE (IHE) has around 50 members (as of June 2021), all of whom are independent providers of HE. It claims to work '...to promote, support and enhance the independent tertiary education sector' (*Independent Higher Education*, no date). Members include the Royal Academy of Dance, Sotheby's Institute of Art and UCFB. No independent university is a member of this group, which might suggest that independent universities wish to align with the established university sector. The College became a member of IHE while the research was being conducted.

The aims of these four membership organisations reflect some of the different motivations of HEIs and give an indication as to what their public aspirations are. There is also a clear hierarchy of groups, with the Russell Group wielding more power and influence than the others.

The HE sector also has three formal representative bodies – Universities UK (UUK), Association of Colleges (AoC), and GuildHE – which could also form the basis of segmentation of the sector. These are not mission groups – GuildHE, for example, overlaps the university and AP sectors - but they represent the voice of their constituents to inform and influence policy change. UUK asserts itself as the 'collective voice of 139 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland' (*Universities UK*, no date). Membership of the AoC consists of further education, sixth form, tertiary, and specialist colleges in the UK, although some universities are affiliate subscribers. Some HE in FE provision falls within the remit of this group. GuildHE has a broad membership which includes universities, university colleges, further education establishments, and specialist institutions from both not for profit and for profit sectors (GuildHE, no date). It positions itself as 'the advocate of choice for smaller and specialist higher education institutions' and consists of 53 members (as of June 2021). These include over 15 universities, (such as Bath Spa, Harper Adams, and Falmouth), university colleges and FE colleges (with HE provision) as well as specialist institutions such as RADA, Moorlands College and The London Institute of Banking and Finance. To qualify for membership for GuildHE, institutions must deliver a significant proportion of level-6 or postgraduate provision. As The College discovered, those that only teach to level-5 (HND) are not eligible for membership. The varied membership of GuildHE, provides evidence that the field of HE in England is highly segmented. Also, it is apparent that some of the smaller universities prefer to be members of GuildHE rather than UUK. It is possible that they choose to do so to have more influence and share of voice in this smaller group than in UUK. There is no formal representative body solely for private or independent providers of HE.

It is evident that any segmentation used to determine subfields and groupings within these subfields may become blurred and contestable to some degree. The largest and most powerful subfield which determines the dominant habitus and culture of the field is, not surprisingly, the university subfield. Universities have always determined the rules of the game and continue to do so. Not all universities are equal, and there is a clear hierarchy among them. Within this dominant subfield, I have chosen to use the mission groups as the basis of further subgroups as these are self-selecting. Hence, the main subgroups are The Russell Group and MillionPlus/University Alliance (which share similar values). Another subfield is that of APs, mainly represented by IHE. This subfield overlaps into the university subfield as some APs have become universities and others are trying to do so. However, in many cases, they still share some of the habitus and capital with their previous subfield. There is also a hierarchy within the independent subfield, with some specialist institutions holding a much higher status than others. Overall, the field of English HE is

extremely diverse and complex (Barnett, 2000, p.5) as there are other fields that overlap with it such as HE in FE, international universities with English campuses, and businesses with an HE function such as The Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology which offers a BEng (Hons) Engineering. Additionally, some universities and APs offer level-3 qualifications (such as foundation years and professional awards), which are technically FE.

As previously noted, there has been constant movement within the field and competition between universities and other institutions. Indeed, the scale of competition has increased as institutions have been encouraged to compete against each other for students and funding in quasi-markets designed and operated by the state (Barnett, 2003, p.77). However, there has been little significant change in the hierarchy, which appears quite resistant to change. Newer organisations rarely challenge the power of dominate organisations:

‘When change does occur, it is often the result of forces from outside the field – in the form of, say, new technology, demographic change or invasion from another nation or field. A redefinition of the boundaries can also open up the field to important changes in the field; and the same can happen if some firm is able to mobilize the state for its purposes.’

(Swedberg, 2011, p.74).

While Swedberg is referring to businesses rather than HEIs, newer entrants into the field of English HE have significantly less power than the established universities. However, with the intervention of the state, through legislation, to create a more ‘level playing field’, APs hoped it might be possible for private providers gain some traction within the HE field.

The English HE landscape

In May 2016, the White Paper ‘Success as a Knowledge Economy’ (2016) was published, heralding the way for HERA (2017). The term ‘level playing field’ is mentioned ten times throughout the White Paper and it signalled that the Government sought to encourage

‘...a globally competitive market that supports diversity, where anyone who demonstrates they have the potential to offer excellent teaching and clears our high quality bar can compete on a level playing field.’

(Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2016, p.8)

This would be achieved with a single route to entry, risk-based approach to regulation, and by reducing unnecessary barriers to entry (p.9). It was also stated that the OfS would be able to designate ‘...a validation service if incumbents do not do more to promote competition through their own validation arrangements’ (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2016, p.21). This is picked up later in the chapter.

HERA was enacted on 27 April 2017 and was the first major regulatory reform to the HE sector in 25 years (Universities UK, 2017). The main purposes were to create a new regulatory framework for higher education, increase competition and encourage new entrants to the sector in order to increase student choice and ensure students receive value for money. It also sought to strengthen the research sector through the establishment of United Kingdom Research and Innovation. Part 1 of the Act provided for the establishment of the OfS in England which absorbed the previous responsibilities of HEFCE and Office for Fair Access but has a significantly wider remit as a market regulator and protector of student interests. Sir Michael Barber stated that its role

‘...is to unleash greatness by creating the conditions in which the interests of students, short, medium and long term, are consistently prioritised and in which a diversity of institutions can thrive.’

(Office for Students, 2018c, p.10)

The stated intentions of the OfS documentation (2018c) are about creating more choice for students, increasing competition, maintaining quality of provision, and ensuring protection for students. The OfS has powers to grant and revoke degree-awarding powers and award or rescind the title of university. As the single regulator of HE in England, it has significant control over both new entrants and existing players in the field of higher education and of determining the boundaries of the field.

A new risk-based regulatory framework was created which included a single register for all English HE providers. I attended the official launch of the OfS at the QEII Centre in London on behalf of The College on 28th February 2018 and the rhetoric focused on giving students choice of high-quality provision and the introduction of new forms of higher education establishments. However, once the application process for registration was made available (Office for Students, 2018b), some APs considered it too onerous and not all providers who had initially intended to register have done so. Unlike larger institutions, administration and governance are often undertaken by a small number of people with other substantial roles, such as teaching. Some have recruited consultants to help them through the registration process. The cost of registration is also a barrier for some institutions. Registered institutions are also expected to subscribe to HESA, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (Campbell, 2020).

Thus, while the concept of one single register of HE providers suggests a level playing field, in practice there now exists a divide between those listed on the register and those who are not registered, for whatever reason. There remains an unknown group of APs operating below the radar as they are not responsible to the OfS. nor are they subject to quality checks.

The English HE sector is large, accounting for nearly 2.2m students across all institutions, in 2019/20 (HESA, no date b). As Figure 1 indicates, in 2018/19 (the last date when APs were listed separately from HE providers) 500,935 students were enrolled onto postgraduate courses, with 1.42m on undergraduate degree programmes and just under 208,000 on other undergraduate programmes. The latter category includes level 4 and 5 qualifications such as HNC, HND, foundation degrees and short credit-bearing programmes.

Figure 1: HE student enrolments at HE, FE, and designated courses at APs in England, by level of study and HE provider type across academic years 2014-15 to 2018-19

Column1	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	% Change 2014/5-2018/9
POSTGRADUATE						
HE providers	442575	438645	457470	468060	482000	8.9
FE providers	2960	2585	2770	2735	2560	-13.5
Alternative providers (designated courses)	20	0	6805	15055	16375	81775.0
total postgraduate	445555	441230	467045	485850	500935	12.4
FIRST DEGREE						
HE providers	1251385	1286845	1315745	1336470	1362265	8.9
FE providers	22060	21685	22310	22330	19630	-11.0
Alternative providers (designated courses)	23920	31685	32685	35065	37360	56.2
total first degree	1297365	1340215	1370740	1393865	1419255	9.4
OTHER UNDERGRADUATE						
HE providers	150040	134455	118770	107410	98265	-34.5
FE providers	102875	100790	100920	98245	92000	-10.6
Alternative providers (designated courses)	25920	21070	19185	20850	17565	-32.2
total other undergraduate	278835	256315	238875	226505	207830	-25.5
ALL STUDENTS						
HE providers	1844000	1859945	1891985	1911940	1942530	5.3
FE providers	127895	125060	126000	123310	114190	-10.7
Alternative providers (designated courses)	49860	52755	58675	70970	71300	43.0
TOTAL	2021755	2037760	2076660	2106220	2128020	5.3

Source: adapted from HESA (no date b) in October 2020

(Please note rounding errors in HESA original data)

This is the last dataset that separated APs from other HE providers, following the establishment of the OfS and the single register of HE providers. More recent figures incorporating 2019/20 data no longer separate APs from other HE providers (HESA, no date b). This could be seen as a step forward inasmuch as it implies that APs are now considered to be mainstream providers of HE. It should be noted that only those students studying at APs on designated courses (programmes where the students are registered with the AP rather than with the validating institution or other) are included in the AP totals. Students on franchise provision delivered by the AP will be recorded as belonging to the franchise provider. Hence, it understates how many students are being taught by APs. Nevertheless, this data provides an indication as to the size of the university, AP, and HE in FE sectors.

The data clearly demonstrates that over 91% of all HE students are registered with universities (Figure 2). APs market share is low, and it is difficult for them to grow significantly as, unlike universities, they are still subject to a student number control which caps the number of students eligible for student loans that they can recruit. Additionally, students on designated programmes can only claim student fee loans for £6,250 – hence, most APs set their fees at £6,250. APs are concentrated in certain profitable segments such as business law and creative industries and tend to be located in major cities where larger student cohorts can be recruited, so some competition between universities and APs does exist in pockets.

Despite the relatively small size of the AP sector, some significant market trends are evident. At postgraduate level, APs have grown exponentially over the five-year period from just 20 students to 16,375 and commanded 3.3% of the postgraduate market in 2018/19 (more if franchise provision is included). At undergraduate level, student numbers have increased by over 56% (Figure 1). Other undergraduate provision has dropped in all three sectors, although FE has managed to increase its share of a declining market (Figure 2). In part, it is likely that other undergraduate provision has taken a hit from degree apprenticeship offerings and lowering of entry requirements for degree provision, including integrated foundation years.

Figure 2: Proportion of HE student enrolment at HE, FE, and designated courses at alternative providers in England by level of study and HE provider type

Column1	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	% Change 2014/5-2018/9
POSTGRADUATE						
HE providers	99.33	99.41	97.95	96.34	96.22	-3.13
FE providers	0.66	0.59	0.59	0.56	0.51	-23.07
Alternative providers (designated courses)	0.00	0.00	1.46	3.10	3.27	72723.45
total postgraduate	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
FIRST DEGREE						
HE providers	96.46	96.02	95.99	95.88	95.98	-0.49
FE providers	1.70	1.62	1.63	1.60	1.38	-18.66
Alternative providers (designated courses)	1.84	2.36	2.38	2.52	2.63	42.77
total first degree	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
OTHER UNDERGRADUATE						
HE providers	53.81	52.46	49.72	47.42	47.28	-12.13
FE providers	36.89	39.32	42.25	43.37	44.27	19.98
Alternative providers (designated courses)	9.30	8.22	8.03	9.21	8.45	-9.08
total other undergraduate	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	
ALL STUDENTS						
HE providers	91.21	91.27	91.11	90.78	91.28	0.08
FE providers	6.33	6.14	6.07	5.85	5.37	-15.17
Alternative providers (designated courses)	2.47	2.59	2.83	3.37	3.35	35.86
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	

Source: adapted from HESA (no date b) in October 2020

The shape of the AP sector in England

With the introduction of the single register of HE providers, the term ‘alternative provider’ should be deemed redundant. However, it is still used by government. HESA defines APs as ‘Higher Education providers who do not receive recurrent funding from Office for Students (previously HEFCE) or other public body and who are not further education colleges’ (HESA, no date a). However, Lee (2014) acknowledges the difficulty of defining alternative provision due to ‘(t)he evolving characteristics of the HE sector itself and the diversity of provision that this evolution promotes, precludes achievement of a single definition’ (Lee, 2014, p.20). He notes that the term ‘alternative provider’ could describe universities (which are not included in HESA’s definition), charities and other not-for-profit entities as well as for-profit businesses with wide ranging missions and purpose. The AP sector comprises of an eclectic mix of institutions, from highly specialised provision, including, for example, religious institutions, music colleges and specialist medical colleges to larger business colleges and universities (like Arden, BPP and Buckingham and the University of Law). While some institutions have obtained DAPs others have been in the press for less notable achievements (e.g. Greenwich School of Management which ceased trading in 2019). A study produced by Fielden for UUK in 2010 identified that

‘(t)he distinction between for-profit and not-for-profit is becoming less relevant in the UK since most not-for-profit higher education institutions now operate in a business-like manner and seek to generate surpluses from many of their activities. A key distinction is how these surpluses are distributed – for private or public good.’

(Universities UK, 2010, p.24).

In 2011, Middlehurst and Fielden (2011) expressed concern that ‘policy makers are largely in the dark at present, about the size and shape of the private sector’ (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011, p.34). In 2014, it was estimated that there were 732 APs in the UK with between 245,000 and 295,000 HE students studying at APs (IFF Research, 2016) of which 50,000 were in receipt of student fee loans. The IFF report was commissioned by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills as, at that time, there was no clear understanding of the size of the sector. In many ways, this

has not changed. In 2017, only 112 institutions were identified as ‘alternative providers’ in a report to the House of Commons (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018). Fielden and Middlehurst (2017) note that it would be a challenge for the OfS to capture all APs in its registration and monitoring system and estimated that ‘as many as 553 providers will be ‘outside the system’ in 2018/19’ (Fielden and Middlehurst, 2017, p.47). Some 420 providers of HE were registered with the OfS as of June 2021 (2021b) of which around 120 APs (not including universities) were identified by a manual count. However, no other register exists that records AP providers not on the OfS register. Anecdotal evidence from APs suggests that there has also been a significant delay in processing applications due to the pandemic with one AP claiming they have waited more than two years for a response. Having initially closed applications in April 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the OfS reopened the portal for new registrations from 16 December 2020 (Office for Students, 2020b), only to advise in in January 2021 that

‘Due to the current unprecedented circumstances related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the need to prioritise **OfS** resources, we are not currently accepting any **new registration** applications, and therefore not issuing any **new** access keys for the **registration** portal...The OfS is in the process of contacting all providers individually where an application has already been submitted’.

(Office for Students, 2021a)

(Bold emphasis as in original text)

This has led to a cohort of APs waiting to register or receive notification of the success of their submissions with significant implications for these organisations as it means they cannot recruit students onto designated programmes.

Degree awarding powers and university status

One intention of HERA was for the sector to ‘...attract new high quality entrants to the market, stimulate competition, give students more choice and grow quality provision’ (Department for Education, 2017, p.6), yet there has been very little movement into the sector as a result. To date, only one new provider – The London

Interdisciplinary School - has entered the sector with DAPs. It is part-owned by Government and became the first institution since the 1960s to launch with full DAPs. It opens to students in September 2021. A few private providers, including the Dyson Institute have also achieved DAPs but these are the exception rather than the rule. Institutions that have gained DAPs or are going through the process note that it is a (rightly) rigorous and time-consuming exercise.

Until 2017, organisations seeking DAPs had to demonstrate at least a four-year track record of delivering HE provision at level-6 or above and have the majority of HE students enrolled on a level-6 programme in order to apply (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). BIS note that

‘Evidence of delivery of HE programmes equivalent to level-6 will typically be demonstrated via a validating/franchising agreement with a degree awarding body for the delivery of a full degree programme(s).’

(Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015, p.8)

Hence, not only did the institution have to find and rely on an existing provider with DAPs to approve their programmes, but most students had to be enrolled on a programme with level-6 outcomes. This immediately disadvantaged organisations offering top-up awards for HND and similar qualifications as students enrolled on level-5 programmes did not count towards the level-6 requirement. It is not difficult to calculate that for every student enrolled on a level-6 top-up, there are at least two on levels 4 and 5. Thus, achieving the 50+% benchmark for most APs was not possible unless they could attract new entrants at level-6. Following submission of the application, the scrutiny process would take 12-18 months before being advised of the outcome. APs and FE colleges could only be granted DAPs on a 6-year renewable basis (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015).

Since 1st April 2018 and the establishment of the OfS, organisations can choose to apply for New DAPs or Full DAPs. An existing provider with three or more years’ experience of delivering higher education can apply for Full DAPs for foundation degrees only, awards up to and including bachelors’ degrees or, all taught awards and research awards. The application can be for specific subject areas or across all subjects (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). other conditions required to apply for Full DAPs include that the organisation is registered with the

OfS, satisfies all its ongoing conditions of registration and 'normally' has more than 50% of its higher education students on courses with level-6 outcomes or above (if applying for bachelor's degrees). Again, this means that institutions which mainly deliver levels 4 and 5 qualifications are still at a disadvantage when it comes to applying for DAPs. If the application is successful, the organisation will obtain full authorisation for three years initially and, following a subsequent review, indefinitely.

If a provider has less than three years history of delivering HE, they can apply for New DAPs. Essentially, this is an extended version of Full DAPs where the organisation would seek a 3-year New DAPs authorisation, followed by a review which would lead to another 3-year DAPs before achieving indefinite DAPs after another review. Again, the intention of the institution must be to register more than 50% of their HE students on level-6 awards. For both routes, there is no indication about the timescale for achieving DAPs. In theory, the opportunity to apply for New DAP is a major step forward for APs unable to find a CAP. However, it would be difficult for an AP to meet the requirements for DAPs without having had experience of at least one CAP. For more details about what is required to apply for DAPs, please refer to *Regulatory advice 12: How to apply for degree awarding powers* (Office for Students, 2018a). Again, similar to OfS registration applications, the OfS has not accepted any new applications for DAPs since 15 May 2020. The website states that they would review the situation in early 2021, but as of June 2021, applications remain closed (Office for Students, 2020a).

The OfS (2018c) also outlines eligibility criteria for applying for university college or university title from 1 April 2019. To register for university college status, an institution must be registered with the OfS, meet all the conditions of registration, and have indefinite DAPs or research awards. For university status, the institution must also have more than 55% of students registered on HE programmes of which 50% or more must be on programmes at level-6 or above. FE colleges cannot apply for university or university college status. Under HERA, the OfS also has powers to revoke university and university college titles (Office for Students, 2019).

Franchise and Validation agreements

For those organisations that wish to deliver degree programmes but do not have DAPs, there are two main options: franchise or validation. Both options require them to find a partner with DAPs to either validate their provision or deliver a franchised award.

A franchise or subcontractual arrangement is where the lead provider (in this instance, a university) enters into an agreement with another provider (the franchisee) to deliver a course on behalf of the lead provider (the franchisor) (HESA, 2019). The programme content, delivery and assessment arrangements are determined by the franchisor who also holds responsibility for the quality assurance. Usually, students will be registered with the franchisor and apply for funding as a student of the franchisor. The franchisor also receives the tuition fee loan payment and allocates an agreed amount to the franchisee for delivering the programme. In most cases, the franchise provision mirrors that delivered at the franchisor's institution. Occasionally, the programme is modified to provide different routes or less option choice for students studying at the franchisee premises. This may be due to lack of resources or cultural differences. Student retention, progression, and attainment data as well as National Student Survey (NSS) and employability statistics become part of the dataset for the franchisor and can affect the league table position of the university. Hence, the university has an interest in ensuring that the franchisee meets performance expectations. The franchisee does not need to be registered with the OfS to deliver a franchise programme. The level of involvement in the delivery of the programme by the franchising organisation can vary – from none to running some sessions or even whole modules for students. Usually the split of fees reflects this. Franchise arrangements may be for a full award or a partial element of a programme, for example, a foundation year or level-6 top-up.

Validated provision allows an institution which does not have DAPs to design their own course (or significantly adapt an existing university programme) which is then validated by the institution with DAPs (HESA, 2019). This means that the awarding institution confirms that programme curriculum is appropriate for the relevant level and that the delivery and relevant systems processes are of an appropriate quality

and standard to lead to an award from the degree awarding institution. The delivering institution may maintain some level of intellectual property for the programme and have its own regulations for progression, attainment, and degree classification, although many accept those of the validating institution. Students are registered with the teaching institution rather than the university. Hence the institution must be registered with the OfS for students to access loans.

The terms validated and franchise are often used interchangeably. In particular, individuals within institutions may use terms inappropriately and I regularly had to clarify what each party's view of the provision was. Skipp and Hopwood's (2017) study of validation and franchise processes in the AP sector also noted that defining validation and franchise agreements was more complex than official descriptions suggested. At the start of any validation or franchise agreement, a signed memorandum of agreement (MOA) is usually required which identifies each party's responsibilities for the management and operation of the programme.

The market for validated and franchise provision is significant. In 2017, Skipp and Hopwood (2017) determined that there were around 600 HE providers that offered franchise or validated courses from another institution and 140 institutions with DAPs in England which could validate or franchise HE programmes. Yet, their research also identified that finding a partner for CAPs was particularly problematic. This was attributed to there being no 'singular or transparent process to find a partner' (Skipp and Hopwood, 2017, p.8). They identified the following problems that APs found during this part of the process:

- identification – it was difficult to know which degree awarding bodies (DABs) offered partnerships and their preferred models;
- finding contacts – it was hard to know who to approach about partnerships. Most providers had found DAB partners through existing contacts or via word of mouth;
- comparing offers – it was hard to understand what different DABs offered, their restrictions and costs;
- lack of clarity of requirements - of the process, stages to go through to secure a validation or franchise agreement, and of the evidence required;

- perceived aversion of DABs to risk and/or competition and supporting market entry to new providers and/or methods of HE delivery.

(Skipp and Hopwood, 2017, p.9)

Once the partnership was in place, Skipp and Hopwood also identified several concerns relating to on-going provision. This included the relative stability and longevity of validation and franchise arrangements, and the risks of termination of the contract impacting on the organisation's ability to plan. Additionally, they observed that the level of support, guidance and service provided by the DAB varied significantly between institutions, from 'rubber stamping' to providing CPD to the partnership staff and supporting the institution to acquire DAPs.

