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**Further and Higher Education Partnerships in
England, 1997-2010: a study of cultures and
perceptions.**

Thesis.

**In part fulfilment of doctoral requirements for the University
of Huddersfield**

Denise Robinson

October 2010

Abstract

This study identifies and analyses issues pertinent to the expanding Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE) provision through partnerships as they relate to policy implementation, particularly of the widening participation agenda of the New Labour government, 1997 - 2010, and the resulting impact on the actors in such partnerships. It explores the perceptions of the students and FE staff who are participants in partnerships and the role partnerships play in the government's policy objectives in responding to the perceived demands of the economy within a neo-liberalist policy position.

The function of how such partnerships have contributed to the positioning of HE in FE and how HE in FE is positioned within the emerging stratified HE landscape; an envisioned model of this landscape is produced.

It focuses on foundation degree students as these are said to epitomise the type of students that are found within such partnership provision during this period. Student perceptions of their studies are highlighted, revealing some differences between younger, full-time students and those who are older and part-time.

The study uses a critical approach, and in particular critical hermeneutics, to inform the research, frame questions and analyse both the present landscape of partnerships between HE and FE, as well as the findings from the empirical study. The application of a critical approach to this domain will be interrogated and the value of such an approach will be evaluated, including future possibilities and dissemination.

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Further and Higher Education Partnerships in England, 1997-2010: a study of cultures and perceptions

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Further and Higher Education Partnerships in England, 1997-2010: a study of cultures and perceptions

Chapter 1

Introduction: 'Players' and policies

This study intends to identify and analyse issues pertinent to the expanding higher education (HE) in further education (FE) provision through partnerships as they relate to policy implementation and the resulting impact on staff and students. By further education I am referring specifically to further education colleges as determined in the Further and Higher Education Act (DfES, 1992), as opposed to the wider inclusion of work-based learning providers and adult and community learning providers; this wider sector is now referred to as the FE sector. My focus is on whether HE in FE partnerships have contributed to the development of the further diversification and stratification of the HE sector. The claim by government (and, in particular, the focus is on the New Labour government, 1997-2010) that widening participation has given opportunities for improved career prospects and social mobility for those HE in FE partnership students is investigated and held up for examination against its own objectives. In other words, an immanent critique will be made of the New Labour government's proposals and policies for widening participation as it pertains to HE in FE partnerships. To support this, exploration will be made of the nature of the students who access the educational opportunities opened to them through such partnerships. The

focal point will be on Foundation Degree (FD) students as these are said to epitomise the type of students that are found within such partnership provision; such students, according to government, will provide the intermediate skills that the UK economy is said to need. FDs are identified as those that were introduced at the turn of the twenty first century as a result of concerns about the low level of skills of the workforce and the perceived need to 'up-skill' employees as part of the maintenance of the performance and position of the UK economy in a globalised context. Furthermore, this will provide a realistic limit to the range of the students that will be analysed as part of the data collection.

The study will use a critical approach and, in particular critical hermeneutics, to inform the research, frame questions and analyse both the present landscape of partnerships between HE and FE, as well as the findings from the empirical study. The scope of critical theory is broad; from the early writings of the Frankfurt School to the recent work of the second generation of the School as embodied in the work of Habermas (b. 1929). The difference between the Frankfurt School and the later writings of Habermas (for example, 1987, 1989) is marked by a shift from what was perceived as being a pessimistic view of the developments initiated in the Enlightenment and a re-framing of Marxist philosophy in response to the conditions of the Nazi Germany in the 1930s, to a radical but, nevertheless, post-Marxist position that focuses on the processes of communication within a democratic framework.

I have been a reformist all my life, and maybe I have been a bit more so in recent years. Nevertheless, I mostly feel that I am the last Marxist.

(Habermas, 1992, p.469,
cited in Tormey and Townshend, 2006, p.165)

The application of critical theory is not intended to present an in-depth account of the depth and breadth of the various writers of this school of thought, but to use it as a basis to highlight and serve as a heuristic tool to penetrate the issues of education and those relating to FE/HE partnerships; the application of critical theory to this domain will be interrogated and the value of such an approach will be evaluated. As Griffiths (2009) states,

‘Critical research’ is not a tidy category. ... it is taken to mean, roughly, research which aims at understanding, uncovering, illuminating, and/or transforming how educational aims, dilemmas, tensions and hopes are related to social divisions and power differentials. Research in this area entails paying attention to fundamental issues of epistemology, truth, validity, perspective and justice. While researchers agree as to the relevance of these issues, they disagree about how they relate to power and social context.

(page unnumbered)

At the core of critical theory is a method of analysis which is said to be the basis of critical theory rather than a particular knowledge or philosophical formula, that of immanent critique. Essentially, this approach analyses a particular phenomenon against its own standards; it describes what a ‘social totality holds itself to be, and then confronts with what it is in fact becoming...’ (Antonio, 1981, p. 338). The matter that springs from this in relation to FE/HE partnership is where FE/HE partnerships are placed in the HE landscape and how they might develop in the future, particularly in

relationship to the positioning of those students within such partnerships. Analysis reaches into perceptions of what they purport to be in the eyes of the government, the institutions, their teachers and the individual students who are participating in such partnerships.

Critical theory maintains that it offers both a method of analysis and a practical approach to social conditions and phenomena; it can be a force for action as well as a means by which the claims of the Enlightenment as being anti-mythological and rational can be confronted by its impact on the human condition. A focus of critical theory is the deleterious effect of a positivist philosophy that has developed the notion that the processes of modern societies that are intended to bring order and rationality, but which, in fact, have brought the human condition to become the servant of the machine of the bureaucracy; the means dominates the ends. Within the context of this study, this raises the question of the perceived role of FE/HE partnerships as a function of the position of the individual, framed within their social position and perspective and their response to pursuing HE. Is the FE/HE student expressing and enacting from an autonomous position or are they responding, perhaps reluctantly, to the pressures of the perceived economic necessity of achieving a higher qualification to retain (or maintain) job opportunities? This feature may also be reflected in the motivations of other HE students but I am limiting my study to foundation students. In effect, 'the administered life' is under scrutiny here. This was, for the Frankfurt School, a life where values were subjugated to the instrumental rational tools of analysis that had developed from the Enlightenment. If students are to be subjected to the demands of the state in forming opinions and making

judgements about their education, they will need to use 'reason'. For Horkheimer this is problematic; he states that subjective reason is that which is used to classify, infer and deduce, and has '...reduced thinking itself to the level of industrial processes...' (Horkheimer, 1974, [1947], p.21) and '...meaning is supplanted by function or effect...' (ibid, p. 22). Concern about the position of social sciences was highlighted by such as Horkheimer who regarded them as a support to instrumental reason; the early critical theorists considered that the Enlightenment had succumbed to the call of pragmatism and that,

If enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate.

(Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p. xvi)

Horkheimer and Adorno's 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' (2002 [1947]) is apt in considering the potential challenge of critical theory to developments in education within the modernist context,

That what matters today is to preserve and disseminate freedom, rather than to accelerate, however indirectly, the advance toward the administered world.

(ibid, p.xii)

Social theory developments since the Frankfurt School have developed the theme and basis of elements of critical theory and may use the term critical as part of their nomenclature to identify themselves with the methodological approach identified with critical theory as anti-positivist and socially progressive. For example, Neo-Marxists, feminists and poststructuralists may lay claim to the incorporation of the paradigm of a critical theory approach. However, for some critical theorists, the various postmodernist

approaches are dysfunctional in that they do not provide a methodological approach that can provide 'theoretical illumination and political inspiration to carry on the tasks of critical social theory in the present conjuncture' (Kellner, 1999, p.3). This was a consideration for me in my choice of approaches; whilst other approaches may be attractive in their intellectual analysis, they do not necessarily support any alternative solutions or approaches to a social issue. My work in a HE in FE partnership and in supporting FE colleagues within a partnership puts me in a practitioner as well as academic position. In developing my standpoint I considered and rejected a number of related but alternative possible paradigms. I discuss these in the chapter on methodology.