The difficulties in finding an appropriate partner who may, in the future, become a competitor have been acknowledged. Universities (and other institutions with DAPs) are both gatekeeper and supplier. Why would an established institution with DAPs be prepared to collaborate with an independent HE organisation to support them to become a potential competitor in the future? And, if they did, given the reputation of the university, they may be very selective in who they chose and what constraints they enforce, forcing the newer HEI to jump through hoops and adhere to the traditions of the established HEI rather than finding new innovative ways to design and manage programmes. In his speech to UUK on 9th September 2015, Jo Johnson, Minister for Universities and Science, summarised this as

'...the requirement for new providers to seek out a suitable validating body from amongst the pool of incumbents is quite frankly anti-competitive. It's akin to Byron Burger having to ask permission of McDonald's to open up a new restaurant.

It stifles competition, innovation and student choice...'

(Johnson, 2015)

In recognition of this, the OfS articulated that it would assess the current validation process to

'...identify any unnecessary barriers for providers seeking a validation partner, or any areas of current practice that are not in the interests of students.

Where it is possible to intervene to remove or mitigate such barriers, and to ensure that students are protected, the OfS will take action at a sector-wide level. This might include increasing transparency of the operation of validation system or setting out exemplar validation arrangements to help informed negotiation between prospective validators and providers that seek validation...'

(Office for Students, 2018c, p.63)

The OfS also note that it is prepared to use its powers to enter into commissioning arrangements or directly validate agreements with registered HE providers (Office for Students, 2018c), if existing DABs are not prepared to enter into validation arrangements. However, the OfS will not force providers into entering such an arrangement. To date, there is no evidence that the OfS has used its powers in these ways. As early as 2016, the Open University (OU) expressed interest in taking on this role of 'validator of last resort', if necessary (Havergal, 2016). Subsequently, the Open University Validation Partnership (OUVP) has positioned itself as a validating body, with over 40 members of staff. It currently validates around 350 programmes for 42 institutions, the majority of which are APs (The Open University, 2021). Although I found the OUVP to be extremely efficient, the MD of The College did not see the OU to be a prestigious university and hence we did not pursue partnership discussions with the Open University.

This review of the field of English HE has identified how, over time, the field has developed into a complex battleground which has always engaged with some form of alternative provision and had exhibited power inequalities. The introduction of a single register of HE providers demonstrates the Government's intention to level the playing field and yet the prevailing dynamics of the field remain strong. While an AP or new entrant into the field can apply for DAPs or university status, the floodgates have not opened and franchise and validated provision remains attractive to many APs, at least in the short term. This research which follows my experience of entering into a collaborative arrangement with DABs occurs just as the HERA legislation was being introduced.

The College

The College was established as a privately-funded independent provider of HE some 20 years ago, originally operating from one floor of an office block in Essex. Initially, it offered a limited portfolio of courses comprising of two Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) qualifications and some postgraduate diplomas in business-related subjects. The MD took over in 2007 with no previous experience of working in education. He soon began to expand the original campus and opened another suite of classrooms nearby in 2009. By this time, The College had expanded its offer to include Association of Business Executives (ABE) and Association of Business Practitioners programmes. Most of the students on ABE and postgraduate diplomas were international students. Student numbers grew relatively slowly during this time and all students were self-funding, which limited the potential size of The College.

In 2012, The College was granted course designation for BTEC qualification which enabled students to receive tuition and maintenance loans from the Student Loans Company (SLC). The College also opened two further 'campuses' in leased property in west and north-west London in 2012/13. Consequently, there was a rapid increase in student numbers between 2013 and 2014 from just over 500 to more than 1500. Some 84% of the students were registered as Home/EU with the remaining 14% being international, mainly from India and Pakistan. More than three-quarters of the cohort were over 24 years old. Over half the students were enrolled on the HND in Business, with nearly 400 studying Travel & Tourism and around 200 on Computing awards. ACCA awards accounted for 150 students while only 17 students were studying level-7 qualifications. The College had made some enquiries about developing CAPs. However, it had not been able to achieve a formal partnership despite negotiations with several UK universities.

The MD wanted The College to grow further and, given the constraints of student number control for courses with access to student loan facilities, The College initiated an arrangement with the local FE college to provide AAT training for college students. The FE college had struggled to attract students onto HE programmes so this partnership was seen to be of benefit to both parties. Each week, students would travel from the FE college to The College to study for AAT exams. In 2014, an

arrangement was put in place which permitted The College to teach HND students using the FE college's student number control (SNC) on a sub-contractor basis. This was unique at the time but received approval from HEFCE and the Students Loan Company. These students were taught on The College's premises by The College's staff, although they were the FE college's students in terms of funding arrangements. The College experienced a second period of significant growth both in terms of student numbers and income. This ended abruptly though when The College's Tier 4 sponsorship license was revoked by the Home Office early in June 2015. While The College was permitted to reapply within 6 months, it was not felt that this would be appropriate as it had been a testing time for the AP sector. In total, nearly 800 Tier 4 licences were revoked between 2010 and 2014, and included London Metropolitan University (www.gov.uk, 2015).

In 2015, a board of advisors was established to oversee the development of a new strategic plan which was never fully completed. This new board comprised external experts and directors of The College and was chaired by a retired vice-chancellor. When I joined in 2016, The College was well-established in the AP sector and its new governance structure was considered to be best practice within the sector.

Early in 2017, The College opened a building in Central London to provide additional space and prepare for a university partnership. The site gained significant interest from several universities seeking a London presence for high-profile postgraduate provision. By Summer 2017, some 800 students were registered as students of The College (mostly HND students) with a further 1,800 registered at the FE college under its sub-contracted arrangement. This had enabled The College to grow at a much faster rate than most other APs and more than mitigated for the loss of international students.

In late-Summer 2017, The College entered into partnership with a university on a franchise basis, offering BA (hons) top-up awards in business management, and travel and tourism, attracting around 100 students in its first intake. Most tutors remained on hourly-paid contracts with full-time staff holding course leadership or management roles. The remaining chapters of this thesis focus on my experience as The College attempts to secure a collaborate academic partnership over a 19-month

period from when I joined the institution up until the enrolment of the first intake of level-6 BA students.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for my choice of research method. Following a discussion regarding my ontological and epistemological positions, I introduce autoethnography and outline different approaches to, and types of, autoethnography. I then explain my data collection methods and how I found my autoethnographic writing style. There are a number of approaches used to analyse and evaluate autoethnographic data and I provide a rationale for how I chose to analyse my data. This study is extremely personal as it focuses on my own experiences and reflections. Writing autoethnography also brings with it some ethical concerns, in particular, in relation to participant authorisation and potential harm to self. The final section of this chapter considers ethical issues in significant depth.

Ontological and epistemological underpinning

As an engineering graduate and marketing researcher by profession, I instinctively prefer numerical data, trends and 'results' to an interpretivist qualitative position. Nevertheless, much of my research has been undertaken on a pragmatic basis and it could be argued that this study has also been a pragmatic choice, given that it arose from the opportunity of being offered a new job. I was aware of my 'unique access point' (Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019); privileged to be in a position where I could access information about collaborative academic partnerships which would not be available to most researchers. Few people have moved from the publicly-funded university sector to the AP sector and I wanted to capture my experience, learning, and reflections in relation to developing collaborative academic partnerships. Hence, I required a method that would enable me to be both researcher and participant. Only an autoethnographic method would achieve this (Wall, 2006; Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019). Had I remained in my previous role as an AD in a university, I would never have considered undertaking this research, nor have had the opportunity to do so.

A key assumption which underpins autoethnography is that reality is multifaceted (Peterson, 2015) and the researcher as participant in the research is in the best position to write about the experience being researched, albeit aware that others may perceive events differently (Hayano, 1979). Autoethnography, like ethnography, has been aligned with both constructivism-interpretivism and critical ideological paradigms (McIlveen, 2008), the former often leading to a phenomenological approach and the latter to a postmodernist epistemology. Many autoethnographers (Wall, 2006; Vickers, 2007; Maydell, 2010; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Marasco, 2015) consider autoethnography to have emerged from postmodern philosophy which questions the dominance of traditional science, and asserts that there is no one correct interpretation of knowledge and multiple viewpoints are therefore acknowledged. However, as I shall discuss later, the style of this autoethnography is more aligned to analytic autoethnography, related to a constructivist-interpretivist approach which assumes reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 2005). It seeks to understand the world of the participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) and relies on participants' views of the situation being studied, acknowledging and embracing subjectivity (Cresswell, 2013). In this instance, the main participant is me.

Autoethnography enables me to reflect upon and evaluate my position as principal at The College, positioning me as both researcher and subject within the study (Coffey, 2002; Lapadat, 2017), and drawing on my unique vantage point to make a contribution to research in this field (Wall, 2016). My story also gives voice to the experience of APs of higher education that often feel powerless when seeking collaborative academic partnerships with established universities.

Autoethnography

As late as 2008, Wall describes autoethnography as 'an intriguing and promising method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding' (2008, p.38), suggesting that it was still considered an emergent research methodology. Muncey (2010) identified that between 1990 and 2002, around 5-20 new journal articles using autoethnography were published each year rising to around 35 from 2003-2009. This demonstrates an

increasing interest in researchers from across disciplines and professional practice (Denshire, 2015; Wall, 2016). Yet, autoethnography is still considered to be an 'avant-garde method of qualitative inquiry...' (Wall, 2016, p.1).

Autoethnography originates from ethnography, a methodology initially employed to study a group of people or culture separate from the researcher, but where the researcher spends extended periods of time with the group to uncover various layers of culture and subculture. The main difference between ethnography and autoethnography is that in ethnography, the writer is the 'objective outsider' (Reed-Danahay, 1997) while, in autoethnography, the writer is no longer an outsider and acknowledges the subjectivity of their writing. Peterson (2015) notes that autoethnography challenges 'the conventional separation between researcher and participant as well as notions of neutrality and objectivity on the researcher's part' (2015, p.226) as the autoethnographer becomes both the researcher and the subject of the study. Autoethnography is used to describe the research process as well as the resultant artefact – one both 'conducts' and 'writes' autoethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Adams and Manning, 2015; Lapadat, 2017).

The term 'auto-ethnography' was first used by Karl Heider (1975), an anthropologist, in his study of the Dani people. He described the cultural accounts given by the Dani people themselves as 'auto-ethnography'. The term 'autoethnography' as we now know it was originally used by Hayano (1979). He used the term when he studied his 'own people' to describe ethnographic research from an insider's perspective but it was later adopted by Reed-Danahay (1997, p.2) to describe 'autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest'. Thereafter, researchers have used the term autoethnography to encompass different approaches depending on how much emphasis is on the auto-, ethno-, and -graphy which relate respectively to 'self', 'cultural' and 'application of a research process' (Wall, 2008, p.39). Autoethnography is therefore '...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)' (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, p.273). The term autoethnography is often used to embrace any study of a personal nature such as autobiography and personal narratives (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Wall, 2008), although not all would consider autobiography without scholarly interpretation to be autoethnographical (e.g. Chang, 2016).

‘An ethnography that does not use personal experience, memory, or storytelling techniques cannot be an autoethnography, just as an autobiography without any fieldwork, observation, acknowledgment of extant research or theories, or cultural participation and analysis cannot be an autoethnography’.

(Adams and Manning, 2015, p.352).

Autoethnographies, by nature, are personalised accounts uniquely influenced by the researcher’s social, cultural and political background as well as their opinions, thoughts, and feelings (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2000; Wall, 2006). The researcher is encouraged to embrace, acknowledge, and work through these biases through the narrative. As an ‘insider’, the researcher understands the unspoken meanings and motives behind behaviours in a way that an outsider would not be able to do (Greenfield, 2000). However, Greenfield notes the value of an outsider’s more objective perspective as this person can identify patterns and cultural meanings accepted without question by insiders. Hence, autoethnography is a blend of insider and outsider perspectives (Maydell, 2010). My role as a senior member of staff provides me with insider understanding. As a newcomer to the organisation and AP subfield, I am also able to identify, question and challenge behaviour and attitudes which others within the organisation may not question or find unusual.

Autoethnography can expose the vulnerability of the writer to a larger audience. Autoethnographers often write about life-changing events, epiphanies, or times of great emotional distress. ‘I write when my world falls apart or the meaning I have constructed for myself is in danger of doing so’ (Ellis, 2004, p.33). Indeed, Ellis (2004) notes that by writing an autoethnography, the researcher might reveal layers of consciousness and become more aware of their biases, particularly in understanding the interactions with others. However, she also notes it is important that the researcher can share what they have in common with others as well as what is distinctly personal, in order that the reader is drawn into the research but also benefits from it. To achieve this, Ellis (2000) claims that the writing must be engaging and that the reader should be drawn into the story and not want to put the paper down. Hence, the researcher must also be a storyteller (Ellis, 2004), opening up their feelings and vulnerabilities to the audience.

In autoethnography, reflection is not just a token paragraph at the end of a thesis but a key component in undertaking research and conducting the analysis of the research (Wall, 2006). Reflection not only forms part of the research but also attempts to make sense of the research subsequently (Hayano, 1979). De Gooijer (2010, p.36) notes that '(v)ulnerability, self scrutiny (*sic*) and revealing oneself to others is not easy', yet also notes that she found writing in an autoethnographic manner therapeutic. However, this must not lead to self-indulgence and introspection and writers must have the self-awareness to avoid this (Sparkes, 2002).

Autoethnography has been used as a methodology in educational research for some time and is considered to be a valid methodology for educators. De Gooijer (2010), Dethloff (2005), Marasco (2015), and Skousen (2015) have all written autoethnographies regarding their roles as principals or leaders in schools and colleges, although none from a UK alternative provider perspective, nor as someone first entering the AP sector.

Evocative vs analytic autoethnography - do I have to choose?

The first autoethnographic papers that I read were stories of pain, hardship, and loss. It was clear that authors such as Ellis were highly skilled in telling, what I now know to be, evocative autoethnographies. I was initially concerned that I would not be able to write in such a style. I also did not feel comfortable that most of the autoethnographic theses I had read did not include research aims or objectives nor referred to the underpinning literature in their analysis, if indeed, there was an analysis section. Perhaps it was my positivist background coming to the fore but many autoethnographic writings left me wanting. I had been pulled into the story and yet I did not know what I was expected to take out of this experience. It all seemed self-indulgent. Despite being intrigued, I felt uncomfortable by the lack of theoretical structure.

I was relieved when I came across the term 'analytic autoethnography' (Anderson, 2006) and immediately felt a connection to it, without completely understanding what it involved. The ensuing literature review of the various autoethnographic approaches helped me locate my position within the spectrum of approaches.

What I had not initially understood in my early scoping of autoethnography was how diverse it was. Learmonth and Humphreys (2012) note that autoethnography is 'a field of inquiry that has become eclectic, to say the least' (2012, p.5) with Wall noting that there are 'numerous definitions of autoethnography' (Wall, 2016, p.5). However, all definitions, in some way or other, embrace the notion of the self and the field becoming one (Coffey, 2002). There is significant debate about whether autoethnography should be about evoking emotion in the reader in order to communicate a message through various forms of (usually) highly-personal narrative (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) or if it should be more 'theoretical, analytical, and scholarly, with a more traditional understanding of self as connected to a particular ethnographic context rather than the focus of it' (Wall, 2016, p.2). The former describes 'evocative' autoethnography, and the latter, 'analytic' autoethnography.

'First generation autoethnographers' (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2012), such as Ellis and Bochner have been influential in promoting autoethnography as a method and began to define the genre (Wall, 2016). Their evocative style of autoethnography evoked emotion in me as I read some of their work and was drawn into the narrative, for example, their account of a couple navigating abortion (Ellis and Bochner, 1992). Researchers are not limited to writing standard academic artefacts, but produce outputs that include discussions between two characters (Ellis and Bochner, 2006), plays (Ellis and Bochner, 1992), poetry and song (Furman, 2005). This style of autoethnography is generally aligned with postmodern ways of knowing that show 'struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p.433). Yet Wall asserts that many of the papers she has reviewed, most of which are stories, poems and dialogue, have little connection to theory and literature or provide analysis of the experience to link the personal with the social (Wall, 2016). Evocative autoethnography is open to several criticisms and concerns which will be addressed further in this chapter.

In 2006, Anderson introduced the term 'analytic autoethnography' (Anderson, 2006) and advocated for its adoption to counter some of the concerns about evocative autoethnography, and to align it more with its ethnographic roots. Analytic autoethnography has been defined as ethnographic work where the researcher is a full member of the group under investigation which is analysed using theoretical

frameworks and contributes to theoretical understanding (Marak, 2016). Anderson listed 5 requirements of analytic autoethnography:

1. Complete member researcher status;
2. Analytic reflexivity;
3. Narrative visibility of the researcher's self;
4. Dialogue with informants beyond the self;
5. Commitment to theoretical analysis.

(Anderson, 2006)

Prior to his 2006 paper on analytic autoethnography, Anderson also published papers on analytic ethnography (Snow, Morrill and Anderson, 2003). The authors make a case for analytic ethnography to contribute to theoretical development, not just through grounded theory but also through theory refinement and extension. They note that ethnographers often neglect 'the theoretical relevance and potential of their research projects' (2003, p.182), advocating a systematic approach to fieldwork and data analysis which links field data to theory. This approach is evident in Anderson's subsequent description of analytic autoethnography.

While some welcomed Anderson's approach as an antidote to so-called narcissistic tendencies where 'the ethnographer becomes more memorable than the ethnography' (Atkinson, 2006, p.402), others expressed concern that creating requirements for autoethnography restricted authors too much. Ellis and Bochner (2006) responded to Anderson's paper (written as a conversation between the two authors). They believed that by explicitly making analysis part of the autoethnographic process, Anderson takes autoethnography 'which, as a mode of inquiry, was designed to be unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative and bring it under the control of reason, logic, and analysis' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p.433).

Evocative and analytic autoethnography have different purposes. Evocative autoethnographies focus on narratives that encourage conversation and evoke emotional responses, while analytic autoethnographies seek to develop theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena and it is this latter point that is the main point of contention (Ellis and Bochner, 2006; Vyran, 2006). The story may still be evocative but analytic autoethnographers will also tell the reader what the aim of

telling the story is (Smith, 2017). 'Analytical autoethnography is just as much concerned with the ways in which it can aid in the further development of critical social theory as it is with a researcher's past experiences' (Wakeman, 2014, p.708).

However, some note that these two styles are not necessarily discreet and may overlap. Doloriert and Sambrook (2012) claim that autoethnography may include both. Wall, although leaning towards the analytic approach seeks a middle ground between the two, balancing the strengths of both (Wall, 2016). From a pragmatic perspective, the selection of autoethnographic method depends on one's ultimate purpose. As I apply Bourdieu's theory as a framework to make a contribution to knowledge, I have gravitated to the analytic autoethnography approach defined by Anderson (2006). The majority of analytic autoethnographies identify some purpose for undertaking the research (Anderson, 2011; Holman Jones, 2016) but these are rarely stated in the form of research objectives or questions as I have done. Nevertheless, I have chosen to keep my research questions as they articulate and signpost the purpose for undertaking this research and have helped me identify what data should and should not be included in my results. To recap, the following research questions were identified:

1. To what extent does a 'level playing field' within UK higher education exist?
2. How did I address any challenges I experienced as I sought to develop a partnership with an English university to offer degree top-up awards?
3. What challenges did I experience in engaging with The College and the wider HE field as a leader of an alternative provider?
4. To what extent did the use of an autoethnographic approach and application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus contribute to the understanding of the research objectives?

Most analytic autoethnographies, including Anderson's work, provide a literature review before focusing on the autoethnographic writing. Some tie everything up together at the end (see DeBerry-Spence, 2010). However, they rarely encapsulate the supporting literature within the narrative or analysis nor explicitly refer to the theoretical underpinning in their conclusions. This surprised and disappointed me. I had expected more from the analytic autoethnographies I read - more structure,

more application to theory, more synthesis between theory and data. To be fair, Anderson's work has more theoretical context and overall structure than evocative autoethnographies and is essentially a different genre. His paper on skydiving (2011) includes the article's purpose, an introductory literature review and some blending of theory within the autoethnography itself which does not occur in evocative autoethnographies. Anderson also includes a section on conclusions and implications, which refers to his literature review. However, I see no systematic approach to fieldwork or evidence that the theoretical underpinning helped him to produce the autoethnography he wrote.

Often, it is difficult to 'see' how the literature review underpins the research – there is little analysis, only discussion at the end. Few researchers use theory to structure or provide a framework for their data collection or analysis.

I am not the first to identify this. Struthers (2014) noted that he could not find any clear examples of analytic autoethnographies methodologies.

'Having critiqued over 30 autoethnographies within the literature review of the thesis, I could not locate any consistent methodological framework or definitive example for analytic autoethnography.'

(Struthers, 2014, p.186)

In my attempt to understand how to write and analyse my autoethnography, I read nearly 20 autoethnographic doctoral theses and many journal papers. Each thesis exhibited different writing styles and structures reflecting the personality of the researcher, the subject of their research and autoethnographic stance. Few, however, evaluated their research. Even fewer applied theory to their data and analysis in an analytic manner. Most researchers reflected on incidences as they occurred in the text.

The exceptions prove the rule. Struthers (2012) states his research aim and questions and brings together theory and experience in his discussion chapter and includes recommendations in his summary. However, he does not apply a theoretical concept as a framework to the same extent as I do.

Holman Jones (2016) weaves theory around her story in a way that creates structure and meaning to the paper. She uses her story as illustration rather than as a

standalone. She is still able to write evocatively as she writes about her father's illness but does not attempt to theorise or critically evaluate her experiences. Smith (2021) also writes about his father's illness. Theory is interspersed through the autoethnography to give structure and meaning to the autoethnography – the stories acting as vignettes.

I came to realise that there is no one way to present an autoethnography and that the writing must fit both the author's style of writing and natural tendencies and the material itself. It becomes clear to me that my writing is at the 'hard' end of the analytic autoethnography spectrum. My writing is analytic in the way it embraces Bourdieu's theoretical concepts. It uses them for structure, as a framework, to help me make sense of my writing, to identify key themes and recurring patterns. I needed structure to my work and for a sense of completion. Like Holman Jones (2016), my position is that theory should not be a subsequent add-on to the autoethnography.

'We cannot write our stories and then begin the search for a theory to 'fit' them, outside of cultures and politics and contexts. Instead, theory is a language for thinking with and through, asking questions about, and acting on—the experiences and happenings in our stories.'

(Holman Jones, 2016, p.2)

Research Design and Data Collection

Straightforward guidelines on how to undertake or 'do' autoethnography do not exist. As someone who likes structure, I understand Wall when she describes how she was disappointed '...to find that much of what was written on autoethnography... was highly abstract and lacking in specificity' (Wall, 2006, p.6). She also notes that 'there is considerable latitude with respect to how autoethnography is conducted and what product results' (Wall, 2006, p.6). Many papers discuss data collection in the form of artefacts, emails, journals and reflective writing (Ellis, 1999; Vickers, 2007). However, there is little guidance on writing the narrative itself, although I found the literature on evaluating autoethnographic research useful in helping to ensure that the data collection was appropriate. Initially, I was concerned that my notes might not

be suitable for an autoethnographic study, and I had no way of determining how much detail was required. I feared that I might not write anything due to the anxiety of failing to meet an unknown standard. However, I was also aware of the importance of ensuring that I captured everything from day one of starting the new role (White, 2003) and therefore put aside my concerns and started to write and collect data.

My main source of data collection was a diary and reflective journal. I intended to complete a daily diary and managed to do so most days, despite it occasionally taking up to 2 hours to complete. De Gooijer (2010) noted that she averaged an hour and four pages of writing in her daily reflective journal, but that this could extend to 7 pages on 'challenging days'. I had many 'challenging days'. I soon found that the value of keeping a daily journal went beyond purely research purposes. It is amazing how much is lost if the writing up is delayed by just a day or two, or even a few hours. This diary not only listed and described the main activities of the day but was also the vehicle for me to begin to write reflectively. De Gooijer (2010) describes how journaling naturally flowed from daily documentation of events into reflection. I chose not to distinguish between the two styles of writing in my journal as one would flow naturally from the other and I did not wish to manage two different sources of data. I realised early on that, for me, the best way of writing my diary was to use email. I endeavoured to complete my entries before I left the workplace as I had access to work emails as memory joggers and for ease of including attachments. I was not particularly good at remembering conversations verbatim. When in meetings, I attempted to write key points as accurately as possible, but the quotations are sometimes approximations of what was said. My diary and notebooks were crucial in reminding me of ad hoc conversations, which were often full of importance. I frequently found the first and last ad hoc conversations of the day were laden with meaning and attempted to ensure these were included in my diary and reflections.

Other materials used for reflection and analysis included more formal documentation which were usually attached to the daily diary. These consisted of emails, policy documents, minutes, and notes of meetings and external events I attended. I included some reflective notes written prior to joining The College, relating to the application process, interviews, and other meetings. It was only on writing up my notes that I realised how helpful these tactics were in ensuring I had the best chance

of remembering events and conversations. I was often surprised by reading something that I would not have recalled otherwise and how the emotions that the memory released took me by surprise. If, sometime later, I recalled additional information or detail, these were either captured in the diary or added to the original entry in different font colouring to make it clear that there were subsequent comments.

As time progressed and the research questions began to become clearly defined, my writing became more focused on issues specifically related to the research questions rather than writing up my whole day's experiences. I also learnt to use time on public transport to either begin my daily journal entry or reflect on a particular issue which was foremost in my mind. Using a separate email account to store my email entries meant that all the data was in one place and secure. I kept records in monthly folders, so it was easy to locate entries by date order. At the end of each week, I would delete emails from my work email account that related to my diaries. I obtained permission from my line manager, the MD, to forward emails to my private email account.

It is clear from the initial entries that the first month's data were particularly rich in content and would have been missed had I started my data collection later in my tenure.

Reflective writing & self-observation

Gray (2007) describes reflection as:

'...an active and purposeful process of exploration and discovery, often leading to unexpected outcomes. It is the bridge between experience and learning...It is important because it allows us to critique our taken-for-granted assumptions, so that we can become receptive to alternative ways of reasoning and behaving.'

(Gray, 2007, p.49)

Many writers have considered the important role of reflection in action, including Kolb (1984) and Boud (1994). It provides an opportunity to press the pause and rewind buttons and consider the meaning of what has been witnessed or experienced. Reflective practice helps individuals to use insights and learning from their past to assess where they are now and to improve their present and future. I found reflection and diary writing to be intertwined. While I wrote some purely reflective pieces (often on a Friday evening on my 2-hour train journey home or after a particularly challenging day), many of my diary entries include reflective elements.

As well as big events, reflective diaries capture ‘the little experiences of everyday life that fill most of our working time and occupy the vast majority of our conscious attention’ (Wheeler and Reis, 1991, p.340). This is eloquently explained by Jenny Moon:

‘...it could be seen as a melting pot into which you put a number of thoughts, feelings, other forms of awareness, and perhaps new information. In the process of sorting it out in your head, and representing the sortings out on paper, you may either recognize that you have learnt something new or that you need to reflect some more...’.

(Moon, 2004, p.187).

This ‘double reflection’, as I call it, appeared to be particularly powerful. I would naturally reflect on incidences that I described as I wrote them. Occasionally, I would re-read or reconsider past events and this would stimulate further reflection. This process continued as I delved deeper into my own writings and records to begin to analyse my data. As time passed and I could review the data more reflexively other patterns emerged. Without knowing at the time, I was conducting self-observation (McIlveen, 2008).

Critical incidents

Flanagan (1954) is credited for first using the term ‘critical incident’. Sometimes critical incidents are dramatic events – a pivotal meeting, a product launch, an argument – but they may also be less obvious initially. I found that my greatest

revelation about the organisational culture came through reflecting on critical incidents and comparing instances. Often these critical incidents occurred because of a mistake or error of judgment, and they were difficult to write about, especially soon after the event. Sometimes I was only able to write a few bullet points on the day and come back to it when the situation was a little less raw. Alternatively, I would leave the office to write my notes up and reflect on my feelings. Being 'researcher as subject' meant that I had to confront and make public painful memories and experiences, and left me vulnerable and open to criticism (White, 2003; Ellis, 2007).

Journaling provided me with a safe environment to express and make sense of my feelings. I commenced formal reflective journaling in January 2016 as I began attending events on behalf of The College. I joined The College full-time in April 2016 and intended to continue my field work until Easter 2017. However, I found data collection rather addictive and given the process of finding a collaborative academic partnership took longer than expected, I continued to gather data until September 2017. In retrospect, while this has enabled me to tell the full story with a defined ending, it also meant that I had garnered a significant amount of data which needed to be sifted through. Daily emails, while useful for recording events in a chronological order, meant that I had nearly 600 such records to open, each of which might have many attachments. In hindsight, I could have reduced the number of attachments by being more selective at the time of posting, but I was not certain of what would be useful for my study and erred on the side of caution.

Data Analysis & Writing Autoethnography

Unlike quantitative techniques, with autoethnography, there is often no clearly defined separation of data collection and data analysis as they often occur concurrently. I have chosen to write my autoethnography as 'results' and analyse my data in a separate chapter, in keeping with an analytic autoethnographic style, although acknowledging that it is impossible to completely separate the two. There is precedent for keeping the narrative and analysis separate (Pace, 2012) and Ellis (2004) acknowledges that different studies call for different approaches. Chang (2007) explains how researchers begin to refine their criteria during the data

collection process, shaping analysis and process. It is this 'interweaving of data collection, analysis, and interpretation that ultimately leads to the production of autoethnography' (Chang, 2007, p.9). The writing up of my data requires analysis – what do I keep? what do I lose? I have had to hone many hundreds of thousands of words into around 15,000 words covering 19 months. I have made choices that will impact my analysis. Hence, I have chosen to include the process of writing autoethnography within this section on data analysis.

Perhaps due to the dominance of the postmodern evocative autoethnographic approach, there is little advice about how to write autoethnography considering the importance of the writing itself, although we are exalted to 'write from the heart' (Denzin, 2006). Some argue that guidelines would be too restrictive for this style of writing and would 'contribute (...) to the suppression of the very thing the autoethnographer is trying to emancipate: the voice of the researcher' (O'Riordan, 2014, p.6). Having rid myself of the need to write in an evocative style, I felt able to present my results in a way more in keeping with my own preferences, erring towards a descriptive approach intermingled with reflexivity, deliberately keeping away from creative storytelling. Due to the nature of the study, I present my data in a linear timeline, as I discovered that a thematic approach would require me to flit between timelines and seem disjointed. I then pick up on thematic issues in my analysis chapter. Few autoethnographies have an 'analysis' chapter per se. To me, it was important to have structure to my work and a sense of completion. Indeed, my data analysis was an integral part of determining what was included in my results chapter as I began to hone hundreds of pages of data.

Just as there is little specific guidance on writing autoethnography, there is even less in relation to analysing autoethnographic writing. Indeed, Chang (2007) notes that it is 'methodologically nebulous to describe and direct'.

'There is some small literature on qualitative data analysis explicitly for autoethnography. Partly due to the nature of autoethnographic research and data collection, as well as the relatively short time it has been an established research methodology, no detailed, explicit, step-by-step set of strategies exist for analyzing autoethnographic data. Some literature on autoethnographic data analysis addresses how to examine data, but most

works state researchers should be self-reflective and 'explore personal experiences when analyzing data (Ellis, 2004).'

(Chang, 2007, p.9)

While part of the uniqueness of autoethnography is that it does not require a 'how to' guide (Martin, 2014), I wanted to ensure that I was reflecting my data in an authentic manner and not just cherry picking vignettes. I wanted to create new insights rather than confirm existing beliefs.

Evocative autoethnographic studies rarely refer to systematic data collection and coding of data or evaluate the research (Adams and Manning, 2015). However, one might expect an analytical approach would consider coding to analyse the data. Pace (2012) considers this from a grounded theory perspective but does not provide any examples of where this has been applied. Chang (2007), from a more evocative perspective, provides a 10-stage approach to analysis outlined below:

1. Search for recurring themes;
2. Look for cultural themes;
3. Identify exceptional occurrences;
4. Analyse inclusions and omissions;
5. Connect the present with the past;
6. Analyse relationships between self and others;
7. Compare yourself with other people's cases;
8. Contextualise broadly;
9. Compare with social science constructs and ideas;
10. Frame with theories.

In reviewing around 20 autoethnographic doctoral theses, I noted that few writers of evocative autoethnography explained how they identified themes nor framed their work around theory. Even those using a more analytical stance rarely undertook coding of data that required the use of specialist software. I felt the need to have some accountability for what I chose to put in my autoethnography and so chose a pragmatic approach to analyse my data, informed by both approaches.

Having set out my diaries and other entries into chronological order, I identified key events and experiences, however small, that stood out. These were sorted both

chronologically and by theme which I then tabulated. I discovered that analysing my data through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice, enabled me to identify key themes which helped me to build narratives and identify where and how experiences built upon each other (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Using theory at this early stage rather than retrofitting it was extremely powerful in providing focus and ensuring that I considered all elements of the theoretical underpinning at an early stage, while being open to other strong themes that might come through.

Evaluating Autoethnographic work - Reliability, Generalisability and Validity

Writing an autoethnography presents challenges of representation, balance and ethics (Wall, 2008). Autoethnography is open to criticism, particularly in relation to the dual role of researcher as subject and relational ethics. While traditional positivist criteria for trustworthiness may not apply in the same sense (Adams and Manning, 2015), arguably it can be addressed by establishing clearly articulated methodology and data analysis processes (Ellis, 1999; de Gooijer, 2010). However, there is no consensus about evaluating autoethnography, particularly, the more evocative styles (Méndez, 2014).

'Gut feel' appears to be a major factor for autoethnographers in evaluating their work (Sparkes, 2000; Muncey, 2010). Ellis (2000) notes she initially assesses any autoethnographic paper by how engaged she is by the story. 'I want to be immersed in the flow of the story....not wanting to come to the end....and afterwards [to be] unable to stop thinking about or feeling what I've experienced' (Ellis, 2000, p.273). She then lists criteria by which she evaluates autoethnographic research, similar in many ways to those used to assess a novel: Is there a plot? Does it sound authentic? Is there a twist or anything new? Is it a page turner? Is the story coherent and logically consistent? Originally, one of my main concerns was being able to write in the engaging manner of evocative autoethnography, rather than in the more report-like style I usually write in and yet, surely there needs to be substance to the research rather than just a good plot?

However, such subjective criteria are unlikely to convince researchers from alternative paradigms that autoethnography is more than autobiography or fiction. Whilst I acknowledge the importance of telling a story and writing in an accessible way, it was important for me to seek out further guidelines which might help to evaluate autoethnography in a way that other researchers might find more rigorous. Anderson (2006) represents the more objective end of the continuum, which is reflected in his criteria for assessing autoethnography. These include that the researcher engages reflexively with the data analysis and is committed to theoretical analysis. Richardson's (2000) criteria of contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impactfulness, and credibility also provided a useful benchmark for ensuring that the study is conducted and reported on appropriately. My preferred evaluation criteria comes from Le Roux (2017) who, following an extensive evaluation of the issues of rigour in autoethnographic work, tentatively suggests five criteria for evaluating all forms of autoethnographic work: subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility and, contribution. She assumes that all research should be ethical and honest and does not appear to be swayed by the seductive powers of creative writing and page turners.

Some may question the reliability of the self as a data source (Hayano, 1979) and note the perceived lack of 'ethno' - methodology - in resultant outputs. Hence, they argue that autoethnographic output is not 'reliable'. Indeed, it would be impossible to justify an autoethnographic study using positivist criteria (Sparkes, 2000). The term 'credibility' is often used to substitute for reliability in qualitative studies (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). Does the reader believe that the narrator has had the experiences described? Does the narrator believe that this is what happened? Is it a credible work? However, this is subjective and might be determined by the writing skill of the author. By adhering to Richardson's criteria, autoethnographic writers are able to justify their research to other interpretivist or critical theory researchers.

I am aware that my viewpoint of incidences I discuss is only one way of seeing things (Ellis, 2004). I have written what I believed I saw or felt at the time of writing. On reflection, however, I can see that I have written sometimes defensively to protect myself and I will share this reflection in my analysis. I am also aware that I may have unintentionally edited out or reconstructed unflattering incidences and thoughts.

Qualitative research, by its nature, does not intend to be generalisable in the traditional scientific sense. Ellis et al. (2011) explain that the focus is not in terms of generalisation of the respondents or population but of the reader. Does the narrative speak to the reader about their experience or the lives of others they may know? Can they relate to the events and feelings described? I hope my story will touch chords with a range of readers, from those moving to the AP sector through to anyone involved in developing collaborative partnerships.

Ellis et al (2011) describe validity as evoking ‘...in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true’. It is not surprising, therefore, that those from a positivist stance would struggle with something that is as subjective as feelings. One of the most common criticisms of autoethnography is that it can be narcissistic and that by putting oneself at the centre of one’s research negates any claim of validity. Feldman (2003, p.28) identifies several criteria for validity which include providing detailed description of the data collection process and how the researcher has chosen which data to use to represent the whole data. He recommends that triangulation can be used to explore multiple ways of representing the same autoethnography, rather than the traditional use of multiple sources of data. The personal nature of autoethnography as a journey for the researcher is also acknowledged as Feldman encourages the researcher to provide evidence of ‘the value of the changes in our ways of being teacher educators’ (Feldman, 2003, p.28).

Ethical Considerations

Despite me being the main focus of the study, there are a number of areas of ethical concern with autoethnographic work, particularly in terms of relational ethics (Lapadat, 2017), including confidentiality, consent and authorship. ‘The self might be the focus of research, but the self is porous, leaking to the other without due ethical consideration’ (Tolich, 2010, p.1608). I am aware that there are other participants in my story and I do not necessarily own the story I tell (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The advice to only publish what you would show to another person mentioned in the text is wise advise (Medford, 2006), although even some of the most important names in autoethnography do not always practice what they preach.

Given the warnings that 'you become the stories you write' (Ellis, 2007, p.22) and that publishing autoethnography is like an 'inked tattoo' (Tolich, 2010), it is clear that there are a number of ethical risks to self when undertaking autoethnography. This section considers issues of consent, consultation, authorship, confidentiality, and vulnerability and incorporates the 10 guidelines recommended by Tolich (2010).

Informed consent is an underpinning pillar of ethical practice in research involving participants. However, there are examples of well-known autoethnographic research that did not gain informed consent. Ellis was criticised for withholding information she had written about her mother as she felt uncomfortable about the way she had described her despite obtaining consent from her mother (Ellis, 2007). Wyatt (2006) was similarly criticised for his autoethnographic writing on the death of his father.

Tolich (2010, p.1607) identified five guidelines relating to consent and consultation, several of which are unique to autoethnography. These include respecting participants' autonomy, the voluntary nature of participating, documenting the informed consent processes, checking at regular stages that the participants still want to be part of the project and recognising any conflict of interest or coercive influence when seeking informed consent. Additionally, he reminds researchers not to publish anything that they would not show to those mentioned in the text and noted the difficulty in obtaining retrospective consent.

Before starting my fieldwork, I obtained permission from the MD of The College, to undertake an autoethnographic study at The College. I explained that I was writing a diary and would be basing my research on my experiences over the first year of employment. I soon became aware that he might not really understand what the output might look like, so I spent more time explaining what autoethnographic research entailed. When some months later, a member of staff was dismissed, partly due to downloading emails to a Hotmail account, I immediately emailed the Managing Director to remind him that I too was downloading documents to ensure that I had permission to do so. His response 'You're the principal. I trust you' was not really the answer I wanted (I wouldn't trust anyone in relation to cyber security!) but I had permission.

I consulted with all senior management, programme leaders and academic managers within The College about undertaking autoethnographic research and that

I would keep a daily diary. I explained how the entries will be anonymised and how I was keeping data secure. I also had the opportunity to explain this in more detail at a team meeting and answer a few questions. All consented, but appreciating that views might change over time, I occasionally reminded colleagues that I was keeping a diary. I have not gained consent from those who are 'bit players' – who do not appear significantly in my writing nor are involved in any critical incidences. Nor have I obtained consent from people external to the institution for the same reasons. They are also more likely to be able to be anonymised. Students were simply acknowledged as 'a student' and the circumstances edited to ensure that they cannot be identified. Similarly, I often refer to the SMT rather than identify individual members.

I endeavoured to ensure that ethical issues were adequately addressed prior to commencement of the study. I sought to anticipate ethical issues at an early stage to avoid having to obtain informed consent after the narrative had been written. I was very aware that given my position as principal, I could be seen as having position power, but I made it clear to colleagues that consent was voluntary and unrelated to my role as principal (Tolich, 2010). While I can never be certain that my position did not influence their consent, I regularly reminded them of my research and that they had the right to withdraw. I have attempted to focus as much as I can on my personal experiences and reflections and include others to illustrate this rather than focus on cultural and managerial issues within the organisation, which would inevitably lead me to critique certain individuals. I am particularly aware of relational ethics in relation to this autoethnography. My relationship with most of the other players was as their principal and I acknowledge that there are power differentials and staff/student vulnerabilities (Tolich, 2010). I did not wish them to act any differently as a result of conducting this research. I am not aware that they did. However, I was asked on more than one occasion, if I have kept a note of a particular incident, presumably in case the individual needed it as evidence if there was ever an HR issue related to it. In some ways, colleagues felt safe that I was recording my experience as they perceived it as an 'independent' record. I had not anticipated this when I started. Having reflected on it, my situated ethical stance was that if I have written something in my work notebook, then it could be used as

evidence but if it was based on my typed reflections subsequently, then not. Fortunately, I never had to make that judgement.

Confidentiality

While I am the main character in my thesis, others play a part in the story and are not always portrayed in a good light. Hence their privacy is essential. Ellis (2004) and others have used composite characters to hide the identities of others while Denshire (2015) used fictional characters. Initially, I chose not to use composite characters as I was concerned it would water down the contribution and voice of each individual. However, as I began to write my autoethnography, I decided to use composite roles within the HEIs where possible to ensure that individuals cannot be identified. I have used pseudonyms to help protect the privacy of individuals and neither The College nor the HEIs involved are identified. However, due to the nature of an autoethnographic output and that I am not anonymised as the author, it may be possible for someone to identify The College. This is a concern for all autoethnographers.

I forwarded emails to a private email address and wrote up my accounts remotely, either on my phone or laptop. I deleted any sent emails from my work email account at the end of each week. I kept a small notebook in my handbag or by the side of the desk and used a form of shorthand to make interpretation more difficult. I locked my office when I was not occupying it.

Vulnerability

Five of the ten guidelines outlined by Tolich (2010) relate to the vulnerability of both self and others. Protecting others from potential harm caused by public exposure is essential and hence the need to ensure, where possible, that others cannot be identified in my narrative. Tolich asserts that ‘...no story should harm others, and if harm is unavoidable, take steps to minimise harm’. (2010, p.1609). This presents a challenge. In some instances, I used composite characters in relation to partner staff and I have carefully chosen which vignettes I use to illustrate a particular theme.

Autoethnography may be 'emancipatory and change making' (Adams and Manning, 2015, p.239) but that comes with risk to the researcher (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). Printed (and electronic) texts live in static form long after they are written (Wall, 2006). Tolich (2010, p.1608) likens this to an 'inked tattoo'. In other people's eyes, we become the stories we write (Ellis, 2007) despite having moved on. I have had to consider this in the context of my career (Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019) and suspect that I might not have wanted others to read this thesis had I still be working at The College. Tolich (2010) suggests that a *nom de plume* might be used where the risk of harm to self or others is possible. The underlying principle is to assume those mentioned in my narrative will read it one day.

The following chapter is my autoethnography which spans 19 months from just before joining The College up to welcoming the first students onto the business and tourism level-6 top-up degree programmes. It represents only a fraction of the data collected but each incident is chosen to reflect key themes emerging from the initial coding. These themes are discussed in more detail and in relation to Bourdieu's concepts in the subsequent analysis chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN SEARCH OF A PARTNER

Introduction

My diary entries began on 26th February 2016. Anything written before then was as a reflection on events. Directly quoted diary entries are recorded in italics. Due to word limits, this can only be a condensed set of ‘vignettes’ which follow my journey as The College attempts to obtain a university partnership. A summary timeline outlining key events can be found in Appendix A. During the period that this research was undertaken, The College approached five universities, which are identified as follows:

Identification	Abbreviation
Big University in Big City	BUBC
Small University in Small Town	SUST
Small University in Small City	SUSC
Tiny University in Medium sized City	TUMC
Tiny University in Small City	TUSC

All the universities were established post-1992, with three holding university status for less than 10 years.

Following this chapter, an analysis of key themes will be undertaken, using Bourdieu’s concepts of Field, Habitus and Capital as a framework.

To avoid identification, individuals have been referred to by role. A list of all abbreviations used can be found on pages 7 and 8.

First encounters

I’ve been invited down to London to meet a potential HE partner (BUBC). Our CAB had made introductions on behalf of The College directly to the VC of

this institution (...) On arrival, I note three members of the AB are in attendance, including the chair and vice-chair. We are expecting a group of four from BUBC, comprising of a DVC, Dean, AD, and the Head of International Office. Quite a high-powered affair! (...) The meeting seemed to go well. The CAB did most of the talking from our side. I noted that the MD hardly said a word. The DVC seemed particularly interested in having a London presence. The SMT were at pains to ensure the university were aware that The College does not a Tier 4 license, having lost it some months ago (...) The head of international (...) seemed to switch off a little when he realised we only recruit Home/EU students (...) I didn't think the AD was overly positive in the partnership opportunity either, but he toed the party line.