So, how is the FE/HE partnership movement positioned within the HE landscape? Whilst there was a steady increase in HE in FE provision from the mid-1980s based upon 'low policy' (Parry and Thompson, 2002) or 'peripheral policy' (Abramson, 1996), that is, policy that has had a low profile with little attention from government, more recent expansion since the mid-1990s has been driven by the perceived needs of the globalised economy and its supposed requirement for a highly skilled workforce (DES, 1991; DfES, 2003; HEQC, 1993). The 'skills agenda' has come to dominate discourse around the future development of all sectors of education; HE and HE in FE do not escape the attention of the policy-makers on this matter. In particular, the Leitch report (2006) called for 40 per cent of all adults to achieve a level four qualification by 2020. The assumption made by government is that higher level qualifications translate into higher skills and a

further translation to improved economic performance; a conflation which is not evidenced.

With the change of the UK government in 1997, an adjustment to the economic imperative was made with a perceived focus on social justice through the expansion of the provision of HE both in terms of the numbers of students and accessibility of that provision to a wider market via the location and the perceived relevance to the student as a future member of the workforce, irrelevant of their social class (Beckman and Cooper, 2004). Social class is normally defined through the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) which is determined through the occupation of the mother and father of the household. However, references to social class of those students who enter HE is often based on a range of factors. In particular, and for the purposes of 'widening participation', the neighbourhood HE participation rate and income levels are often used. From a sociological perspective, social class is used as a basis to identify differentiated economic, status and power positions between individuals and groups in society. For the purpose of this study and in relationship to HE participation, I am using the terms working and middle class loosely as referring to those students or individuals who are located according to perceived social, economic and power position.

The shift in policy of HE in FE is said to reflect more than the New Labour Government's role as merely the mediator in the game of globalisation (Mulderrig, 2003); rather it is seen as a continuation of a policy which reflected a neo-liberal stance and which was initiated under the auspices of the Thatcher Government in the 1980s. Neo-liberalism represents a

standpoint that foregrounds a free market ideological position and reduces the role of government in social policies whilst raising the expectation of individuals to accept greater responsibility for their personal and family welfare and economic well-being. The relationship to education is to subsume the role of education for personal satisfaction and development and to place pre-eminence on its role as a vehicle in achieving independent economic benefits and the demands of the economy in the guise of employer skill requirements. Educational promotion and benefit are to be seen by the individual in terms of their potential for investment and return in a monetary sense over the lifetime of the individual. Government philosophy has become extended and deepened through the wide-spread use and formal acceptance of a target-setting, inspection and auditing regime with an acceleration towards the objective of modernisation that has led to action with no or little time to review and evaluate the true impact on learners or staff (Wright, 2001). It is this element, in particular, that highlights the character of the expansion of HE into FE and the role that the partnerships that support such expansion play. The role of FE/HE partnerships within this context will be explored; I will investigate the position of FE/HE partnerships in the present policy make-up, particularly compared to previous years and including how such partnerships not only reflect but also extend the role of government and its demands on individuals; that through the rhetoric of improvement of skills and life opportunities, the hidden purpose is that of maintaining the position of capital. For, according to Kellner (1999) critical theorists regard,

...science and technology as forces and relations of production as providing legitimating ideologies for contemporary capitalist societies.

(Kellner, 1999, p.1)

The re-positioning (or confirmation) of individuals within the context of the policy emphasis on extending vocationalised HE, whether in HE itself or HE into FE, and the particular place of FDs within this will be examined.