(...) The next stage, we are told, is for the university to undertake due diligence. My colleagues will need to gather the relevant evidence for this. They confirm that the lack of Tier 4 status shouldn't be an issue. (26/2/2016)

Subsequently, the university sends a 'letter of intent' to advise HEFCE of its intention to deliver programmes through The College.

Slow start

We send the required documentation for due diligence to BUBC in early March but otherwise things progress slowly until I join The College full-time in April. I begin to appreciate the importance of my previous experience – my personal habitus - in ensuring this partnership will succeed.

I had a pleasant conversation with the AD Health and Social Care (H&SC), and we discussed what might be feasible. She was initially rather formal but (...) warmed to me as it becomes clear that I am an equal – or rather, have been an equal, as an AD in another university. (12/4/16)

Almost immediately, I find myself banging my head against a brick as I fight against the disorganised habitus of The College.

Whilst trying to pull together the information required by the University, I discovered that The College doesn't have any formal course documentation! Somewhere, sometime, someone has decided what modules will be taught but they did not record it (...) We do need, as a minimum, to record our decisions and make sure that we have adequate documentation at course level. (12/4/16)

The BS agrees to offer level-4 and top-up awards in the first year. BUBC will require a minimum of 35 students on each course, although we hope for more. I've seen too many partners suggest high recruitment targets to pique the interest of a university, only to fail to achieve them and incur financial penalties. My preference is for franchise provision so we can benefit from an 'off the shelf' award rather than design one from scratch. Ultimately, we agree to a validated route which makes use of existing BUBC modules but enables us to lower entry requirement for the programmes. Student numbers will belong to The College's SNC and this will support any future application for DAPs. Validated provision also protects the university's league table position enabling both parties to protect or enhance their position within the field. However, this rationale changes over time.

Punching above their weight

The other members of SMT have no fear when talking to external organisations or key influencers in the HE sector. It amazes me that they often get a 'yes' when they approach such people... it's something I need to develop myself. At external events, my colleagues will always (...) approach the keynote speaker to ask for their help or invite to our college. It usually works! (14/4/16)

It begins to rub off on me. After the HEFCE AP conference I send an email to the HEFCE AP lead, introducing myself and explaining that I have significant experience of NSS and the destination of leavers in higher education (DLHE) surveys (which were being introduced to the AP sector that year). A year later, I am asked to join an advisory group, following his recommendation.

The SMT decides that if the university can insist we complete a due diligence form, then we should ask them to do so too. Theoretically, this is reasonable, but it is not the done thing and demonstrates how my colleagues continually try to push above their weight but lack the social capital to know what is appropriate. A due diligence form is cloned from a partner FE college and sent to the DVC of BUBC. It's embarrassing! There are a lot of FE terms within the document and much is irrelevant. The university never completed the form.

Delaying tactics

I had my suspicions about the BS being slow to respond to requests and sharing information. Towards the end of April 2016 and into May 2016, this became evident at both school and university level.

I receive an email from the BS advising me that because of internal workload, due to the institution's move from 15 to 20 credit modules, '*...we may need to postpone the start of these programmes until September 2017, but this will be a decision made by (the meeting), and I will get back to you on that*'. (18/4/16). This is the first indication that BUBC may not deliver as promised. I respond saying that this would be a great disappointment to The College as we chose to work with BUBC partly due to the opportunities to run courses next academic year. The power imbalance is evident. This decision delays The College's plans by a year and we have no power to change this. Based on my knowledge of HE, I offer a potential solution of franchise for the 15-credit module top-up award for one year but receive no response.

We are still waiting to hear from BUBC about their due diligence checks on us and the costs of validation/approval. I reflect on the power imbalance:

We have numbers and location; they have status and that all important 'Degree Awarding Powers'. We need them more than they need us. It seems to be us pushing BUBC rather than the other way around. For them, it's just another partnership that they wouldn't have agreed to if it wasn't for the VC. For us, it makes a significant difference in terms of reputation, student numbers and, of course, DAPs. I don't think universities see that side of

things. I know I didn't. With just one decision, they can throw away the livelihood of a small organisation. (20/4/16)

The different habituses of the two academic schools becomes increasingly apparent.

The H&SC team seem to be trying to resolve problems. Their counterparts in the business school are more reserved and, I suspect, are doing the minimum (...) I expect, at some point, they will say 'the committee says no' because of the documentation they've submitted. It does annoy me intently that I cannot see or even contribute to the proposal documentation that will determine the future direction of my college and I have no right of reply. (22/4/16)

The day before the first meeting to approve the partnership and programmes, I receive an email from the AD H&SC.

She has had a conversation with the pro vice-chancellor (PVC) and director of academic services, and they confirm that they cannot validate anything until after January 2017 due to their 'transformation of the curriculum' (...) I suspected this all along, as (...) that's what I would have said, had I been in their shoes. However, we have been strung along for several months now and could have been moving forward with another partner in the meantime. We have now lost the opportunity to run courses in September 2016 and, (...) January 2017. We have lost a year, because they didn't want to say 'no' initially or at least, manage our expectations. I feel for The College. It is not a level playing field. The AD notes that she would still submit paperwork through the various committees 'in readiness'. (25/4/16)

I respond with, what I consider to be a measured and proactive approach, taking into consideration what I know to be feasible based on past experience:

Dear AD,

Thank you for confirming that the documentation will go to the Academic Planning Group (APG) tomorrow and then, hopefully, Collaborative Partnership Committee (CPC) next month.

Obviously, we are very disappointed that it looks like the courses cannot be validated until 2017, which, I assume, implies a September 2017 start, as we are currently in the process of developing capacity for level-6 delivery. However, I appreciate that this is not your decision and The College will discuss it further with the DVC on his return.

On a positive note, it does mean that we will be able to run with the new 20 credit top-up and 3-year award for both H&SC and Business, which is exciting. It would be useful if we could have sight of your proposed 20 credit portfolios (course titles and structure and module titles) for H&SC and business courses as soon as possible so we can undertake the appropriate mapping exercises (acknowledging that it has not yet been validated).

Please can you let us know the decision of the APG tomorrow. If further information or clarification is required at the meeting, please don't hesitate to ring me.

Kind regards

(25/4/16)

I never receive the course outlines.

It gets worse....

A few days later, the head of partnerships confirms they would continue to work towards a September 2017 start, but for top-up awards only. There is an implied assumption that The College has no other choice and will agree to this. *We will be back in touch as necessary, once we have a further update or a date for committee submission*, he advises (27/4/16). I assume it will not go to the next Committee in May and we'll be left hanging. I have no confidence now that this partnership will work. We need a contingency plan.

Light at the end of the tunnel?

On 9th May, The College receives approval in principle from HEFCE for course designation of BUBC programmes, subject to validation. We use this opportunity to ask the DVC of BUBC for a meeting. A holding email states that the DVC *'is currently in discussion with the VC about this and will be in touch very soon'* (11/5/16).

Meanwhile, the H&SC team enquire if we would be interested in a 'Flying Faculty' arrangement for September 2016. This school does not have many partnerships and is keen to keep the relationship going particularly as they have London partners delivering foundation degrees who might be interested in the top-up award. BUBC staff would deliver the course on our campus. They would only need to approve our premises for delivery. I have doubts – there's no real financial benefit to us but it might be better than nothing – certainly from a student perspective. The MD is keen on this suggestion, so we continue to work towards this interim goal. The H&SC team also confirm that the BS is considering something similar for September 2016 with a view to each offering a top up and level-4 award in September 2017 as a validated provision. It's clear that it is our London facilities that are of interest to them, and we feel obliged to take up their offer to maintain the relationship.

I enjoy working with the AD H&SC – we're on the same wavelength. Towards the end of the month, we have almost agreed the modules, entry requirements, prices, teaching delivery models, campuses, and the possible role of The College staff in seminars.

On 25th May, having had no correspondence from the BS for a month, I ask BUBC colleagues if we can meet to agree the modules, costings, promotional etiquette etc. It is 3rd June before I get a date from BUBC for a meeting – 13th July.

This smacks of 'we don't want to do it' at school level. Apart from asking if I can meet each school separately to speed things up, I just have to accept the tidbits I am offered. I respond, making it clear that this is very late for a first meeting as it does not give The College enough time to promote the courses. (3/6/16).

Eventually, a meeting is arranged with both schools for 27th June. I meet the H&SC team and BS programme leaders for the first time. I also receive information about

the BS modules. It doesn't look promising for a 2016 start. Based on the financial model that the university presents, we will not make any contribution to overheads from our share. There is no wiggle room, we are told.

In the meantime, the White Paper is published. I share the link to SMT.

There are some very positive opportunities for The College. The main challenge is that we need to ensure our NSS, DLHE, progression, and retention statistics are outstanding...in order not to give anyone any reason for delaying an application for DAPs. The fact we can start from day 1 is great...and may possibly mean that we might not have to partner up with a university or other degree awarding institution as is currently the practice. (16/5/16)

As the CAB notes, 'it does no harm for them (BUBC) to realise we have more options now'. (19/5/16)

It's beginning to get complicated...

The MD advises SMT of another potential new partner (TUMC). The introduction has been made by the headhunter (HH) who recruited me as principal. We meet the VC and DVC at The College on 6th July.

It's a delightful meeting! The VC and DVC (...) seem very interested in working with The College. It's a small university and has a limited portfolio (...) However, it has the all-important degree awarding powers (...) They want to work with us across all our subject areas, two immediately (...) It is clear that a Central London presence is important to them. It's early days but having both the VC and DVC on board should help. My only concern is that they think they can get things in place for September 2016 for a couple of top-up awards. From past experience, I doubt it. (6/7/16)

Evidently, our Central London campus is a significant draw. I also feel more comfortable working with a smaller, more recently established university as it might enable us to develop a more equitable relationship.

Today (...) four members of SMT visit BUBC to meet the DVC - our first since the meeting at The College in February - to try to work through some of the stumbling blocks we have with the process so far. I get the impression we can be a little more bullish following the positive meeting with SUMC yesterday.

On the train journey there, I try to (...) discuss our plan of action but that gets nowhere. It frustrates me as I know it means we will talk over each other and have no common understanding of what outcome we want and what we're prepared to compromise on.

On arrival, we are escorted into a meeting room and offered refreshments. My colleagues are impressed by the size of the offices, and I enjoy telling them that I had a similarly-sized office in both my last two jobs. Childishly, I relish the surprise on their faces! It was clear that the three gentlemen were rather in awe of their surroundings.

Just after 2pm, the DVC joins us, closely followed by the AD Business and the head of collaborative services. After some pleasantries, led mainly by me, the meeting commences.

I felt so comfortable and alive during the meeting. I was clearly a bridge between both parties, understanding where the university was coming from but also being understood and respected by the university staff. I was by far the most comfortable person from The College side of the meeting, and I observed that the BUBC colleagues tended to address me even when they were directly responding to another colleague (...) I wonder if my colleagues noticed it too and if they acknowledged my experience in this area? I didn't perceive it if they do.

We talked over each other a little too much for my liking. It's also embarrassing when my colleagues ask the same question several times - either they don't understand (...) or it's their way of getting what they want by wearing the other party down.

I am always amazed by my colleagues' brazenness (...) constantly pushing for a February 2017 start. I could see the university colleagues getting frustrated as they had already said they couldn't start (...) until September 2017. I felt embarrassed and was trying to act as a go between. I explained to my colleagues that the 20 credit modules would not be running until September 2017 and BUBC wasn't trying to be awkward. The BUBC contingent nodded in agreement. However, in the end, my colleagues' tenacity worked, and they appeared to have got what they wanted – a February 2017 start for BA Business Studies and BA H&SC top-ups - or think they have. I suspect the rug will be pulled from under our feet again. But this is not the time to tell my colleagues.

So, I've a lot to do to ensure we can get the courses validated for Semester 2 delivery next year. That should keep me out of mischief for a while! Obviously, BUBC need us more than I thought they did. I suspect they see us as a safe way of getting a London hub. We might get in a pickle with engaging with two institutions - playing with fire, is how I described it. But we can't afford to end up with nothing.

The mood is buoyant as we walk back to the train station. We might have to make a hard decision at some point. Do we want to be a small fish in a big pond or a big fish in a small pond? I think I would stick with TUMC - but that's just a hunch. (7/7/16)

Things start to speed up

During the rest of July, I focus on getting the flying faculty option launched for September 2016 start. It's a big ask to get this to work. After some negotiation with

the H&SC colleagues at BUBC we agree student fees of £6,250 for both top-ups with a 1/3 going to The College for marketing and premises. Once we pay agents' fees and VAT, we are basically doing this for free, but this partnership is important, so we are prepared to take a financial hit in the first instance. The maximum cohort for this first intake is 30 per programme. I make it clear that we have lost potential applicants due to the delay, so we doubt we will get more this time around.

I'm also concerned about entry requirements. Whilst H&SC will allow students with a pass grade at HND provided they have work experience, the BS requires a distinction and may consider work experience. Most of our students achieve a pass. Hence, we cannot guarantee them a progression route. On a more positive note, as soon as prices are agreed, due diligence completed and the agreement signed, then The College can start to promote the courses subject to BUBC approval of promotional material.

Some good news! The university's APG have approved the delivery of top-up awards only for September 2017. Chair's action is required to change this to February 2017. I was wrong to be so pessimistic, obviously! The validation event for both courses is planned for January 2017. Costings and pricing TBA but around £1400/student in first year of delivery (due to additional support offered by university during the first year) and then £1200 for further years. There would be no 'wiggle room' but there would be a 'discount' for larger student numbers. The director of finance was tasked to send a proposal for discounting large student numbers to the DVC. A further validation for the three-year awards to start in Sept 17 would be required later in the year.

(7/7/16)

It all looks positive, yet on the same day, SMT is asked to provide the DVC with details clarifying The College's position on student visas and our intention to offer the programmes to home and EU students only.

Another meeting with the two schools is arranged for 13/7/16.

Despite the 'breakthrough' we had at the meeting last week, it seems the BS is not really behind this relationship and is trying to do just the bare

minimum. They still use terms like 'subject to validation' and are obviously hesitant about the whole affair. The H&SC colleagues couldn't be more different!

I am pleased that my course leader for H&SC HND contributes well (...) and holds his own (...) Once again, I feel empowered being in a university environment.

I can see that the BS colleagues appear incredulous about our forecast student numbers (...) I try to allay their fears by confirming that none of the students in the first two cohorts of the validated awards will be international students. They seem to visibly relax (...) when I explain this. (13/7/16)

It is now late-July. Site visits were completed during mid-July and modules and degree titles agreed. We're down to the wire and still haven't got confirmation about due diligence nor a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

I discover by chance that the director of quality (DQ) has agreed with TUMC to offer the same course areas as we have agreed with BUBC. This could be interesting! I am annoyed that we are now stuck with two institutions, unknowingly competing against each other. DQ has also agreed high intake numbers that will be difficult to hit. I admit, I would rather be a big fish in a small pond, but I cannot see how TUMC will deliver the goods by September.

The following day, BUBC confirm that the academic approval form for February 17 validation has been signed by the PVC and will go to the APG meeting tomorrow. It sounds like good news. The AD BS in BUBC rings to tell me. The pendulum swings in the direction of BUBC.

On 1st August, we are advised that TUMC SMT cannot complete institutional and programme approval for September delivery because they've never done it before! I'm not surprised. What is a surprise is that the VC and DVC didn't know that! It materialises that they would have to create processes to handle it. They too would like to consider delivering full degrees from February 2017 starting at level-3 and

postgraduate qualifications in September 2017. The pendulum swings back in favour of TUMC.

On 8th August we receive a copy of the MOU from BUBC. I'm still trying to get the artwork for the website approved by the university so we can go live. It is the 24th August before we get this. It's too late for any meaningful recruitment, but we try.

Bad news comes in threes

It's rather a shock when DQ receives an email from the DVC BUBC stating:

'Thank you for the additional information...In order to progress the approval of validated delivery from February 2017, CPC has requested sight of the actual UKVI revocation letter. I would be grateful if you could arrange for a copy to be sent to me at your earliest convenience'. (16/9/16)

My perception is that BUBC is looking to get out of this relationship. We send a copy of the document but hear nothing.

On the same day, MD receives an email from a dean at TUMC stating that they are not able to move forward with a collaborative arrangement due to the Vice Chancellor leaving the institution.

We receive more bad news – Coventry University College will open a London campus in 2017 and will be in direct competition with us, offering similar programmes as well as foundation years, top-ups, and full degrees in most of our subject areas. Why enrol at a small for-profit college when you can study at a university college? The imperative to find a university partner becomes stronger.

Towards the end of the month (27/9/16), CAB and I attend a HEFCE roundtable event about the structure and governance of APs and how HEFCE could work with APs to develop their governance. The College's governance is seen as good practice within the sector, and we are asked to contribute to the discussions.

A slow death

As September progresses, it becomes clear that we cannot recruit the number of students required to run the Flying Faculty provision – the admissions process is clunky, and admissions criteria are too high. Most of the business applicants have been rejected by the university team. We delay by a week but get to the point where there would be less than 15 students on each course. It is not financially viable for either partner. My SMT colleagues are adamant there are more applicants in the pipeline, but it is too late. On 29th September 2016, it is decided not to run either award.

Soon after, I receive an email from the DVC BUBC:

'It is with regret that I have to inform you that our Collaborative Provision Committee has not approved franchised delivery at UKCBC from February 2017, based on the due diligence information you have supplied to us'.

(6/10/16)

The MD believes we still have a chance with the business course, despite being told by (...) the DVC that it wasn't going ahead (...) He wants to progress Flying Faculty, but I explain that this was supposed to be a stop-gap because we begged for something sooner rather than later. Now we end up with nothing. My colleagues don't understand that most of these agreements are based on trust in smaller collaborations which get bigger over time. They want it all now. (6/10/16)

Later that month, the DQ responds to the DVC's email:

'Dear DVC

Many thanks for your email...

Though the decision was quite disappointing, we were very concerned of the fact that the Tier 4 issues and updates on our actions, including a letter from Professor CAB to the Vice Chancellor, have unfortunately not been taken into consideration by the university while considering the revocation issues.

Undoubtedly, the delayed decision caused serious hardships to BUBC, us and the students who chose to pursue the top ups with us.

We are awaiting your detailed letter on the proposal so that we can assess our further course. Your feedback will be of great help in ensuring that we strive to meet your expectations.

In spite of all the challenges and disappointment, we sincerely and most gratefully thank you for your wholehearted involvement and support extended to us'. (17/10/16)

A month later I receive a letter from the DVC BUBC regarding the outcome of their collaborative partnership committee:

'The Committee has put forward a recommendation therefore that the University should not proceed with the proposed development of the relationship at this time'. (31/10/16)

The reason given was strange:

'(...) the committee concluded that there were concerns regarding the management of course options for students which had not featured in The College's representations to the University'.

It is unclear what this meant. The letter went on to suggest that the university remained open to developing a relationship with The College and willing to discuss in more detail ways in which BUBC could assist with the development of our course portfolio. (31/10/16).

We did not respond to this letter or ask for clarification apart from politely acknowledging it.

To me, it seems clear that the BS felt uncomfortable with the partnership as the rationale did not relate to the Tier 4 issue nor due diligence as suggested in an earlier correspondence, and no one had discussed problems in relation to course options that were effectively prescribed for us.

We learn on 18 October that the VC at BUBC has resigned for personal reasons. Once more, the loss of a key advocate within a university has foreclosed any opportunity for an ongoing partnership.

Desperately seeking new opportunities

During the weekend on 15th October, I receive an email from the MD asking me to investigate university opportunities.

I have struggled to contact institutions for new partnerships because I didn't have access to information about whom The College had contacted in the past. Today, I am sent a list of VCs and universities contacted by CAB on behalf of The College – 15 institutions, mainly post 92s. I was not given any details of the responses but recall that most institutions did not respond or responded negatively (...) I've now seen a copy of the original email sent to these institutions and I despair. It starts 'Dear Esteemed Sir/Madam' and is full of grammatical mistakes... It's the sort of email that I would automatically delete in a past life. (25/10/16)

I start to develop a database of prospective institutions, noting league table rankings, subject areas, propensity for partnerships, and begin to work through the list.

The MD also asks me to write a proposal for developing degree apprenticeships. I explain that we would need a degree-awarding partner who could validate the degree element. None of my SMT colleagues had realised this.

November limbo

I spend much of November in conversation with HE organisations. I attend the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) annual conference on 13-14th November. I'm one of the few representatives from the AP sector.

Last year I attended in my university role. This year, I felt like I was (...) an imposter (...) I was concerned that I might get a frosty reception given my role change, but I knew enough people, including a member of The College's AB,

who were happy to network with me and make up for the one or two who did shun me. I made some good contacts which is what it was really all about and I should be able to get some progression agreements as a result. (14/11/16)

I also meet with the chair of the Higher Education Strategic Planners Association (HESPA), a former colleague of mine, to determine whether it would be beneficial for The College to join. There are no APs within the association currently, but they promise to get back to me. Early in January, I am informed that the HESPA executive would welcome applications from APs. I am invited to attend their February conference. This is refreshing and at odds with another HE organisation, Linking London, a partnership of London-based universities and colleges, whose executive director made it clear that they had no intentions to work with organisations such as mine for the foreseeable future. Ironic really, given one of its aims is widening participation.

From 2016/17 onwards, The College would be participating in the DLHE and NSS surveys. I arrange for the head of administration to visit a university with me to see how they administer the surveys. My ex-colleagues were generous in sharing tips to promote good response rates.

I also contact Independent HE (IHE) to discuss potential membership. I had met the chief executive at previous events so am surprised that it takes a while for them to respond. So, I approach GuildHE as it has some AP members as well as smaller universities.

The month ends with me arranging a visit for a DVC from a northern university who would like to develop an international foundation year in London using our premises and tutors. I also submit a short article about the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and APs to the Westminster Higher Education forum keynote seminar which is accepted. *It is beginning to annoy me that these discussions about the future of HE only consider what I call 'mainstream HE' and not APs or HE in FE, so I've started on a one-person crusade to call it out! (28/11/16)*

New Year, a new tack, and new opportunities?

The MD instructs me not to contact potential partners as he has asked HH for more introductions to senior university staff. The first result of this initiative is the visit of the VC of TUSC. The MD asks how we should address him, as he had several pre-nominal titles, and whether we should buy him flowers or a gift. I explain the normal protocol for such a visit which appears to go well. The VC seems excited about working with The College. I express concerns to SMT that the university does not currently offer awards in most of our subject areas, so it is likely to be validated provision. The university, however, has less students than The College and is relatively new to academic partnerships, which might give us more power compared to BUBC.