Previously, HE in FE partnerships were developed on an ad-hoc basis to fulfil their own various objectives and mission (Abramson, 1996) and such arrangements became widespread in the late 1980s and 1990s but received little policy attention. The emphasis and steer in the early part of the first decade of the 21st century for FE and HE was to work in formally constituted partnerships (HEFCE 2003/16) formulated to achieve government policies and targets. However, this can now be seen to be shifting as policy moves to a stipulation for low-cost HE closer to the HE in FE model and one that responds to the FE colleges' aspiration for greater autonomy.

The study will review the impact of this shift and its resulting policy implications for and application to staff and students in FE and HE, and particularly those who are most closely associated with the teaching and managing of HE in FE. Gleeson et al (2005) have identified how the discourse around professionalism in the FE sector is not complete; is the FE teacher merely a 'trusted servant' (Avis, 2003) of modernisation, or is there capacity to act as an independent and transformative agent with the facility to construct meaning available? According to Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) the field is made up of approaches that combine Lave and Wenger's communities of practice (1991) and Bourdieu's habitus (1984) as a means

whereby individuals are more or less disposed to accepting the prevailing social structures through their habitus. Some will work with the system and some will not. Individuals are influenced by the social context within which they operate but they have also internalised 'the objective social structures which appear spontaneous and natural, but which are in fact socially conditioned' (Macey, 2000, p.175). Furthermore, FE as a whole has become one of the most controlled services within the public sector (Gleeson et al, 2005; Keep, 2006) and is subjected to a regular round of inspections and audits with the resulting effects of a managerialist regime and any previous freedom and space for professional and individual autonomy is reduced by demands to improve retention, achievement, and inspection grades (Cope et al, 2003; Leader, 2004; Patrick et al, 2003; Reicher et al, 2005). It seems increasingly likely that the Coalition government will allow the expansion of HE through a cheaper model operationalised through FE.

Whilst FE appears to bear the brunt of the paradigm of control, audit and inspection, the HE sector might now be regarded as becoming incorporated into this scenario. Through the tools of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) benchmarking and targets are imposed upon higher education institutions (HEIs) (Barnett, 2003, 2005; Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; Silver, 2003). HE might, at one stage, have been viewed as a centre for academic freedom preserving the voices of alternative views and perspectives. This is now being challenged on a number of fronts that reflect both the thrust of neo-liberal policy and the problematisation of the very role and function of HE as the monopoly of knowledge production (Smith and Webster, 1997). This latter discourse is

particularly pertinent to the post-1992 universities and to the partnerships, both emerging and mature, between FE and HE (Scott, 2005). The traditional boundaries between FE and HE are blurring in terms of their functions and roles, with or without Government intervention (if we can imagine such a state) and the latest pronouncements from the Coalition government (see Willetts, 2010) seem to reinforce this. The question arises, is this a trend that will continue and fits with the emergence of an educational practice that is more in keeping with the developments in society and, indeed, globally? A further suggestion is that this represents an extension of FE in HE, rather than HE in FE (Ainley, 2000; 2005). This is operated through the extension of the managerialist paradigm that is endemic in FE and is now re-created in HE, and through the extension of standards and outcomes-based programmes that are now a requirement in HE.

The study will explore how FE and HE institutions and individual tutors in this field regard their role in partnerships in the emerging re-aligned and their responses to government targets to increase the number of widening participation students. The term 'widening participation' has become a by-word for aspects of the social justice policies applied to education and that have been a central tenet in the last New Labour government's strategies. Yet, it is a term that defies a single definition; for HEIs it is determined by postal codes (low participation rates in HE) and previous family experience of HE. The common understanding (see Callender, 2002) is associated with students from lower socio-economic groups, certain ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, older students and, to a lesser extent, female participation. Some authors make no differentiating identification of categories of students

within the term 'widening participation' and generally refer to such students as those from 'lower socio-economic' groups (see Bowers-Brown, 2006 as an example), thus assuming that the individual categories are subsumed within the term 'lower socio-economic'. However, Gorard et al (2006), in a review of barriers to entry into HE undertaken for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), identified that the definition of 'widening participation' has three possible base criteria:

... focusing on raising the aspirations of a few gifted and talented working-class students to enter the 'top' institutions – a utilitarian discourse focusing on getting more people into HE to serve the needs of the economy by providing pre-entry support, supplementary study skills and vocationally relevant programmes, and a transformative discourse of widening participation through broader engagement and institutional change.

(ibid, p. 121)

In the literature on widening participation elements of all three criteria can be identified. Nevertheless, in the context of this study I am not differentiating between these separate categories and I am using the general category of lower socio-economic as an all-encompassing one for 'widening participation'. I undertake further discussion however, about the nature of 'widening participation' and the sub-categories that are contained within the term in chapter five. However, this raises the problem of the identification of socio-economic status of the participating students as I did not have access to personal data. This will be addressed later.

The assumption is that widening participation strategies will result in a realignment of access to educational opportunities at HE level and the incorporation of such students into a social framework that expects individuals to comply with the overarching objective of achievement of economic benefits within a neo-liberal agenda (see Hall, 2005). The nature

and characteristics of the students that are the focus of Government policy and target-setting will be examined and their experience as HE students within an FE context will be analysed in relation to previous notions of the 'new student', as envisaged in the 1960s (Maton, 2005). The assertion that the FE-based students are likely to experience an impoverished version of HE and the counter claim that this is a different and more appropriate version of HE, that meets the needs of such students and the demands of the economy, will be analysed (Abramson et al, 1996; Evans, 2002).

Given the HE emphasis on research and scholarly activity, this study will analyse the perceptions of academics from FE in relation to this particular aspect of their roles. This will require an initial exploration of what is meant by research and scholarly activity in the first instance; and how research and scholarly activity might be viewed from a critical perspective. An examination will be undertaken of how both FE lecturers perceive the role of the FE lecturer in relationship to research and the role of research in FE. It will seek to clarify how the FE teacher and manager understand research and scholarly activity and what (if any) differences they perceive between those teachers in FE delivering HE programmes and those who teach HE at universities (Harwood and Harwood, 2004; Hughes, 2005; Parry, 1999; Widdowson, 2003). It will also question whether research in the FE context will be able to meet both the demands of the Government's targets for an increase in HE participation to meet a target of 50 per cent of all 18-30 year olds by 2010, whilst maintaining national and international excellence in research, or if, indeed, such a separation might clarify the roles of the two sectors and offer improved opportunities to those students. It will examine

whether HE in FE is becoming part of a diversity of HE provision and whether there is an expectation that FE lecturers will require the acknowledgement, support and resources needed to undertake such a role (Gleeson et al, 2005; Page, 1997; Young, 2002). Recognition is made of the diversity of the English HE landscape; whilst the term 'HE' is used generically, the range of practices and understandings of the nature of HE varies considerably. It may be that in discussing HE and responding to questions about HE, FE tutors and managers have a fixed notion and image of HE that is based upon a traditional understanding (and, perhaps, reflecting their own experience) of a university with high levels of research-active lecturers, rather than one that includes Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that do little research and focus on teaching and student support, very much in the vein of FE.

Positioning FE is critical to the debate of HE in FE; whilst the expansion of HE in FE was overshadowed by the expansion of the polytechnics during the 1980s, the focus moved to a more clearly defined role in the late 1990s (Dearing, 1997). This policy emphasis was evidenced in the papers and reports produced by agencies such as Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE); Further Education Development Agency (FEDA); Further Education Funding Council (FEFC); QAA; Universities UK, Standing Conference of Principals and the Learning and Skills Council (HEFCE and FEFC, 1998; HEFCE, 2001; HEFCE and LSC, 2001; HEFCE; QAA for HE, Universities UK and Standing Conference of Principals, 2001). These identified issues, concerns and aspirations ranging from support and development needs in FE, widening participation, costs of provision, quality assurance and partnership issues. Yet the role of FE in this context is still