Pushing at the boundaries

In late-February, I receive an email from the VC of TUSC who confirms that the university would like to progress an academic partnership with The College.

On 22nd February, I attend an Inside Government conference on effectively regulating HE. All the speakers are from the university sector yet there are FE and AP representatives within the audience.

During a breaktime, I was excited to get to talk to a high-profile speaker who has written several books about higher education. His disdain of for-profit APs was evident. 'I can just about cope with not-for-profit private organisations delivering HE', he asserted. As we discussed further, he was surprised to learn that universities charge for the approval process and that most APs were subject to VAT. He did concede that that APs were completely reliant on the willingness of universities to validate programmes and that the universities held all the power. Some of the other speakers made derogatory remarks about APs during their talks (...). (23/02/17)

On my return to the office, I send an email complaining about bias against APs at an event promoted as 'UK HE' and note there were no speakers representing HE in FE or AP/challenger institutions. The conference focused solely on universities:

(...) there were a number of comments made about the threat of alternative providers/challenger institutions and I felt that this was not challenged.

We need robust debate and discussion between both sectors, not pander to the scaremongering that I heard on occasions. One speaker made a derogatory comment about an Alternative Provider and got a cheap laugh when he ended the sentence 'until they were discredited' and a delegate from another university made a statement about Alternative Providers taking significant market share from universities through undercutting and poor quality. The truth is somewhat different. Most alternative providers are very small, many are specialist. Most take students that would never consider or get into university. There are less than a dozen large providers that might nibble away at the market share of some established institutions, but only if those institutions allow them a foothold. (23/02/17)

I offer to talk at a future event.

Two hours later, I receive an email acknowledging that this had been overlooked and promising to consider APs in the future. The following year, I am invited to speak at the event. I also respond to a LinkedIn discussion insulting private universities and make a comment to the public forum of a *Guardian* news article entitled 'who's afraid of private universities?' (2017).

I work in the Alternative Provider sector and I agree with those who note that there needs to be strict controls to protect the student interest and that is happening more and more (and rightly so). But what other industry requires a new entrant to have to rely on existing providers to allow them into the marketplace (through validated or franchise degrees)? The established university benefits financially, calls the shots and can decide to withdraw at any time. That surely is one barrier to entry too far. (22/02/17)

A few days later, I receive an invitation to attend the HEFCE AP Engagement Conference. I reply offering to speak about the AP sector, particularly about validation processes and relationships between HE partners.

Dear ***

I'm sure you've got plenty of ideas for workshops and speakers, but I thought I would drop you a line, just in case you have a gap. I've now spent a year in the AP sector, having worked in the university sector at AD/Deputy Dean level for a good number of years. I'm currently undertaking research on validation processes and AP/HE partnerships and would be happy to talk about something along these lines in a seminar/workshop environment if you wish. Having spent many years chairing validation events at university, I've found it very interesting being on the other side of the table! (27/2/17)

The following day, to my surprise, I'm asked to present at the HEFCE conference. The theme is 'Building Networks' and I will be presenting alongside the CEOs of GuildHE and IHE. Perhaps I'm learning from my colleagues to seize opportunities as they arise.

Marching forward

In March, HH introduces two more potential partners – SUST and SUSC. Both institutions have new business schools and are seeking to develop student numbers and partnerships. The College has more business students than either university but that does not mean we have more power. HH articulates SUST's process for approving a new partner and the initial information they require. It all looks appropriate. The VC and DVC are excited about developing the partnership and HH notes that *'Some universities are quite rigid about following a linear process, but if any institution is going to be willing to find a critical path to achieving this quickly, I imagine it will be SUST, so anything we can provide upfront will be very helpful indeed'* (1/3/17). This sounds promising and based on my own knowledge of the institution, it doesn't surprise me.

However, having looked at the undergraduate provision of SUST there is little that we could piggyback onto in terms of franchise provision (...) so we will have to design programmes for validated provision. This is much harder given I've no academic staff who have designed courses before – they have only

taught set HND programmes which comes with teaching materials which they can augment. (3/3/17)

I express my concerns to HH especially given the timescales. He responds:

'Hi,

Thanks for your feedback; it's very helpful.

Fortunately, SUST are very hungry for rapid growth and are unusually dynamic in their management. Also, the VC is leading their new BS herself, so if a way can be found to work around the very real issues you raise, then they can probably do that faster than an institution offering an existing portfolio of traditional business programmes taking us through their formal committee processes.

*If the validation route were taken, then I'm sure they'd offer to work closely with the College faculty to put a programme together in short order. Some joint brainstorming and creative thinking will be required on Tuesday, but SUST pride themselves on that, so it will be a joint effort to work this out'.
(3/3/17)*

I am informed that the DVC of SUSC wants to visit our Central London campus. The product offering appears to be a little restricted – they can only offer a business programme with a travel and tourism pathway. They have no H&SC provision. The university has already expressed concerns about being able to approve a full 3-year provision at The College for a September start. This may be an honest and prudent statement or an indicator of the bureaucracy of the institution – time will tell.

I'm now juggling three universities.

To gift or not to gift...

On several occasions I have to guide my colleagues about business etiquette. It started with the visit of the VC of TUSC. Then, as I prepare for the visit of a local MP, the MD insists that I present him with a gift – a £200 pen. I try to explain that the MP would not be able to accept the gift, and this might embarrass him, but the MD is insistent. Feeling uncomfortable about being the person to present this gift, I ring the

MP's constituency office to ask their advice and they confirm my position. Fortunately, the MD acquiesces but still does not understand why it would have been inappropriate.

A couple of weeks later, when discussing the opening of a new building, I write an email to try to express why, on this occasion, it is appropriate to present gifts. Such cultural nuances must be difficult to pick up for outsiders.

Dear all,

Further to our conversation last week...

It is customary to present a small gift to all attendees to commemorate the occasion – in my last place, we gave everyone a hardback notebook with a pen attached ...These were very well received by everyone...

In addition, this is one occasion where we can present the speaker with a gift – again at the universities I worked at, they tended to give something that students had made – e.g. glassware or a commissioned painting/print. We may need to be a little creative on this one – with a woman, it's easy – a bouquet of flowers will do fine – but men are more difficult. It should be a corporate gift if possible, so we may need a bit of lead time to get something.

I would welcome your suggestions. (6/3/27)

The following month, while discussing the opening of the new building, another member of SMT asks when we should sing the National Anthem and suggests that we invite our QAA reviewers to the event. I explain that neither is appropriate and that QAA reviewers must remain impartial.

While I am working with my contact at TUSC, relationships with the new universities are still being managed by the MD and HH. I regularly receive emails requesting further details but have not yet had direct conversations with university staff. The senior contact at TUSC has not worked on collaborative partnerships before – he is a research professor responsible for income generation – and hence, there are delays as he relays information requests to me.

What a tangled web we weave...

On 8th March, I attend a workshop on transnational education partnerships with another member of SMT who finds himself in a difficult position. Sitting at the same table are attendees from TUSC and SUST. Both institutions might now know that we are working with the other. I'm not sure how that will affect our relationships with them. Universities aren't used to competing for partnerships.

The MD sends a series of emails. Clearly, he is smitten by SUST and wants to ditch TUSC. I go to talk to him – it's too early to make a judgement and I don't want to end up with no partners for a second time. We must play the game.

As we start to build relationships with these three universities, the MD and SMT struggle to understand the differences between franchised and validated provision and implications of both. Due to competition in the London region, the MD wants to maintain a £6,250 fee for top-up provision rather than the higher fees that universities charge. This is usually achieved via validated provision which means The College would design the courses and possibly regulations. The student numbers would be attributed to The College. While universities currently do not have SNC, APs do, so we might have to recruit less HND students to accommodate the level-6 students, resulting in lower overall income over time. If we want DAPs, validated provision might also help our case. Franchise provision means that The College delivers an existing university programme, usually at the higher fee rate but the students would ordinarily be enrolled and registered with the university. Thus, franchise provision would be preferable for academic reasons, income for the college, and growing overall student numbers but would be less helpful for DAPs application. The MD does not want to charge the higher fee level and some universities, especially, SUST, do not want College students registered with the university as it might affect their NSS and DLHE statistics, so validated provision would be the better option. Also, The College would have more control over admissions and assessment with validated provision. However, I do not have the staff to design new courses so quickly. Ultimately, it's down to the MD and the university to decide.

Other members of SMT want to forecast high numbers... expecting to take share from other top-up providers. From my experience as AD, I would often

reduce student number projections from prospective partners by a factor of 5 or even 10 to get to a realistic number. My own preference therefore is to agree to lower student numbers that we know we can hit and then to 'delight' our partner if we get more demand. I've never known a university not to accept higher student numbers provided there is no additional workload for academic staff. It also means we can ensure that the financials add up with lower numbers. My colleagues think that overregging numbers will put them in a better position with the partners and we'll deal with the impact of any shortfall later. I think it demonstrates that we don't know our business.

(13/3/17)

It's a fundamental disjunct that is never fully resolved as my personal habitus collides with that of my colleagues.

The cost of approval events and fees to universities

Costs for the approval process vary significantly by institution. The fee per student seems high in some cases so I decide to make enquiries with colleagues at other universities. I update SMT:

Some universities do not charge for institutional and programme approvals. Others ask for a nominal amount, say £5,000. One charges £24,000 for international partnership approval. While some universities still had partners who might only pay a few hundred pounds for each student, they acknowledged that this was far too low. The minimum 'reasonable' payment per student/level was around £700-800 with the highest being £1,800 for a flying faculty-type arrangement. Given the number of students we are forecasting and that we are based in the UK, I recommended that we should not be expecting to pay more than £1,200 per student and that we could negotiate for high student numbers. (9/3/17)

The MD decides to offer SUST £1800 per student/level as he wants to ensure that the partnership is attractive to the university. I believe this is too generous and suggest a sliding scale based on student numbers. Given that private providers also

pay VAT and agents' fees of between 10-20%, there is little left of a £6,250 student fee. SUSC's fee structure is less onerous, it's £1000 for each for the first 80 students per annum and £600 for additional students. There is no mention of approval fees and I choose not to ask.

The registrar of TUSC contacts me regarding validation fees. It's £6500 for institutional validation and £5,000 for each degree/top-up. They charge 15% per student – so £937 on £6,250.

I also discover that the TUSC business award has not yet been approved internally, so The College would be delivering the top-up franchise provision three years before the university does. This would mean that my academic colleagues would have to design the course and module handbooks as well as all the learning materials which might prove challenging. Given this university can only work with The College on one subject area and how slow and clunky their systems are, they've not got much to offer us, but we need to keep them in the running as it will be better than nothing. I'm informed that institutional approval is planned for week commencing 15th May with franchise approval taking place 6 weeks later. I've 2 months to get ready for institutional approval and a similar time to recruit students to the top-up award. (15/3/17)

It's not just universities that have power...

I feel overwhelmed with the amount of information the three universities require, often at short notice. I am developing 'policies' at speed to meet their requirements. Reflecting on our recent success setting up a campus in the UAE, I note it's *ironic that it seems easier to set up a branch in a foreign country than to get a top-up from a university in the UK* (14/3/17). I also complete the application for IHE membership which is submitted in late-March 2017. On the same day I receive an email from GuildHE. They thank me for the application, but we are advised that:

'All of our members offer degrees, either their own or through a validation arrangement with a university. For this reason, the Board decided they couldn't accept The College in membership at the moment. The

Board...would be happy to consider an application once...students are enrolled on degree programmes'. (22/3/17)

I suggest to SMT that we reconsider applying once we have students on level-6 awards. However, the MD decides not to do so having not appreciated the rejection. My response to GuildHE is rather tongue in cheek:

Thank you for your letter and explanation. As you note, whilst not a surprise, it is disappointing as the outcome clearly intimates that members consider 'higher education' to only equate to level-6 and above. However, I realise I will not win that particular argument!

We hope to be delivering full degrees and top-up awards from September. Please could you confirm when it would be appropriate to reapply? Also, was there any feedback on the content of the application itself which we can address when we next apply?... (28/3/17)

I receive a swift response:

'(...) it's not that we consider higher education only equates to level-6 and above. (...) It was about a present lack of fit with the rest of our membership – that The College would have been the only member who didn't offer level-6'. (29/3/17)

I receive no feedback on the content of the application itself.

On 30th March, I receive details of the next stages of the process with SUST which includes a partnership grid identifying who does what.

Once the business case is approved by the VC (...) the materials can be published as 'subject to validation'. However (...) the university does not have any relevant courses that are currently being delivered at level-6. So, unless we are prepared to wait until 2020/21, we must design the programmes from scratch – whether they be validated or franchised. Whilst we only need to develop level-6 for September 17 delivery, in my mind it would make sense pedagogically to develop the underpinning levels 3-5 at the same time if we have capacity. It is unusual for a partner to develop franchised programmes for a university partner, and I seek assurances that the university would not

offer the programme we've designed to other partnerships. The proposed timescales from the university are for the VC to sign off the business case by the end of April with Heads of Terms signed in the first week of May after which The College can recruit, subject to validation in July. It's tight! (30/3/17)

The following day, I leave London at 5.30am to drive to TUSC to attend a conference as a guest of the VC who takes time out of his schedule to welcome me.

The issue about validation and franchise continues to rumble as we seek a solution the MD will agree to within the constraints of what the universities can offer.

Internal delays

The amount of paperwork required by the three universities and IHE is significant. I worry that I will accidentally send an email to the wrong institution. Indeed, one of my colleagues did, but it went unnoticed by the university. Many of the delays experienced are due to internal issues rather than the universities themselves – I am reliant on the SMT and MD to agree to particular action and provide me with information, but we rarely meet and when SMT meetings are planned, no one attends. The institutional habitus regularly frustrates me. I must have been in a foul mood when I responded to HH's request for an update on materials due to be sent to SUSC.

Further to your query re SUSC, below is most of an email I sent to colleagues on Tuesday evening when it became evident that we were not going to have the planned SMT meeting which would have helped move things forward.

I have not had any response regarding my intentions or requests yet, so when I get back in the office around 7-ish tonight, I'll send off the SUSC documentation – I cannot wait any longer and I think I've got everything apart from agreement that it can be sent.

My concern is that I do not have access to updated policies etc (...) to move the other two institutions forward and I shall be knocking on doors tomorrow to tease the information out from DQ and get agreement from SMT. (6/4/17)

This is an ongoing issue. Where timely decisions are not made by The College's SMT, or are changed by the MD, it creates tension in my role as the middleman between the universities and The College.

More delays

While the VC of TUSC seems enthusiastic about the proposed partnership, it becomes evident that the institution has little experience of working with collaborative academic partnerships. Compared to the other universities, they are also slow to respond, and I have more than 5 university staff contacting me regarding issues which creates confusion. Accidentally, I discover that the university's business programme was not approved at the internal validation meeting and requires major revisions for submission on 7th June. The bad news continues with the following email from the VC:

'As a result of the validation event and approval timescale, it is not now planned for the full BA Business to commence delivery at TUSC until September 2018. Also, we are aware of the short timescales concerned with The College Institutional Approval event in May; and the subsequent ratification of the recommendation from that event; and then for the validation event for the Business programme.

Considering the work required and interdependencies involved, we are now proposing that the validation for The College will initially focus on the BA Business Top-up alone for delivery in academic year 2017-18. We feel that the work involved in approving the 3-year BA Business is not achievable with confidence in this timescale, as this is an entirely new programme not yet running at TUSC. However we would hope to build that into the plan for development (potentially with other Top-up awards) with The College during 2017-18, following the Institutional Approval.

I do realise that this represents a change from the timescales we had discussed, which may be disappointing for The College. However our view is that we must work with yourselves on the quality and integrity of the partnership, rather than the risk of trying to achieve too much in haste. Should

you have any concerns about this, please do raise them with myself or with the academic registrar, as appropriate and we will do our best to address them'. (7/4/17)

The College has no power to debate this, and it is uncertain that the BA Business programme will be validated in time. Additionally, despite being franchise provision, The College will have to develop all materials from scratch and teach the level-6 programme several years before the university itself does. I reply:

Thank you for letting me know. While it is disappointing in terms of The College planning forecasts, I appreciate that the course needs to be right, and this takes precedence.

I will not have the opportunity to discuss this with the SMT until later in the month, due to the Easter break but will continue to work on providing the institutional approval documentation in the meantime.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help to support the course development team, given my past experience of designing and validating business course. (10/4/17)

The following day, I meet with the Dean of SUSC's business school and a principal lecturer who will be my main point of contact during the approval process (...) I felt in my element. The next day, the Dean confirms that they would like to enter into a 'directly-funded franchise agreement' which would enable The College to both retain the student numbers and charge lower fees. Importantly, from my perspective, we would not have to design the programme. I receive details of the level-6 business management programme and assessment map. Initially, they can only offer the business management award and a tourism route through it, but it's a start. Already, this is more than I have received from the two other institutions. The same day, I confirm with SUST that the MD has requested

(...) the Business award to be franchised (i.e. SUST students) across all levels – 0,1 and 3 (...) The fee will be around £9000. The Travel and Tourism award which will initially be delivered as a top-up/level-6 in September 2017, will be validated provision (...) at the circa £6000 fee point and form part of The College's student number control. (12/3/17)

This is all rather complicated, and, in my opinion, the logic is flawed but I fail to convince my manager of my concerns.

My presentation is well received at the HEFCE conference. I had control of the room, despite being alongside heavyweights from IHE and GuildHE. I was even asked by one of the participants if I did consultancy to help APs get academic partners!

This morning as I reflected (...) I realised I am at my happiest when I'm out of the office or engaging with external agencies (...) because I am accepted by external people as having something to say that's worthwhile, that I bring something to the table. They understand me on so many levels and they value me and give feedback. They treat me 'normally'. I am not quizzed about my motives, I am trusted (...) I am valued as an expert or a colleague. I am able to be me and not feel like I am a freak. (26/4/17)

Even after almost a year, my habitus is still embedded in mainstream HE.

I continue to receive emails from TUSC asking for extra evidence – it seems like they are making it up as they go along. Due diligence still has not been completed. The university wants assurance that The College's financial position has not changed and asks us for a 5-year plan. We provide what we have and our 3-year plan.

On 2nd May, I am advised by the Dean at TUSC that as they don't have the capacity to develop course materials over the summer; they expect The College to get them ready for September 2017. There is also the first hint that they are concerned about hitting deadlines for September 2017 delivery of the top-up. In a later email, he notes:

'We are very aware that the timescales for completion of the institutional and programme approvals, and related interdependencies with processes at TUSC such as confirmation by Senate, are extremely tight if they are to enable a September 2017 start for delivery. We will continue to work with yourselves towards this target, but we do have to be aware that there is a risk of delay from, for example, conditions being raised in either of the approval events. If this were the case, we would propose delivery from February 2018 as a fall-back option'. (3/5/17)

A delay of one semester would reduce The College's turnover by around £1m.

It is clear to me that TUSC must be a back-up institution only. It can only offer a top-up for one subject area which has not yet been validated and they cannot confirm a September 2017 start. Additionally, my staff would have to develop the modules with limited academic support from the university. It seems hardly worthwhile continuing.

By mid-May, my frustrations with TUSC are beginning to show when they advise that the programme approval at Senate level will take place in late-July. This is too late for meaningful recruitment. Institutional approval is due to take place on 26th May and I have still not seen what the final programme will look like. The university doesn't realise we have other options. Eventually, I am informed that once Senate approves the institution, The College will be able to advertise the programme (which we have not seen) subject to approval after 7th June.

In contrast, my contact in SUST keeps me informed of progress at each stage, although I've yet to have discussions with an academic. However, the schedule of activity has slipped. *The university seems to have very good processes and are extremely enthusiastic about the partnership but are rather slow to progress the relationship as it relies on one point of contact.* (22/5/17)

Meanwhile, I am managing visits from all 3 institutions for site approval and meetings. Ensuring that these events do not overlap, and that staff are briefed about the purpose of the meetings is difficult logistically. Moreover, The College is preparing for the annual Higher Education Review later in the month. Unlike universities, which have reviews every four or five years, APs, at this point were required to undertake a yearly review.

Our first institutional approval event also looms.

On the 18th of May, I received an email from the VC TUSC wishing The College well.

'Although I have kept my distance, I am aware of the huge efforts made by your staff and TUSC staff in putting together the paperwork in preparation for the event. I really hope it goes well. We are sending down a strong team and we all want it to work. I hope also that your Higher Education Review visit went well. I will be thinking of you on Friday and hope for a positive outcome.'
(18/5/17)

We still do not know who will be attending the event from the university side, apart from the Chair, nor have an agenda or details of who they expect from The College.

The first institutional approval

The institutional approval event with TUSC takes place on May 26th.

The meetings themselves went well (...) The College team were as good as any university team I have fielded at programme approval events. I am really proud of them. Hence, I was extremely disappointed, indeed, annoyed, when we received eight conditions and three recommendations, most of which related to the next stages of the process rather than the institutional approval itself. We also received five commendations. Did I actually grump at the end of the meeting? It was not my finest hour. I am annoyed with the university. I know how these meetings should be run and what are fair and reasonable conditions and yet we were being asked for more than the university itself does. (26/5/17)

I summarise key points for SMT...

Having 'cooled down' over the weekend, I am still of the opinion, that many of these conditions, whilst valid issues, could either have been consolidated into a couple of conditions and/or should have been addressed as part of the process for institutional approval. Similarly, it is unethical that there is a recommendation to share confidential information and, if QAA see this recommendation in the minutes at a later stage, the university may be quizzed about it. I think it shows the lack of experience of TUSC in developing partnerships. I'm sure we can discuss this at a later stage. (30/5/17).

Nevertheless, I start to work on an action plan to address the provisional conditions and recommendations while we wait to be informed of them formally.

No rest for the wicked

The following day my contact at SUST provides me with a time-line.

'Apologies that this is taking longer than usual, it is a complex proposal and so is taking longer than anticipated. You asked for revised timeframes, please see the below...' (31/5/17)

My response:

Thanks for this (...) We will do our utmost to comply with this timeline (...) there is very little wiggle room.

Will someone be able to talk us through the paperwork and requirements/expectations for the programme validation soon so I can get working on it? Also, will you expect The College to conform to SUST progression and attainment/classification regulations and other policies? If so, could I view these so I can align them to our proposal?

Finally, just for clarification - has due diligence been completed? (31/5/17).

I am concerned that we are about to enter June and I have no idea what the programmes will look like or whether due diligence has been completed.