unclear; at the same time as Dearing (1997) was proclaiming a wider remit for FE in relationship to HE, the Kennedy Report (DfEE, 1998) placed mission focus on vocational programmes and widening participation at sub-HE levels. The Foster review of FE (Foster, 2005) and Leitch (2006) made little reference to this aspect of FE and, indeed, have promoted a more limited range of work. Yet the proportion of HE within FE, although limited, is significant at 10 per cent of total HE numbers and the target for the expansion of FD students continues with an achieved target of 100,000 for 2010 (HEFCE, 2007a). Earlier references to HE in FE emphasise the key role of Further Education Colleges (FECs) in expanding the numbers of students through their contacts with local and regional communities and employers (for example, the Strategic Plan of HEFCE, 2006c). Recent shifts in policy from the Coalition government suggest that FE is to play a more significant role in a particular range of HE provision. Given the growth and expectation of further growth of HE in FE, there is a need to explore the critical features of HE in FE and how the interface of HE and FE meets the needs of such policy imperatives.

Previous work in this field (Parry and Thompson, 2002; Bridge et al, 2003; HEFCE, 2003/15; Harwood and Harwood, 2004) has identified the need for further research on the various aspects of HE in FE provision. The scope of research needed ranges from the micro institutional level (for example, Paterson, 1999) of course tutors operating within the context of either FE or HE, to national policy. Recent work by Parry (2010) and Bathmaker (2010) has addressed this but the fast-moving pace of policy development, particularly with the new Coalition government and its over-riding objective to

reduce costs as well as extending private sector influences/practices, will need a constant review of the HE in FE sector and the impact on partnerships.

The challenge of a critical approach is to lay bare the projected image of progress towards a world of improvement and benefits to the lot of humans through education and to contrast this, using immanent critique, to the reality of the social conditions as reported by those individuals themselves as they apply to FE/HE partnerships. Using a critical hermeneutic approach will allow the perceptions of individuals to reveal the interplay between themselves and their position in the HE in FE scenarios.

The structure of the thesis starts with a discussion around the theoretical framework (chapter two) and how this informs the rest of the study, before any exploration around the literature review and related issues, government policy analysis and empirical analysis. The extent of the three chapters following the theoretical framework (chapters three to five) is longer than in the traditional pattern of thesis structure. I considered this discussion to be essential in understanding the policy framework that has informed the development of HE in FE partnerships. These three chapters incorporate the usual overview of the literature associated with the topic but also explore the policy and features of the 'field' and, as such are an element in the hermeneutic circle. To undertake an analysis of the position of staff and students in an HE in FE partnerships without such a policy and contextual analysis would be to ignore the structural and cultural environments that inevitably provide opportunities as well as constraints on the players in HE in

FE partnerships. To merely consider the perceptions of staff and students and to ignore their environment would have been to render the study invalid. In formulating a critical hermeneutic perspective all pertinent elements are included; it is not the individuals as 'objects' that are under research but the policy and social environments as well. Policy discourse and its analysis,

...requires researchers to uncover the normative nature of decisions that appear to be obvious, inevitable or natural, to test judgements about truth claims, and to consider alternative more socially just ways of developing policies and practice.

(Blackmore, 2005, p. 98)

Thus, chapters three to six explore the three main foci of HE in FE partnerships; the development of partnerships and their function in New Labour policy; the background of FE and the position and development of HE in FE; and, the students themselves with particular reference to government policy of widening participation and its implications for the HE landscape and structure. Without a critique of such issues that grounds and frames the practitioners, managers and students, the analysis would not have fulfilled the requirement and expectation of an approach that is based on critical hermeneutics. The role of policy and HE structure and partnerships thus play a central feature in the study alongside the empirical data collected from staff and students and their interpretation.

The theoretical framework explains the paradigm and concepts used to inform the study and my positionality as a researcher. Educational research is presented as problematic in the context of recent government policy expectations and academic discourses around 'evidence-based' research. General issues around qualitative research are raised and how these have informed the empirical data collection and analysis. As previously indicated, the next three chapters cover the substance of the policy background and

context of HE in FE partnerships, their students and their constituent parties, with analysis of their relationship to the research questions; the literature review is incorporated into these chapters, allowing analysis to flow from the literature review itself. This presented itself as an improved alternative to a shorter literature review followed by analysis of the issues. Chapter six examines the research methods utilised, the ethical considerations and problems encountered. The analysis of the empirical data follows with an example of the coding strategy employed in the Appendix 11. Finally, the last chapter lays out the conclusions and my stance on the future developments for HE in FE partnerships, including dissemination, given the New Labour government claims for social justice and widening participation.

It is to be noted that the bulk of the thesis was written during the New Labour government period (1997-2010) and discussions around policy are related to those as defined by that government. Whether the Coalition government will take a different position is still being clarified. References to policy statements made by Willetts (the present minister for higher education) are cited but it is appreciated that these are not yet fully codified. Political and philosophical tensions between the two parties within the Coalition will, no doubt appear; given the tensions both between and within each party, whether progressive forces, as opposed to the conservative traditional and neo-liberal position, will emerge as the dominant standpoint is not known. However, the latest position as stated in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) letter to HEFCE (December, 2010) expects HEFCE to continue its work on widening participation policies,

Social mobility, fair access and widening participation should be a key strategic objective and you should continue to require an annual Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA) from all institutions.

(DBIS, 2010)

Yet, considerations of the economic downturn and public sector deficits are claiming the priority of the government focus but that, in itself, may present opportunities for the search for, and implementation of, policies that might result in a possible further entrenchment of social divisions that frustrate those practitioners in HE and FE endeavouring to offer social justice through genuine widening participation through education.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework: critical hermeneutics

Introduction

This chapter on the theoretical framework and methodology is placed before the chapters on literature review as it informs that literature review and analysis. It begins with a discussion of critical theory as a 'broad church approach' and more specifically, how this has informed the epistemological and ontological assumptions made. It outlines how these have influenced the framework for data collection. In particular, this chapter addresses the issue of how, within an interpretive approach, the pitfalls of relativism and reductionism are avoided. Although critical hermeneutics is an interpretive model within a critical framework, the approach does not accept that,

Knowledge is reduced to interests, standpoints or just knowers...
(Young, 2008, p. xviii)

The discussion of the position of FD students which follows in the study does not prioritise their 'voice' over the inter relationship between that voice and structural questions; experience is not allowed to dominate and operate as a supreme determinant of knowledge. According to Moore and Muller (1999) there is a danger that,

Knowledge is dissolved into knowing and priority is given to
experience as specialised by category membership and identity.
(ibid, p. 190)

Recognition is given to socio-economic structures and the role that students, teachers, policy-makers and others have within such structures. A critique permeated with critical hermeneutics permits the values, interpretations and perceptions of the 'actors' to be incorporated into the interplay between such individuals and the power structures of society. Yet the individual actor is confronted with the claims of a myriad of interpretations. The hermeneutic, dialectic interplay and 'spiral' between the individual self and context, including government policy, offers a process of reflexivity that can forge a new understanding for the individual which, according to Uggla (2008), allows the,

... dialectic of stabilising and destabilising forces [to become] a
role model for the human capacity to create meaning and identity.
(ibid, p. 216)