The same day, I receive an email from the VC of TUSC advising of yet another delay:

'I hope that the meeting on Friday was not too stressful; I understand that the panel identified a number of conditions and recommendations.

I am just writing to let you know that the formal decision on the institutional approval will be taken by Senate at its meeting on 27th July. I know that there was some discussion as to whether it could come to the June meeting, but this is next week, and it is impossible to get the reports written and disseminated in time for the members of Senate to have an informed discussion. As chair of Senate I would not be happy with a decision of this importance being taken without reviewing all the paperwork.

By having the discussion in July it allows us to consider both the institutional approval event and the programme event at the same meeting. It is in the interests of both institutions to ensure that we are acting in accordance with best practice.

I really do hope we can make the proposed partnership work and apologise if this is not what you were expecting at this stage.

With best wishes' (31/5/17)

Clearly, the VC and the partnership team were not aware of their own regulations on collaborative academic partnerships. This means that the formal approval of the partnership and programme cannot take place until after the July 27th Senate meeting, which again, gives little time to meet any conditions set. I don't understand why the team did not plan for the institutional approval event to be earlier so that the paperwork could get to Senate in time.

SUST advise that due diligence hasn't been completed. We agree to the franchise/validated mix of provision, but I note that if the university expects The College to design and develop a programme and materials (which is usually validated provision), then we should share the intellectual property for the award and confirm that the university would not deliver it elsewhere. I note that we would expect the university to take our developmental costs into consideration when determining fees to the university. I again ask for a link tutor to work with. I am concerned that it will be a huge task to develop two degrees from scratch in such a short time. The university confirms that any agreement will '(...) *make it clear that the course IP is jointly owned and therefore we wouldn't use it with other partners (...) We will be able to confirm the fees payable to SUST as soon as the business case is signed off*' (8/6/17). That's a lot of faith from our perspective at such a late stage. I ask again about being assigned a link tutor so we can start designing a course. We cannot go much further until we know the basic structural requirements of the university.

TUSC staff start to come out of the woodwork. I have to work with one administrator to progress the conditions for institutional approval, another for the programme approval event on 10th July and three other administrators for other activities, including one supporting the academic school. I have yet to talk to any academics about the actual programmes.

Today, I finally receive a copy of the newly validated programme specification from TUSC. Two weeks after the institutional approval event. I don't understand how universities can be so arrogant to assume we will naturally be happy to take whatever course they have to offer (8/6/17).

There are also more delays with SUST – we were expecting the business case decision on 9th June but have not received notification. My contact is on leave for a week. Apparently, there's been a delay with references, but she notes that *'this is a high priority for us all, so I will be touching base with my colleagues while I'm away'* (9/6/17). She agrees to send the business case to the VC with references to follow.

In the meantime, SUSC confirms that

'All our internal stakeholders have now approved the outline plan which the VC will now be invited to sign. So I should be able to confirm formal approval soon. I have instructed our lawyer to draft the partnership agreement (...) We are very excited about this and look forward to working with you. Would an approval event in mid-July be OK with you?' (15/6/17)

It looks as if SUSC is nudging ahead. The VC signs the outline plan on 20th June, and I start to push for dates for the submission of documentation and the approval event(s). We also need to forward a letter of intent to HEFCE which outlines that the university is seeking to permit The College to deliver named awards and levels from September 2017. After prompting them, I am given access to some course documentation – programme descriptor and course structure and level handbooks.

Two days later, I hear from SUST that they have the VC approval and the Heads of Terms have been drafted. Once this is signed, courses can be marketed as 'subject to approval' though we've not even discussed course design. The approval events are likely to be 27/28th July. I have also been allocated link tutors for business and travel and tourism, the former is on holiday from 5th July, which gives me two weeks to work on a course design with him. The following week, I note:

I've had some good conversations with the two academic staff at SUST prior to visiting them – they seem creative and ready to work on the level-6 modules, although concerned about the lack of time. The travel and tourism link (T&T) had already sent me a draft outline of a programme design – he is very eager to get a T&T award on the books as he's part of a more general department. Just to complicate things, the Business award is franchise and the T&T one is now validated (...) Hence, it was rather surreal to find out that the T&T academic had done a lot of thinking for a validated award, which in theory is what I should be designing. Bless him! (26/6/17).

We arrange for me and two colleagues to spend two days on campus the following week to work on the curriculum for the two programmes. Meanwhile, I receive details of an indicative timeline from submission of documents through to students enrolling on the course.

One down? and it's neck and neck between the other two

A visit to TUSC on 27th June proves frustrating. The academic staff are obviously not behind this partnership. However, I have excellent conversations with the quality and admissions teams. My visit overlaps with an email from the registrar who advises that senate are concerned that there is not enough time to approve everything. The email arrives on my phone whilst I am still on campus, yet no one mentions it during my visit. I try to be circumspect in my response which I send on my journey home but doubt we will continue with the partnership given what's on offer and our experience to date.

Thank you for your letter outlining the proposal to delay the programme validation for the BA (Hons) Business top-up award. While it is disappointing (...) I suspect that this was inevitable once we realised that the Senate approval would not take place until the end of July, thus restricting our ability to recruit students.

Given that the launch of the level-4 start was already postponed to September 2018 earlier in the year, I should be grateful if you would confirm that the validation would be extended to include the full BA (Hons) Business award and that we would be able to launch level-4 in addition to level-6 for September 2018.

We shall continue to work with TUSC colleagues in the meantime to meet the conditions set at the Institutional Approval event by September, albeit at a less frenetic pace (...) (27/6/17)

I cancel the validation event planned for 4th July.

When the draft Heads of Terms arrive from SUST, SMT has serious concerns, particularly that the partnership can be dissolved if The College does not achieve

certain NSS and DLHE scores. The top-up business students will be university students (as franchise students) and SUST are concerned the partnership may hurt their league table rankings and TEF rating. As this is the first year our students have taken both surveys, we cannot guarantee these scores. Universities have had over 10 years to achieve high NSS scores and few achieved over 80% on their first attempt. The MD sends the following email.

'Many thanks for forwarding us the Heads of Terms document and for your commitment and support to make our partnership stronger and most effective.

It appears that from the draft Heads of Terms that SUST is stringent in terms of its expectations of the partnership in comparison with other provisions (franchise and validation) in the sector. We expect the agreement to be more collaborative, mutual, and less restrictive. We can confidently assure you that we will ensure strict compliance to university standards and expectations....

We would like to discuss the draft Heads of Terms and our comments in person to ensure that we amicably agree on various terms in timely fashion. We are happy to meet at SUST at the earliest possible date of mutual convenience, preferably early next week'. (28/6/17)

Meanwhile, I enjoy working with the two academic staff to design the new programmes. We agree to develop the whole 3-year programmes in terms of level and module learning outcomes and outline module titles but focus on module specifications for the level-6 top-up for immediate validation and approval. We can then be confident that we have designed a course from the bottom up and that the level-6 makes sense both as a top-up and the final year of the planned 3-year programme. This is the only way we can get the paperwork ready for 12th July – less than two weeks away. Somehow, we manage to meet the deadline. We've all sacrificed annual leave to complete the documentation – it's a bit ropey in places but should get through with a few conditions. The SUST academic staff have been outstanding.

The legal documents are slowing the process down for both SUST and SUSC. The power seems to be entirely with the universities. The Dean at SUSC notes that:

'We have not included any restraint clauses in the agreement, on the advice of our lawyer, however we can reassure you that it is not our intention to offer these courses through any other London providers, or to solicit any of your staff. We hope that this collaboration will grow and develop into a strong and meaningful partnership that is mutually beneficial for staff and students'.
(5/7/17).

Hence, we could find the same awards delivered by another institution next to one of our campuses. We are expected to trust the university, although they do not reciprocate.

On a positive note, I receive an email from HEFCE asking me to be an AP representative on their NSS subgroup – as a result of the conversation I had with the head of the HEFCE AP team nearly a year ago.

The next couple of weeks go by in a fog – my 'team' are responding to enquiries from both universities (SUST and SUSC) non-stop. There are few economies of scale as each university require information in different formats – even staff CVs must be reformatted differently for each institution. Given that I only have a team of one other person, much of this responsibility falls to me, unlike at a university.

We have not received an agenda for the approval event with SUSC (déjà vu). While preparing for this event, I continue to work towards the SUST approval event for the following week. We cannot drop this partnership until we know the outcome of the approval event with SUSC. I am shattered!

The MD agrees to sign the agreement with SUSC and the Dean SUSC thanks me for my help. She advises that this should be a straightforward approval event and that we are already developing good working relations.

'I am sure the approval event will go well - I expect there will be a few conditions and recommendations as otherwise the panel will feel they haven't been rigorous enough! Seriously, this is a very good and supportive panel'.
(19/17/17).

She identifies two academic members of staff who will support us during the event, including a new link tutor who seems pleasant, but has no experience of collaborative academic partnerships. I feel that I am acting as a mentor.

There is a positive vibe in The College as we work towards the approval event with SUSC on 21st July. This gives us more confidence to push back on the contractual issues we have with SUST. SMT discuss contractual issues on the evening of 19th July and following legal advice, tell the DVC that we cannot sign the Heads of Terms due to the restrictive nature of some of the metrics but that we intend to continue to work towards institutional approval with a view to further discussion.

Exiting gracefully

Universities are not used to being rejected – they are the rejectors. So, I have been considering how (...) we can bow out gracefully. Partnerships seldom last for ever and one never knows when we might need the support of another HEI. I have enough reason to pull away from TUSC as they neither have the product offering that we require nor can offer a timely solution. I now have a good reason for SUST. It's sad, as I really enjoyed working with the team there, but I cannot put The College at risk of not meeting the metrics. Had the MD been prepared to go for validated provision initially, then this would not have been an issue as the students would be part of The College's SNC (...) (21/7/17).

21st July was a bittersweet day. The partnership with SUSC was approved, subject to conditions and recommendations, but it also marked the ending of the partnership with SUST. The approval event had a different atmosphere to that of TUSC. The two university academics were extremely helpful. Most of the conditions were about the next steps such as student recruitment, preparing course and module handbooks, induction materials, recruiting staff and generally agreeing which policies are followed (College's or university's). There is much to do between now and mid-September. I can now start recruiting staff so we can deliver the programmes. It's a relief to know that we have two top-up awards that starting in September, and we can deliver the full three-year awards from Semester 2.

However, later that evening, the DVC at SUST emails the FD to terminate the proposed partnership:

'Many thanks for the email and for your candour. It's prompted a very useful internal discussion here.

As you know, measures such as NSS, DLHE and non-continuation are the primary indicators of the quality of our students' experience.

All of these metrics are absolutely mission critical to Falmouth (and at the core of our gold TEF rating). I should say, too, that all of our current partners grant us exclusivity – another non-negotiable from our perspective.

The concerns that you (and your advisers) have reiterated over these measures/non-negotiables is, I'm afraid, suggestive of a deeper incompatibility.

Such that it would be imprudent to commit further resource to the project (I appreciate that the event is less than a week away, but it represents another significant slice of staff time).

I have therefore decided that we will not be progressing the proposed partnership with The College any further.

But I do want to thank you and the team for the contributions you've made to the development process up to this point.

And I wish The College the very best for the future.

Best regards,' (21/7/17)

Returning to work on Monday morning, I email my academic contacts at TUST to thank them for their support. They achieved so much in such a short time.

I was saddened to hear that the programme approval event is not going ahead this week due to contractual issues rather than academic. I know you both put so much into the design of two awards at a breakneck speed and I appreciate all the work this required, especially given you both gave up annual leave to help complete the documentation. I do hope you will be able to use some of the material you have designed for other purposes.

Thank you so much for your support and I hope our paths cross again in the future. It has been a pleasure to work with you. (25/7/17).

Both the lead academics get back to me with positive responses. I'm genuinely saddened that it was only due to contractual issues that this partnership was terminated. Ironically, when the DLHE and NSS results are published, The College surpasses the university results and hence would have been a positive contributor to their statistics.

I discuss with SMT when we should contact TUSC about our new partnership. They will find out as soon as we start to promote the programmes and I believe it is important that they hear from us directly. Fortunately, I receive a timely email updating me on the outcome of the Senate meeting which enables me to politely terminate the partnership.

'TUSC's Senior Leadership Team met last week to discuss the proposal to launch the full BA (hons) Business Award at level-4 as well as the top up at level-6 in September 2018. At this point, we are not able to approve the launch of Level-4 in September 2018. We would, however, welcome a proposal for a future date.

We understand this may be disappointing; however, if, in the meantime, you require any help and support to complete the Institutional Approval conditions and recommendations or to prepare for the Programme Approval event, please do contact myself (...)' (25/7/17).

I respond that evening to the VC:

Following the decision to delay the programme approval event for the BA Business top-up until the next academic year and the most recent news that we would be unable to offer level-4 in 2018, The College's SMT has decided to proceed with another institution which has been able to offer provision for September 2017 start.

Hence, I wish to confirm that The College is unlikely to be progressing with the level-6 BA Business top-up award for September 18 (...)

Please thank, on my behalf (...) all those involved in the institutional approval for their help and support over the past few months. I have appreciated the opportunity to work with colleagues and to be more aware of the ethos behind the institution and its provision. I would also like to thank you personally for

always taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet me when I was on campus. (25/7/17)

The following day, the VC responds.

'Thank you for informing me of the decision by your SMT not to proceed with a partnership with TUSC. I am of course very disappointed at this as I had hoped that we could develop a mature partnership spanning several areas of activity. I realise that you and your colleagues have put in a tremendous effort and I can assure that TUSC staff were totally committed to making this work. I am sorry that the timescale did not suit your purposes but fully understand the ambitions you have and the desire to move ahead sooner rather than later. I cannot comment on our processes but am only sorry that the timings did not work for both institutions. I wish you well with your relationship with another provider.

(...) I wish you every success in future and will watch the progress of The College with great interest. Thank you for considering TUSC in the first place.

With best wishes.' (26/7/17)

Getting ready for a new start

Work with SUSC begins in earnest. We receive HEFCE course designation within three days of applying so the Student Loans Company should permit the courses to be promoted on the Student Finance England portal.

My research focuses on my experience of developing the relationships between The College and universities, but it would be wrong for me not to acknowledge the difficulties within The College itself.

There are many obstacles in making this partnership work, ironically most from The College itself, as SMT colleagues struggle to permit another party to have access to their data and make decisions. I am constantly reminding the marketing team that all publicity must be approved by the university, but they do not understand why. The SMT does not want the university to be involved in admissions, probably because they don't want to disclose details of our agents. I spend considerable time

explaining why the university is responsible for certain elements, but colleagues perceive me to be on the university's side. While I try to share The College's requests with the university, I understand why we cannot get what my colleagues want and try to find some middle ground – even when it might affect how the university perceives me.

I set up a weekly internal meeting called the 'Degree Operational Group' to discuss how to manage student recruitment, marketing, student administration, induction, and library resources, and ensure all the conditions are met. The College is not used to having regular minuted meetings and it does not go down well. There are strong personalities who want to have the last word and do not understand why we must conform to what the university wants. One director does not see why we need to purchase additional resources for the library, yet this is a condition of the partnership. No matter how hard I push, the director leaves it to the last minute to purchase minimal resources. Similarly, I am unable to recruit staff to the HE teaching team as some directors have strong views about previous employment and other issues. It is September before I can make job offers.

One evening, after a spat with one director, I note:

I feel drained and despondent about all this internal conflict... I am further behind now that I was a fortnight ago because one person keeps sticking his oar in (...) I wouldn't mind if his concerns were valid, but he continually changes his mind, and his comments add little or no value. He just wants to have the last word and demonstrate his power to veto. I could cry. (30/8/17).

I receive any validation that I need through the external contacts I have. The same day, at one of my lowest points, I receive an email from QAA asking if I would be willing to represent APs in a QAA film. It raises my spirits and although I hate seeing myself on film, I accept. Within one year in the AP sector, I am already getting an external reputation. One of my academic colleagues at SUSC notes that '*you know our regulations better than we do*' as we seek to join the gaps between the two institutions.

The deadline for meeting the approval event conditions is 7th September. We only receive official notice of the conditions on 15th August. It's tight. Applicants will only get to know if the course is running the week before they are due to start the

programme. I feel so much pressure knowing that we could seriously affect students' futures if we don't get full approval in time.

Because the level-6 programmes were not designed to be top-ups, I map every applicant's HND to levels 4 and 5 learning outcomes. While it is time-consuming, I undertake this exercise rigorously. Within a couple of weeks, I've gained the university's trust – *'you do it better than we do'* – and they accept my word thereafter. My colleague notes that *SUSC have their heart in the right place but are not very organised and lack systems. They have asked us to do things that they don't do (...)* *but they are very willing and are helpful.* (15/8/17).

The 6th September is a pivotal day – it's the deadline for sending the conditions and recommendations to SUSC. At 3.27 pm I send possibly the most important email of my career to the university and heave a sigh of relief.

After over a week without hearing the outcome, I email the Academic Registrar to chase it up as it is affecting our ability to recruit students. The next day, 15th September, I get confirmation of approval and we can inform all applicants.

Four days later I am invited to join the university academic quality standards committee as the partnership representative. I take this as recognition that I have something worthwhile to offer them.

The first students arrive on Monday 22nd September. We have over 100 students registered on two top-up provisions. It's been hard work, but worthwhile to know that these students, the majority of whom are classed as BAME and/or mature, now have an opportunity to gain a degree at an institution close to home.

After nineteen months of daily data collection, I close my diary.

CHAPTER 6

MAKING SENSE OF THE JOURNEY – EVALUATING THE DATA AND IDENTIFICATION OF KEY THEMES

Introduction

To some extent, I had already evaluated my data as I determined what should be included in the previous chapter. I initially sorted the data to create a timeline of events. I then coded the data to Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus, taking note of recurring patterns. The themes and codes used are outlined in Appendix 2. Finally, I identified incidences which best illustrated the key themes and minimised the likeliness of identification of other participants in the research. The following evaluation focuses on themes identified during the research.

I prefer the term 'evaluation' to 'analysis' as autoethnography does not lend itself to positivist criteria. I reflect in more depth on how Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus help make sense of my findings. I also identify emergent themes that I might not have identified or realised as I was in the midst of the events. Like autoethnographic writing itself, this evaluation cannot cover everything so focuses on what I perceived to be important issues or reoccurring experiences.

Following Bourdieu's three-staged methodological approach (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), I first consider the field and demonstrations of power within it. I investigate the role of capital in competing for position within the field and then analyse the habitus of the agents. Finally, I consider other emergent themes.

Field

My research was undertaken in a moment of significant change. The White Paper, published soon after I joined The College stated that:

“New and innovative providers offering high quality higher education continue to face significant and disproportionate challenges to establishing themselves

in the sector. Making it easier for these providers to enter and expand will help drive up teaching standards overall; enhance the life chances of students; drive economic growth; and be a catalyst for social mobility... We will create a level playing field with a single route to entry and risk-based approach to regulation. We will seek to reduce unnecessary barriers to entry..."

(Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2016, p.9).

The AP sector was anticipating great change but had to wait until 2018 for the OfS to publish the new regulatory framework (Office for Students, 2018c). When I joined The College in 2016, it was still necessary for us to find a collaborative academic partner, whilst knowing that change was around the corner. The shifting field was evident as the prospect of DAPs gave The College options, yet also meant that universities might not be interested in establishing new CAPs due to the potential short-term nature of such partnerships. Members of SMT were open with prospective partners about their desire to gain DAPs and eventually university status. Speakers at the IHE conference in November 2017 noted that while there might be regulatory change in the HER bill, it was not a level playing field. For example, with the HER bill enacted, the QAA consulting arm, QAA Enterprises, offered consulting advice for DAPs applications for £54,000 – a significant sum for many APs. The QAA is also responsible for assessing DAPs applications and may charge fees to cover their costs (QAA, 2020).

Following the creation of the OfS, one single register of HE providers was introduced, intended to provide a level playing field. In reality, it created an extra barrier for APs. As of 28 April 2021, some 420 institutions were listed on the register (Office for Students, 2021c) but many APs have still not been successfully registered or have chosen not to apply. Students at these providers do not have access to student loans unless there is a franchise arrangement with another registered institution. Hence, there are still two distinct sectors of higher education, albeit differently defined – those that are registered and those that are not.

The field of English HE is complex. There is a hierarchy alongside significant conformity. University regulations and structures are similar and most provide undergraduate and postgraduate awards in common areas, and focus on face-to-face delivery, although this might change, post-Covid. Few have distinctive delivery

modes. Birkbeck is known for its evening delivery, the Open University and Arden University for online courses. Some newer universities, such as the University of Law, are specialist institutions but even the University of Law has now moved into more generic business provision. Until recently, the AP sector was a distinct subfield of English HE, but there is more overlap with the university sector as some private providers have obtained DAPs or university status. There is also evidence of universities targeting the traditional AP sector through initiatives such as Coventry University London, Dagenham campus, which blurs the boundaries between the two subfields. Universities remain the dominant subfield, dictating the rules of the game, with newer universities conforming to existing norms. Meanwhile, HE conferences repeatedly failed to include APs in discussions and often viewed APs as competitors. The first event I attended on behalf of The College discussed the ‘threat’ of APs. When I began to complain about the negative comments about APs and the lack of AP input into some of these conferences, pushing back at the boundaries of the subfields and the dominant habitus, I was surprised when I was asked to speak at several of them. Linking London was not prepared to consider membership for The College, nor was GuildHE (until we had level-6 provision). However, my social and cultural capital allowed me to influence some organisations, such as HESPA, to consider inviting AP members to a solely university membership. To date, no institution has moved from the university subfield to the AP subfield but there has been movement in the opposite direction and some HE in FE institutions have increased their HE provision, mainly competing with APs.

Bourdieu suggests that the position of the field should be analysed vis-à-vis the field of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It is here that I noticed the most difference between universities and The College as we attempted to negotiate partnership arrangements. To ensure that The College had a partnership for franchise or validated provision, I had to work with several institutions and, even then, it was not guaranteed. Despite often having more business students than universities we were working with, the power imbalance was evident at all stages of the relationship. Universities held power over pricing, timings (and subsequent notifications of approval delays) and contractual arrangements. We had no power over timescales or product offer and there appeared to be no appreciation of the financial impact of any changes on The College. Two universities – BUBC and TUSC – asked for

additional information on several occasions, almost as though they were trying to find a reason to reject us. In every case, the universities moved the goalposts prior to approval events. On several occasions, The College met with delays in receiving course documentation, policies, and details of points of contacts, especially academic contacts. Some universities did not complete due diligence on The College until late on in the relationship. There was also an assumption by all the universities, apart from SUSC, that we were desperate, and would agree to anything.

My frustration was evident when The College was required to go over and above what some universities did themselves. For example, SUSC couldn't provide us with personal tutoring policies or handbooks that we could adapt because they had not developed any themselves but expected The College to produce them. We were not privy to university student data, but SUST and TUSC insisted on seeing our progression and attainment statistics for HND students. Universities held the ultimate power of owning degree awarding powers which The College desperately wanted.

Nevertheless, The College had some power due to its large student cohort and Central London location. The latter proved attractive to institutions that did not want to incur the cost of having their own London campus. The College did possess the power to pull away from negotiations – but we felt we had to be diplomatic in doing so. As I noted, it was easier to set up an overseas campus than get a top-up with a university.

While most APs still rely on offering degrees through franchise or validated provision, if a university chooses not to partner with an AP, then the AP is not able to make progress towards obtaining DAPs or university status. Legislation now provides a route for new entrants to gain university status, but this has not yet been tested. For some institutions, the Open University has been a lifesaver in terms of working with over 40 institutions in the UK (The Open University, no date). It is noticeable though, that the hurdles new entrants face appear to restrict the type of institution that they become – as they replicate the structure, policies, and procedures of established universities. Given that most APs are relatively small, this is difficult as it effectively strangles them in bureaucracy before they start – unless they can pay someone to do it for them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these people tend to come from a university

background – like myself. Identification of the dominant power within the field is evident here.

Prior to undertaking this research, I assumed that the size of The College would be attractive to potential university partners, but this seemed a minor factor in partnership discussions, although we were able to negotiate volume discounts with SUSC due to our large student cohort.

While The College's SMT had a good understanding of the AP sector, their lack of understanding of the English HE field was evident. None had undertaken undergraduate or postgraduate studies in the UK and therefore they were not aware of what a university experience was (*habitus*). This meant they often did not know the rules of the game or pushed at the boundaries, for example, by wanting to conduct due diligence on a university and inviting high-profile speakers to The College.

An emergent trend I had not expected was the lack of product information made available to The College. Sometimes we were a long way into discussions before the structure of the relevant programmes were made known to us and we were able to view module specifications. On two occasions, TUST and TUSC, the programmes had not yet been validated to run within the institution! We were expected to accept a product that we had not seen and, in the case of TUST, design the course as well. Similarly, I had expected negotiations on fees (payment of fees to the university by The College) would take place early in partnership discussions but, in most cases, this was not the case. The College was more reliant than I had anticipated on relationships with senior leaders within the university. VCs leaving scuppered plans on two occasions. Similarly, we were introduced to senior managers by HH which opened doors that were previously locked.

Capital

I was recruited to be principal because The College needed someone with experience of working in the HE sector, knowledge of collaborative academic partnerships, and curriculum development. All this relates to the social, cultural, and academic symbolic capital I had acquired throughout my academic career.

As soon as I joined The College, I became aware that the SMT lacked legitimate social capital. Any networks they had were within a tightknit south Asian community and with London-based business AP providers and agents. News and rumours flowed fast in these networks. The MD also had a network of UK recruitment agents which he held close to his chest. I was never introduced to our agents, but The College relied heavily on them for student recruitment. The College sought to establish a high-profile advisory board recruited directly by HH. These posts were remunerated, and the board possessed great experience and substantial networks. The CAB was instrumental in opening doors at several universities. Later, we relied on HH. As a recruiter, he had a stronger social network at senior level across a broader range of institutions than I had. However, it meant that, at the early stages of the partnership relationships, the universities had less investment in making the partnership work than if they had been approached directly by The College. Sometimes, I used my social network, for example, to gain insight into typical fees required for approval events and rate per student to feed back to The College.

I had not realised the value of my cultural capital before I joined The College. I had taken for granted the knowledge I had gained over some 20 years in higher education. On reflection, it was this cultural capital and my familiarity with the dominant culture in the field of English HE that was my most important contribution to The College and SMT. However, my work colleagues struggled with trusting my knowledge or instincts due to our different experiences. I had seriously underestimated this problem.

SMT often struggled with understanding the dominant culture of English HE. This involved making inappropriate decisions, such as asking a university to complete due diligence. Others were more 'cultural' such as not knowing how to address a vice-chancellor or when to give gifts. They also couldn't understand why everything took so long and took for granted that if a senior leader of a university was behind a proposed partnership, it would succeed. I often acted as 'interpreter' in these situations, explaining how universities worked.

While there were times when my colleagues didn't know what they didn't know, (and I too was told I didn't understand the AP sector on many occasions), the MD was sufficiently aware of this to create a team of non-executives around him to support

the SMT. This was seen as good practice in the AP sector, as demonstrated in the HEFCE round-table event that the CAB and I attended and presented at. Employing the expertise of HH to gain access to senior decision makers in universities was also evidence of buying in cultural capital, including my appointment as principal. While the SMT lacked cultural capital, they had tenacity and confidence in abundance. I admired how colleagues approached speakers at events to ask their advice or invite them to visit The College, often receiving positive responses. This rubbed off on me and I started to invite MPs and civic dignitaries to visit The College and open new buildings. I also admired how colleagues attended events to learn about HE in more detail.

My knowledge of the university sector was essential for ensuring that we provided relevant information in a format and style that was acceptable to the university and for being able to negotiate and suggest different options. I was able to relate to university colleagues as I understood their systems, processes, regulations, and way of thinking. I understood the vocabulary of university academics. On several occasions, particularly with SUSC, it was remarked that I was more knowledgeable than them. However, while my capital was appreciated and acknowledged by some university partners, my own colleagues sometimes did not trust or believe me, which I found difficult.

There were also times when The College demonstrated more knowledge than the university. Every member of SMT was aware of the London market for business awards and the regulations under which APs operate. Occasionally, I had to advise senior university leaders on the difference between franchise and validated provision, for example. I found it difficult attending approval events chaired by people less experienced than me; this frustration occasionally reared its head.

It became evident that my embodied cultural capital (and habitus) was adapting as I experienced the AP sector from within. This is captured in my attempts to be a voice for AP at conferences and events I attended, cumulating in representing APs at the HEFCE NSS subcommittee and in a series of QAA videos (QAA, 2017). I was also asked to represent partnerships as a member of the SUSC Academic Quality and Standards Committee. I suspect my experience in mainstream HE was a deciding factor.

One issue that became evident to me during the write up and analysis was how I began to lose the distinctive university-based social and cultural capital I was recruited for. It was difficult to maintain my university connections. While I attended more HE events in one year than I had in the previous 10 years, I had to let several opportunities go because they were not seen as valuable to The College. I was expected to take annual leave to undertake external examiner responsibilities and CIM board of trustee meetings (with 24 days annual leave compared to 40 at my previous institution). Presenteeism was important to The College and eventually I was permitted to conduct my external examining duties via Microsoft Teams from my office.

Hospitality played an important part in The College's life and food was central to any meeting whenever guests were invited. The role of food and its meticulous presentation was a distinctive physical artefact of the corporate culture. The MD was also particularly proud of having a Central London presence - evidence of objectified cultural capital.

The MD paid much attention to institutionalised cultural capital. He insisted that all tutors were qualified to at least level-7 and preferably doctoral level, although there was no research culture within the institution. He would always recruit a tutor with a doctorate over one without, regardless of ability to teach. He sought recognition from professional bodies and from IHE and GuildHE as he strove to prove that The College was better than other APs. As we sought partnerships, he wanted to ensure that we were talking to 'good' universities.

The College had limited economic capital, reliant on the owner to raise funds through other business interests. The College did not own any property. Additionally, for-profit APs pay VAT and, unless offering franchise provision, student fees are capped at £6,250. Being based in London, this required staff to teach large student groups to make the finances work. Timetabling was important to always ensure full classroom occupancy.

The College also had limited symbolic capital as described by Bourdieu. Although the SMT was proud of their campuses, my first impressions were negative. The College could not compare with the quality of buildings and other assets that universities possess. It had no scientific nor intellectual capital. . The College did not

encourage staff to undertake research and scholarly activity and therefore had no reputation in this area. It had not won awards, nor had graduates of note.

Habitus

At the start of the data collection process, I assumed this section would be about evaluating the habitus of APs compared to mainstream universities. However, as I began to analyse my data, I realised that the concept of habitus has many layers. Each organisation has a dominant habitus, and my personal habitus began to change over the 19-month period. I now consider issues relating to my own habitus before moving on to analyse The College and university habituses.

Before joining The College, I spent 16 years working at two universities. I understood how universities operated and had experience of working with academic partnerships and chaired approval events. As an AD, I was used to spending half my working week in meetings, including university-level meetings and examination boards. Meetings had agendas and minutes and could be quite formal. Everyone arrived promptly and meetings would run on schedule. This was not the case at The College. To me, it seemed disorganised. Meetings rarely started on time and sometimes I would sit in the room for an hour before anyone arrived. Often, meetings just did not take place, with no explanation. No minutes would be taken. Papers were rarely shared prior to meetings. Occasionally, I would receive a phone call at 6pm to call me to a meeting that should have started at 9am. I found this frustrating, rude, and inconsiderate, yet my colleagues could not understand my irritation. Fortunately, colleagues tended to be on time for meetings with external organisations, but meetings were still not structured in a way that university partners might have expected.

Having worked in an environment subject to QAA reviews, I found the lack of documentation and processes disturbing. We had no formal processes for approval or quality procedures. Yet, in many ways, it was a highly-bureaucratic organisation. Everything had to get approval from the MD or DQ. Copy for the website had to be approved by each director which could delay publication considerably if someone was on leave. Each piece of letterheaded paper was numbered and had to be accounted for. I felt out of place and became aware that my MD and the rest of SMT

did not 'get' me. I missed the academic banter and enjoyed working with academic partners. Over time, I became more outward facing, working with HE organisations and raising The College's profile. Occasionally, my legacy university habitus overrode my new position in the field of higher education. For example, the AD H&SC at BUBC warmed to me when she realised I had also been an AD elsewhere and knew what I was talking about. However, on other occasions, people made assumptions about me based on my role at The College – I call this my 'perceived' habitus. Slowly, my habitus began to encompass the AP sector and I was able to put my 'dual habitus' to good use, offering to speak at various conferences and representing APs at HEFCE events and committees, in QAA promotional videos and the TEF subject panel.

My role as interpreter or middleman between The College and university was critical. I was able to advise colleagues what was expected by university partners and explain some of the idiosyncrasies of the AP sector to university staff. University staff were more likely to trust me and direct questions to me. Often my colleagues did not appreciate my 'sixth sense' – for example, I suspected that BUBC would pull out of the proposed partnership weeks before they did, due to delays and resistance we were experiencing from the business school.

The College had a strong institutionalised habitus. As a relatively small, owner-led organisation, decision-making could be extremely fast on occasions. If the MD wanted something to happen, it happened. My colleagues seemed to have no concept of deadlines required by universities and I spent much of my time apologising to university colleagues for not being able to give a timely response. Emails to colleagues would go unanswered and they would not be available for me to meet them. I never got to the bottom of this. Was it because they did not understand the importance of the request? (sometimes). Was it internal sabotage? (Perhaps with one person). Was it because they had an overinflated belief in their own importance – 'the university will wait for us'? (possibly) or was it just my approach? Other colleagues experienced similar frustrations. Internal politics were also evident. I often felt I was battling against internal colleagues more than university partners and I was accused on several occasions of not understanding the needs of The College and siding with the university when I had to deliver bad news or explain why we could not charge £9000 fees for a validated provision. Yet, SMT

members sometimes succeeded in achieving concessions that I would not have dared to ask for. The other directors had a greater risk appetite than me. The MD and DQ would promise potential partners high student numbers, while I would be more conservative. My colleagues saw no issue in publishing literature that had not been approved by the university, while I freaked out, knowing that we could be banned from producing any literature in future.

The habitus of each university was unique. For reasons of space and to ensure institutional confidentiality, this section considers the common features of their habitus rather than what distinguished them. Even the smallest university had a strongly developed bureaucratic structure. Progress was delayed because university meetings were not quorate or because one person had not signed off some documentation. Feedback from meetings, including action points from the approval events took weeks to arrive. The habitus of each department or school/faculty could also be different to another. This made working with different parts of the same university complicated as I tried to negotiate with two parts of an institution which did not see eye to eye. The internal politics within universities were difficult to navigate. It became evident that staff in two universities were only working on the partnership because they had been told to do so by the VC or another senior leader and it was clear their hearts were not in it. They found ways to slow the process down or derail it (as I did in the past as AD when working with partnerships). There was a tangible difference when a team wanted to support the partnership – SUSC and TUST being illustrations of the latter. At times, from The College perspective, universities appeared disorganised and there was poor communication, often because several people were working on similar aspects of the partnership. Perhaps due to pressure of work, we received information far too late and at both approval events, the agendas and confirmation of the documentation being considered were sent within hours of the actual event.

There were two areas in the habituses of universities, which I had not identified prior to undertaking this research. These related to risk appetite and communicating unpalatable decisions. All institutions were concerned about working with a London-based AP and wanted to ensure that The College was a suitable partner. However, the amount of information requests for due diligence became burdensome.

Except for SUSC, whenever universities had to communicate bad news, they sent emails. They seemed averse to picking up the phone to advise me that there would be a delay or another problem. Also no one person took responsibility for the bad news. It was always the decision of a 'committee', 'board', or 'team'. I began to label this as 'the committee says no' syndrome. I could predict it at times. On reflection, I also did this when I worked in a university, even when I knew before submitting documentation that there was little chance of the partnership being approved. After experiencing this several times, I vowed never to hide behind the decisions of a committee if I were to be in that position again.

I was surprised by how little university senior leaders knew about the AP sector – apart from the high-profile failings at some institutions. On different occasions, I was asked to provide details of The College's standing in the league tables (only DAPs institutions feature in the league tables), to advise my VC (only universities have VCs), to explain how our students had access to student loans (like universities) and how we recruited students without going through UCAS. None of the universities realised that only two people were involved in producing all the documentation required – one of those being the principal.

Finally, there were several occasions where habituses collided. For instance, when my habitus collided with that of the dominant College habitus or where The College habitus collided with that of the university. These collisions often caused misunderstanding, confusion and hurt, and usually resulted in one party giving way to the more powerful entity.

The outliers

While, overall, most of the journey towards securing a CAP can be understood through the Bourdieusian concepts of field, capital, and habitus, there were two interrelated elements that I felt were not sufficiently represented. These are process and complexity.

Each university had a different process for approving partnerships and required different types of information from The College. While some of this can be accounted for in the habitus of the organisation, the practical challenge of understanding the

processes and providing the relevant information at the right time was time consuming and labour intensive. The complexity of working with three universities simultaneously – five over the timescale of this longitudinal research – all with different requirements, is only mentioned in passing as part of the field analysis. I lived in fear of sending the wrong document to the wrong university over the final few months. Yet the workload was considered necessary to ensure that The College was able to have a top-up award to offer its business students.

Summary

This evaluation of my autoethnographic data using Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus as a framework has identified several barriers and motivators in relation to my experience of obtaining a CAP for The College with a university. Despite new legislation, universities remain dominant in the field of English HE and The College struggled to develop its capital sufficiently to engage as equals with universities, despite buying in social and cultural capital. The analysis highlights the distinctive habituses of universities and The College, acknowledges my role in bridging the gap and demonstrates how my capital changed and habitus adapted or grew during this study.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This thesis has documented my experience of establishing a collaborative partnership between an AP and an English university through an autoethnographic lens, applying Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus as an analytical framework. I began this journey in February 2016 with the following objectives and research questions in mind:

Research Objectives

1. To critically review my experience of the English higher education landscape in relation to alternative providers and degree provision.
2. To critically reflect on my experience of the process of seeking and establishing collaborative academic partnerships between universities and English alternative providers of higher education through the application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus.
3. To use autoethnographic methods in combination with Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus to develop novel and critical insights into collaborative academic partnerships.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does a 'level playing field' within UK higher education exist?
2. How did I address any challenges I experienced as I sought to develop a partnership with an English university to offer degree top-up awards?

3. What challenges did I experience in engaging with The College and the wider HE field as a leader of an alternative provider?
4. To what extent did the use of an autoethnographic approach and application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus contribute to the understanding of the research objectives?

These research questions were developed prior to undertaking the secondary and primary research and rightly helped to guide and inform the research process. Based on my secondary research alone (chapter 3), it became clear very early on that a 'level playing field' within HE does not exist, despite the introduction of the single register of HE providers and other initiatives undertaken as a result of HERA. I had 'answered' the first research question and could have stopped there. However, through the application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus, I continued to determine why this was the case and thus expanded the original scope of the question. The richness of the data gathered through this autoethnographic study provided me with insight that would have been difficult to obtain through any other means. It became clear that a change in government policy alone was not sufficient to create equity when APs lacked all forms of culture – economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital – and the dominant subfield of universities, that determined the 'rules of the game', had little or no incentive to welcome or support new competitors into the market

My autoethnography in chapter 5 and evaluation in the subsequent chapter, cover the middle two research questions. I identified that my university habitus and social, cultural, and symbolic capital were particularly useful when addressing any challenges I faced with universities. However, they proved to be a hindrance when working with my colleagues at the college. My frustrations are evident throughout the autoethnography. An emergent theme from the data analysis identified how my own habitus was adapting during this period and how I became an advocate for APs. The analysis also documented the varied experiences I had with university staff. Through the medium of my autoethnography and analysis, I was able to identify challenges I experienced with The College and the wider HE field as a leader of an AP that I may not have otherwise recalled. I reflect further on these areas later in this chapter.

The next section considers the final research objective and question in some detail. I also consider the implications for both practice and policy emanating from this study and its contribution to knowledge.

The autoethnographic approach

When I decided to undertake this research, I possessed a limited grasp of how rich and authentic the data would be. Autoethnography has given me a voice to share and reflect upon data that could not have been unearthed through other methods. I had to be immersed in the AP subfield and College habitus to experience the highs and lows, obstacles, and successes of obtaining a partnership with a university.

A quantitative approach (which is my natural leaning) would have resulted in a superficial understanding of how collaborative academic partnerships were developed and would have provided little more insight than existing secondary data sources. Respondents cannot or will not go into much detail when asked to provide comments as part of an 'anonymous' questionnaire (Vogt, Gardner and Haeffele, 2012; Miller and Lambert, 2014; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Other qualitative approaches might elicit more information, but it is unlikely that participants would share (or even remember) some of the behind-the-scenes incidences.

Similarly, observations by an outsider, if permitted, might only pick up on a fraction of the nuances that take place in a meeting or workplace, and it is unlikely that an external person would be permitted to undertake an ethnographic study for confidentiality reasons. My position and The College's aspirations for partnering with a university provided an arguably unique opportunity to conduct autoethnographic research and identify issues that may not have been identified had I chosen another methodological approach to undertake my research.

Initially, I struggled with what I perceived to be the indulgence of autoethnography but, as analysed my results, I became aware of the power of the insights my autoethnography produced and the knowledge it uncovered. I realised I was describing scenarios others may never experience. I was providing an opportunity to share my experiences, albeit through my imperfect lens. I began to feel more comfortable with autoethnographic writing when I came across analytic

autoethnography. This was a eureka moment for me as I realised that I could create structure and form to my experiences whilst maintaining the richness of data. I have endeavoured to apply Anderson's five requirements of analytic autoethnography (2006) to my research. I have also attempted to ensure that my research is ethical, honest, acknowledges subjectivity and demonstrates self-reflexivity and I hope the reader considers it to be credible (Le Roux, 2017). This chapter will also consider the contribution of the research.

Applying Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus

Having completed this research, it now seems inconceivable to me to consider addressing the research objectives without applying Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus through an autoethnographical approach. Yet, it was not until I began to write up this thesis, that I realised how unique this combination is. Few autoethnographies employ theoretical concepts at an early stage in the research process. Most have an element of retrofitting. I am not aware of any autoethnographies which incorporate Bourdieu in this manner. My approach ensured that my research remained focused and enabled me to identify key themes very easily.

This thesis demonstrates the adaptability of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus. They can be applied at sector level, such as the HE sector, to an organisation or an individual. While it was sometimes difficult to determine if an example should fit under habitus or cultural capital, for example (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014), these concepts as a framework, created form and structure to the analysis and, enabled me to organise and understand my data. I spent some time defining the scope of the field of study and its components. Initially I assumed the field would be UK HE but then had to narrow it down to English HE partly because the OfS is only relevant to England. Yet, I still had to be mindful of how the global field of HE interacts and influences the smaller field. I remain comfortable with my decisions in relation to how HE in FE and the AP sectors are positioned within the field and in relation to the field of English FE. However, while mission groups assisted in identifying the relative power and focus of universities, a historical

grouping might also have worked as all five universities mentioned within this study were formerly polytechnics or colleges of higher education.

When I consider the final research question - to what extent did the use of an autoethnographic approach and application of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus contribute to the understanding of the research objectives? – the simple response is that both the approach and theoretical framework have contributed significantly. Again, I have gone beyond the initial remit of this research question by explaining and demonstrating how this unique combination has resulted in exposing some illuminating results which might not have been identified through other approaches. To me, they have become inextricably linked and I cannot imagine undertaking this research and achieving the such rich data through another route.

My reflections and how I am now positioned

This study provides a highly personalised account of the process that The College went through to achieve a CAP. I found the discipline of recording activities and writing reflections daily was cathartic and helped me to understand what was going on during the time. Delving into the minutiae of everyday interactions and decisions that, taken together, determine the success or otherwise of a new partnership, enabled me to make sense of my frustrations. The process helped me see patterns in how universities work. I never expected the journey would be so complicated or require so much from the organisation seeking the partnership.

I had anticipated that some university staff may not trust me or appreciate the skills and knowledge that I possessed but I had not appreciated how that would make me feel. In particular, the attitude of academic staff at BUBC and TUMC towards me was quite hurtful, especially when they talked down to me or discounted my suggestions. My past experience and knowledge were not valued because I worked for an AP. Mostly, I let it go, but occasionally, my frustration was evident. I was fortunate that others did trust me and acknowledge my experience, particularly at SUST and SUSC, and this was reflected in our working relationship.

Sometimes my university habitus worked in my favour when engaging with bodies such as QAA and HEFCE and gaining external-speaking engagements. However, I

did not expect to get so much push back from my own colleagues on SMT. While they needed my social and cultural capital to be able to engage with universities and knowledge of the dominant university subfield, I did not gain their trust. I remained an outsider for the two years I worked at The College and my views and opinions were constantly challenged in meetings, and regularly blocked by one colleague, in particular. While the SMT needed a collaborative academic partnership, they did not want to lose power and fought hard to keep control of fees, admissions, academic regulations, and exam boards. Even after the successful approval event, we were at risk of not meeting the conditions of approval due to what I perceived as internal sabotage mainly by the aforementioned colleague. I still cannot determine whether this was due to lack of trust, jealousy or just a personality clash. In the weeks between preparing for approval and welcome week, most of my energy was focused on working around obstacles placed by The College, not the university. It was the validation of university staff and other external parties in the AP sector that helped me understand that this was not 'normal' behaviour for an AP.

When I began this journey to record the development of a partnership, I never thought I would discover so much about myself along the way. Perhaps, of most interest, was being able to explore how my habitus changed over the 19-month period and how I became an advocate for APs. My eyes were also opened to the benefits of reflective journaling, which I still do, although not daily.

I now see English HE from a multi-dimensional viewpoint, from both a university perspective and an AP perspective. I also feel a greater affinity towards HE in FE. In essence, I have developed empathy for the underdogs in the HE field.

After seeing the first cohort of top-up students through the new degree programme I left The College and joined a post-92 university as dean of the business school. The legacy of my time in the AP sector meant I maintained better relationships with our partners. I also knew what to look out for when approving partnerships, due to my experience at The College. I now run my own business and most of my clients operate in the AP sector. They value my experience in mainstream HE but also that I understand how the challenges the AP sector faces. I am currently working with a for-profit college pursuing DAPs and university status; with an overseas organisation seeking to enter the UK HE sector; and with a new for-profit private HE college.

None of this would have been possible without my experience working with The College and developing partnerships.

This autoethnography has been instrumental in helping me understand what my personal contribution to the HE sector is. I am not unique but there are very few like me who have crossed the divide between universities and APs.

Contribution to knowledge

There are three areas where this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge. These are: the application of Bourdieu's theory of practice to the relationship between APs and universities; the integration of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus with autoethnography; and, offering greater insight into the nature of CAPs, in particular, how power relations shape and influence what is essentially a highly unequal relationship.

This thesis applies field, capital, and habitus as a theoretical framework or model to a set of data in a unique manner and setting, demonstrating the versatility of Bourdieu's theory of practice at both institutional and individual level. It is rare that these concepts are applied in this manner and this research demonstrates how they create a powerful framework for collecting and analysing data. To date, no other research has been undertaken which applies Bourdieusian concepts to the AP subfield and English HE field in general, and the relationship between APs and universities in particular. This research provides a unique insight into the establishment and nature of such partnerships.

In terms of methodology, this thesis contributes to the body of knowledge of analytic autoethnography in two ways. Firstly, it demonstrates how it is possible to apply theory, in this instance, Bourdieu's theory of practice, as a framework to analyse autoethnographic writing to achieve deeper analysis. This analytic autoethnography is distinguished by its use of data to gain insight into and develop a theoretical understanding of social phenomenon (Anderson, 2006; Le Roux, 2017). However, as discussed, the analytic autoethnographies I reviewed rarely engaged with their chosen theoretical underpinnings in any significant sense. Some have linked their autoethnographic writing and summary to relevant literature but not to a model or

framework to the extent that this thesis has accomplished. Hence, this thesis is an example of a highly-analytic autoethnography at the end of the autoethnographic continuum (Le Roux, 2017) and demonstrates the power of adopting an autoethnographic approach framed by theory.

Secondly, this is the first instance that Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus have been applied to an analytic autoethnographic study. This approach has enabled me to develop a unique insight into the development of CAPs from the perspective of one AP institution.

Finally, this study increases our knowledge of the AP sector in general and developing CAPs, in particular. Few studies on academic partnerships exist and there are none from the perspective of the AP. This research adds to the scant body of knowledge in this area, from the unique perspective of an autoethnography. I found the terms "collaborative" and "partnership" to be problematic as they did not describe my experience in most instances.

Implications for policy and practice

This research has identified several potential implications for policy at governmental and institutional level, including some unintended consequences. The first research question identified was to evaluate whether the government policy of creating a level playing field within UK higher education was a reality. This autoethnography provides insights from the experience of one AP which suggest that the current HE policy is still skewed in favour of the existing seats of power, i.e. the established universities. There appears to be equality, in terms of a single register of HE providers, but there is not equity, Organisational inequity is perpetuated and maintained through the use of capital despite the introduction of legislation which purports to level the playing field. Indeed, there may never be a level playing field while APs do not possess the relevant capital or symbolic capital (especially, academic, scientific, and intellectual capital). Additional support is required for APs and new entrants if the government wants to achieve its stated objective of a level playing field. For example, there is no formal representative body for private or independent providers of HE. IHE does a good job but it does not have the same influence as GuildHE and Universities UK

which are formal representative bodies. Similarly, new entrants struggle to find collaborative partners. The OU has been proactive in partnering with APs but, to date, the OfS has not yet investigated how to make this process more transparent and simpler. It would appear that Marginson (2008) and Bathmaker (2015) were right to warn that policy attempts to change the dynamics and boundaries of the English HE field, might not be successful.

The single register of HE providers was heralded as a major initiative in creating equality and simplifying HE provision in the UK. No longer would the term 'alternative provider' be necessary. As of 6 October 2021, there were some 416 organisations registered, including universities and FE colleges. However, OfS has been unable to cope with the workload required to process applications to join the register. The impact of Covid-19 has accentuated this. An unintended consequence of this policy is that we no longer know how many organisations are not registered through choice or delay. The delay in registration has caused some institutions to close or experience significant financial hardship as they can no longer access the student loan scheme for new students. In order to combat this, private colleges are even more reliant on franchise agreements with degree awarding institutions to recruit students. However, as this study has identified, these agreements take time to implement.

The stated purpose of HERA enacted in 2017 was to increase competition, encourage new entrants, increase choice and improve value for money for students. Overall, the delays in registering organisations on the single register of HE providers, are likely to have reduced the number of players in the HE sector in 2021 compared to 2017, although no official data exists to confirm this. Certainly, if the government agenda was to encourage new entrants and offer students more choice of providers, the policy has failed. To date, only one new institution has entered the sector with degree awarding powers since 2017 and that is part owned by the government.

At university level, it was clear from The College's experience, that some universities did not have a policy on what their view was about new entrants and collaborative academic partnerships generally. My experience suggests that the main drivers were fear of competition (as evidenced in several conferences I attended) and financial gain. There was little mention of widening participation

opportunities by university representatives in our discussions. Similarly, several universities The College worked with did not have a clear strategy about what partnerships they wanted to encourage and whether UK partners were different from international partners. In terms of practice, I hope that this personal account of acquiring academic partnerships enables others to reflect on their own experiences and their organisational systems and processes in relation to AP partnerships. I outline some guidelines for universities and partner institutions based on my reflections of the process in Appendix C. New entrants cannot assume that despite the opportunities afforded by HERA, it will be easy to gain degree awarding powers or enter into collaborative partnerships. They must do their homework before approaching potential academic partners. In addition to the guidelines in Appendix C, new entrants and APs might wish to consider what they can do to develop their cultural, social, and academic symbolic capital and resources and how they can reduce the perception of risk exposure for the university before approaching potential partnering institutions.

Final thoughts and reflections

Although I am aware that several APs are currently working towards DAPs and university status, it is likely that CAPs will continue to have a role in the field for the foreseeable future. I am currently working with an AP on curriculum content for newly-validated provision. The AP wants to gain experience in curriculum design and development before applying for DAPs in several years' time. For many reasons, not all APs aspire for university status or DAPs and will continue to be reliant on partnerships with awarding institutions. It is still difficult for an organisation with no HE experience to set up a university or institution with DAPs from scratch in England. Quite rightly, the application process is rigorous and requires a large amount of documentation (Office for Students, 2018a). This can be prohibitive for aspiring entrants due to a lack of social and cultural capital and their inability to navigate the peculiar field of English higher education. Nevertheless, there are several international organisations considering entering the field of English HE. I recently had a telephone conversation with an Indian HEI which is investigating setting up an English university - not an Indian university campus - in the Southeast

of England. I explained the process to them. Theoretically it is possible but, at the time of writing, there is only one example of a new entrant that has achieved DAPs status from scratch in recent years – and that is a government-sponsored institution. None have achieved university status so far.

Additionally, it will take time for new entrants to adapt to or navigate the field. We have seen that most newcomers begin to take on the trappings and habitus of the dominant group (established universities) and there is no evidence to suggest a seismic shift in power is likely soon. Ironically, until it becomes evident that universities which do not adapt to the changing environment can fail, it is unlikely that the disruption needed to attract new entrants will occur.

This research demonstrates that English HE is not a level playing and is unlikely to be in the foreseeable future. New legislation did not open the floodgates to large numbers of new institutions with DAPs as the Government anticipated. This may be due to continuing barriers to entry or that running an HEI is not an attractive proposition. Many APs have not yet registered with the OfS, although there remains a significant backlog of applications due partly to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the legislative changes have given APs choice – they can choose to maintain CAPs with universities or to seek DAPs or university status. Either way, the process can be long and complicated and requires significant resources. Most APs that have achieved DAPs or university status have relied on consultants or recruiting staff from universities or other institutions that have already achieved DAPs. English HE is not yet a level playing field, but some bumps have been smoothed out and more players are allowed on the pitch. However, the rules of the game still favour the more established teams. My hope is that these new players will influence the dynamics of the field to enable more choice for students and increase the level of innovation in the sector.

Finally, as I look back on my personal journey over the 19-month period during which this research was undertaken, I reflect on the challenges I faced as someone new to the AP sector and The College, my experience of working with 5 universities to obtain a CAP for The College and on how the experience has affected me and my career.

The process of gaining a partnership was a struggle and, at times, I questioned my self-worth. While I had much to offer in terms of creating a bridge between The College and the universities we worked with, I had not appreciated how my university habitus would collide with that of The College. I felt I was in no-man's-land – I was neither trusted by the universities nor accepted by the SMT of The College. I was not used to having my motives, recommendations and actions questioned by colleagues. Similarly, I often felt powerless when working with some universities. I had limited control over whether a university would eventually choose to work with me. Despite having possessed a similar university habitus, I struggled when it was evident that I was not trusted or considered inferior to the university staff, particularly those at faculty level. In my previous roles, I had a reputation for being trustworthy, finding solutions to problems and getting the job done. That meant nothing now. There were exceptions, of course – I relished the academic banter with colleagues from TUST and SUST.

During this time, I gained much of my self-worth from externally-focussed elements of my role. I achieved a greater external presence than I had as an AD in a university. Despite being a difficult experience, my time at The College has transformed my career direction. This experience was pivotal in achieving my next role as dean of a business school. I also have a much greater appreciation of CAPs from the perspectives of both universities and the AP, and the experience and knowledge gained from this has opened doors for me in recent months. I am also proud that in some small way I became a voice for APs.

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Appendix A: Summary timeline of key events

Activity	Activity	Month	Activity	Activity
	I accept job at The College & hand in my notice	Jan-16		
1st meeting with BUBC for programmes to start Sept 16.		Feb-16		
Initial discussions with associate deans in both schools at BUBC.	I leave my previous job.	Mar-16		
First indication that timescales will slip due to revalidation of BUBC programmes. Unable to approve or validate top up programmes only until Jan 17 for Sep 17 start.	I join The College as academic dean	Apr-16		
Flying faculty option considered for Sep 16 start.	Publication of White Paper "Success as a knowledge economy"	May-16		
		Jun-16	First discussions with MD about TUMC	
Second SMT meeting with DVC of BUBC which confirms scope and timescales for approval, validation, and launch. University begins due diligence process for flying faculty.		Jul-16	First SMT meeting with TUMC VC and PVC. Agree to offer awards from Sep 16	
MOU received and signed.	I become principal of The College	Aug-16	PVC advises that TUMC cannot meet Sep 16 deadline for franchise provision but possibility of flying faculty for Oct 16.	

<p>Two requests for additional information required regarding College finances & Tier 4 status. No response received regarding outcome. The College is given permission to advertise the flying faculty programme on 5th September. Decision made not to run due to low numbers on 30 September.</p>		<p>Sep-16</p>	<p>TUMC advises that they cannot fast track flying faculty courses for Oct 16 nor validated provision for Feb 17. MD does not progress relationship further.</p>	
<p>DVC informs The College that there are issues with due diligence, and they will not progress flying faculty for Feb 17.</p>		<p>Oct-16</p>		
		<p>Nov-16</p>		
		<p>Dec-16</p>		
<p>First meeting with VC of TUSC. He wants to work with us to get courses approved for Sep 17 delivery.</p>		<p>Jan-17</p>		
<p>Meeting with registry and partnership staff to discuss partnership. TUSC advise that they wish to work with college.</p>	<p>I am asked to present at the HEFCE AP annual conference</p>	<p>Feb-17</p>		<p>SUST identified as potential backup partner</p>
<p>Communication with DVC and Registrar of TUSC regarding institutional approval & initial set of documentation required.</p>	<p>Meeting with local MPs for both main campuses. Guild HE rejects The College's application for membership</p>	<p>Mar-17</p>	<p>First meeting with DVC of SUSC & introduction to dean of business school. Due diligence form completed.</p>	<p>MD visits university to discuss a partnership with DVC & I start working with the partnership team. VC approves expression of interest so can move to business case and academic approval stages. First meeting with partnership team & next stages outlined.</p>

<p>Preparing documentation for institutional approval required by 28 April. Advised due to internal validation event that only top-up is to be approved for Sep 17 delivery as TUSC will not be delivering new awards until Sep 18.</p>		<p>Apr-17</p>	<p>Visit by Dean of Business School and school partnership manager of SUSC. Only interested in Business & Tourism awards at moment. Suggested directly funded franchise agreement - college retains student numbers and lower fee but MD slow to respond. Business School starts to prepare outline plan for approval of expression of interest.</p>	<p>Discussions regarding type of partnership - franchise or validated.</p>
<p>I chase TUSC for a date for the approval event but confirm that they require The College to write materials for franchise programme as they do not have any. Ongoing requests for new or more information. They advise they cannot guarantee Sep 17 start date. Institutional approval takes place on 26th May with several conditions and recommendations. VC advises that formal approval by Senate on 27 Jul.</p>	<p>Opening of 1st Central London building. QAA HER visit.</p>	<p>May-17</p>	<p>Due diligence not yet completed. Expected to be signed off on 16th May. Outline plan approved by SUSC on 23 May.</p>	<p>University advises that there may be a delay in being able to market the awards. Provides revised timelines with approval event planned for end of July/beginning of August.</p>
<p>Programme approval event due for 4 July. I receive copy of programme specification for first time. Advised that TUSC planning for Sep 18 launch. Validation event postponed. TUSC send invoice for institutional approval event.</p>		<p>Jun-17</p>	<p>SUSC solicitors instructed to draft partnership agreement. VC approves outline plan on 20 Jun. Approval date agreed for 17 or 21 Jul</p>	<p>University advises that programmes will have to be validated - more work for college. VC approves business case on 23 June.</p>

Programme validation event for this week cancelled.		w/c 02 Jul 17	Visit to SUSC and meeting with Dean, new VC, and other colleagues to discuss issues.	College team go to university to work on designing course for Sept 17 delivery. Meeting with MD and SMT with DVC re contractual agreement. Some issues raised.
Meeting with VP of TUSC Students' Union.		w/c 09 Jul 17	Programme documentation completed for programme approval & all documents sent to SUSC.	Programme documentation completed for programme approval & all documents sent to university
		w/c 16 Jul 17	Partnership agreement agreed 19 Jul. Signed on 21 Jul. Institutional and programme approval event on 21 Jul.	More information sent to university at their request. College advises university that there are some major concerns regarding contract.
TUSC advise they only want to run with level-6 top-up provision for Sep 18 and not level-4. Assume college will continue with relationship. I respond to say that we have a partner for Sep 17.		w/c 23 Jul 17	Specific course designation submitted to HEFCE and received 48 hours later. College can promote partnership & SUSC programmes 'subject to course designation'. Web pages go live but process for handling applications not agreed by both parties. Both parties start to work on conditions and recommendations.	2-day approval event planned for 27 & 28 Jul. Cancelled on 21 Jul
	First NSS results received	w/c 30 Jul 17	College is still awaiting formal wording of conditions and recommendations from SUSC	
		w/c 6 Aug 17	First external students mapped to SUSC top-up programmes. No agreement yet on admissions approach	

	College QAA report published; Internal conflict re university policies.	w/c 13 Aug 17	Draft minutes of approval event received 15 Aug	
I advise TUS that we do not intend to meet the conditions and recommendations for institutional approval.		w/c 20 Aug 17		
	First round of interviews for academic staff to support university delivery, including programme directors.	w/c 27 Aug 17	Agreement re admissions process.	
		w/c 3 Sep 17	SUSC gives formal permission to enable college to perform the admissions process in full; Documentation supporting conditions and recommendations submitted by college; college staff induction by university staff.	
	Academic staff have accepted positions and will be able to join full-time on 2nd October.	w/c 10 Sep 17	Institutional and programme approval confirmed by SUSC on 15 Sep.	
	I am asked to join SUSC academic quality and standards committee as partnership representative.	w/c 17 Sep 17		
		w/c 24 Sep 17	WELCOME WEEK! First cohort of students arrive to study SUSC programmes.	

[Appendix B: Initial 'coding' of partnerships](#)

Field

Concept	Category
The changing field/field in flux	White paper & legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OFS - Single register - Conferences, speculation, and commentary
	Conferences, speculation, and commentary
	Time-related issues (e.g. delay in registering)
Field hierarchy/layers	
Power	Power imbalance
	The College has some power
	Struggling for power
	Demonstrations of power
	Negotiation & compromise
	Lack of power – feeling helpless
	Relational differences
Alternative provider subfield	Position in the field of HE
Field boundaries	Scope of field/pushing boundaries
Rules of the game	Not understanding the rules
	Not playing to the rules
	Explaining the rules/my role as interpreter

Habitus

Concept	Category
'My' habitus	University background
	Feeling more comfortable with universities and external contacts.
	My (university) habitus overriding position in the field
	My "perceived" habitus – assumptions made by others not knowing my background
	Beginning to develop habitus in AP sector
	My impact on organizational habitus
	My role as interpreter of habitus/middleman
College habitus	Speed of decision making
	Habitus as embodiment - senior management team/others within organisation
	New to HE/not worked elsewhere in UK or in HE
	Trust/lack of trust
	Hospitality
	Formality
	Administration/disorganised
	Punching about their weight
	College internal politics
	Risk appetite/covering our backs
University habitus	Internal politics
	The difference it makes when the team want this to happen & understand the process

	Disorganised?/poor communication/too many cooks (complexity of organization)
	Making it up as they go along/moving goalposts
	No one wanting to give bad news ('the committee says no')
	Bureaucracy
	Different habitus in university faculties/departments
	Risk appetite – asking for more from college than they do themselves
Individuals are key – good working relationships power of individuals (e.g. initial contact and staff, leaders)	Good working relationships with individuals
	Not understanding how APs work
When habitus/habitus collide	Misunderstanding/fish out of water
	College - fear of other institutions knowing about each other

Capital

Concept	Category
Social capital	Lack of social capital
	Buying in social capital – networks/membership
	Making use of my social capital
	Not listening to advice (my capital)
	College having more knowledge/capital than more powerful partner
	Losing social capital (personal)
	Making up for lack of capital – taking opportunities

Economic capital	funding
Symbolic capital (prestige, honour & recognition)	
Cultural capital	Embodied (vocabulary, way of thinking, education, upbringing)
	Objectified (trappings, physical artefacts, food)
	Institutionalized
Disjunctures between habitus and field	

Outliers

Concept	Category
Processes	Model doesn't really work to show complexity of processes – habitus maybe?
Complexity	The complexity of working with more than one university at a time.

University

- The university should be aware that either the partner will not have experience of working with universities or may have worked with other institutions and some things will need to be unlearned. Each university has its own ways of undertaking partnerships.
- Most partner institutions are much smaller than universities and certainly have less administrative support. Often it is the principal or another senior person who is responsible for producing much of the documentation. Hence, there can be delays.
- It is useful to provide an outline of all processes, approval stages and timescales at start of the discussions and make it clear what are non-negotiables.
- Due diligence should be undertaken & completed as soon as possible and before any significant commitment is made on either side.
- Filter out partnerships that do not stand up to rigor sooner rather than later – it saves time for both parties.
- Don't over-promise. If the timescales are not realistic, say it! A delay of a year has income implications for both parties but impacts the partner institution more.
- Be above board in relation to fees expectations at the start of the partnership allowing for future negotiation and discussion for volume.
- Ensure that the partner understands the difference between franchise and validated provision.
- Clearly identify which institution is responsible for what – early on from both sides.
- Ensure there are no more than two points of contact - 1 academic, 1 administrative – on both sides.

- Key dates and submission deadlines for university meetings and approval events should be highlighted along with a basic critical path analysis.
- Documents should be shared in a timely manner and not piecemeal. Ideally, there should be a shared folder containing all relevant documentation in one place.
- For franchise arrangements, programme and module details should also be shared before any agreement is made to ensure the partner institution is happy with the product.
- There should be no need for the partner to replicate and submit university documents – e.g. course and module specification and university policies – if no changes are being made.
- The approval and validation events should relate to the partner concerned and not issues they cannot change (e.g. do not ask why the partner decided on entry requirements which are determined by the university. Perhaps a better approach is to ask how the partner will support students to achieve these entry requirements).
- Remember to keep the students' union involved in franchise partnerships and involved in approval and validation events.
- Ensure conditions of approval and validation events are related to the discussions held at the meeting. If approved, there are clearly 'next steps' that both parties will undertake, but these should not be 'conditions'.
- Ensure partner staff and students have access to the appropriate materials and are not hidden behind firewalls.
- Work out how admissions is going to be handled for franchise students and what data the university requires for all contractual forms before students are invited to apply.
- Don't ask your partner for policies or documents your team do not have – e.g. personal tutoring policy or course handbooks.
- And, finally, be prepared to learn from your partners and value their local knowledge.

Partner Institution

- Be clear from the onset what you want – e.g. validation/franchise, fees etc. – and stick to this unless there is agreement that another approach would be preferable to both parties.
- Be aware of timescales – it can take one year for a partnership and programmes to be get approved.
- Determine what are your non-negotiables.
- Don't overpromise student numbers – be realistic.
- Identify the main contacts for institution and ensure they have the authority to contact other team members. (We struggled as I didn't have direct access to academic staff or marketing team).
- Ensure costs of approval and validation are made clear at start of discussions.
- Don't change your request halfway through the process – it's unprofessional.
- Don't expect the 'crown jewels' immediately – a university partner is not likely to offer the MBA in the first year until they trust you are confident that you are a good partner.