The critical researcher takes a stand of social criticism of a particular phenomenon and through the interpretation of the players and the parts, presents an alternative scenario both from an ontological and epistemological perspective. This study allowed me the opportunity to examine and interpret the position of staff and students alongside the HE in FE partnerships that have expanded in the English HE landscape over the last few years and with particular relationship to the 1997-2010 period. In undertaking this study I was aware that there would be no end point in the development of knowledge and interpretation; this is limited to this particular set of individuals, their social and educational contexts and the specific policy determinants as they appertain to this time period. There would be no final analysis and conclusion in the sense of 'closing the circle'; a critical hermeneutic approach authorises an intermediate position as not only acceptable but presents this

as one that is true to the dynamic of social forces and individual histories. Revealing the power relationships contained within partnerships as presented in this study informs the interplay between government policy, HEIs, FECs and the 'actors'; that is the tutors of HE in FE, the managers of partnerships, and the FE students themselves. Initiating the revelation of power relationships within my particular sphere of influence is the first step towards informing and supporting action that will be focused on working with tutors and managers involved in HE in FE partnerships. I am not in a position to work directly with students and, therefore, my objective will be to employ a method that will incorporate the raising of awareness, through dialogue, of the issues of HE in FE partnerships and their positioning in the HE landscape. As Lincoln and Guba (2003) state,

Critical theorists seek to produce practical, pragmatic knowledge that is cultural and structural...

(ibid, p. 249)

The students and staff in this study will provide an insight into how they are responding to their situation within HE in FE and creating meaning of their specific context. Critical hermeneutics offers a strategy to define experience without falling into the problematic of relativism or absolutism.

I provide an analysis of the pressures on my position as a researcher (and, more generally, other researchers) in the educational context, and how these might affect the approach to my work. My perspective and position as author is also examined and related to these issues; they are not separate to these debates but an integral part of them. I also identify my position within the study as an actor who is not external to the interaction between policy and

practice. In particular, I identify my part in a HE in FE partnership which provides the context of the study, my relation to some of the participants, and how this may have influenced the process of data collection.

The challenges presented by the different data collection methods will be discussed and resolutions employed will be highlighted. Fundamental to the study is a critical perspective, specifically, critical hermeneutics, and the extent to which this approach can illuminate the relationships of students, staff and the state in FE/HE partnerships.

The research questions were drawn from a range of my professional and practitioner experience; my reading of the literature; and my previous studies undertaken across a number of HE in FE partnerships. The issues fell into two broad themes; that of the New Labour government policy and the role of HE in FE partnerships and the position of both staff and students in such partnerships. The third issue is related to the effectiveness of using a critical hermeneutic approach.

The research questions:

1. What is the role of FE/HE partnerships in the New Labour policy context?
2. What can the study of foundation degree students and staff say about the role of FE/HE partnerships?
3. How can a critical approach and specifically, critical hermeneutics, develop understanding of these questions and what are its limitations in so doing?

My initial literature review was informed from a critical perspective. The methods and the methodology itself were determined within a paradigm of a critical framework that called for an approach from a non-positivistic standpoint. The study explores and evaluates issues through the use of qualitative methods within a critical hermeneutic framework which seeks the meanings of actors and their situations rather than a nomothetic approach (Seale, 1999). Critical hermeneutics highlight the interpretive act of the researcher in the process of collecting, analysing and ultimately making the transition from mere description to interpretation,

Not only is all research merely an act of interpretation but hermeneutics contends that perception itself is an act of interpretation.

(Kincheloe and McLaren, 2002, p. 97)

As inhabitants of the social world, researchers may be considered bounded in their interpretive acts. However, Kincheloe and McLaren emphasise that, despite the contextual constraints placed upon the act of interpretation and the individual constructing that interpretation, the researcher can provide new levels of understanding about the relationship between the individual, the context and wider social issues,

A critical hermeneutics brings the concrete, the parts, and the particular into focus, but in a manner that grounds them contextually in a larger understanding of the social forces, the whole, and the abstract (the general).

(ibid, p. 98)

1. Critical Hermeneutics: development

Critical hermeneutics is grounded in both a critical approach and hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics rejects the correspondence theory of truth and that understanding is,

...a situated event in terms of individuals and their situations – an inevitably prejudiced viewpoint. [...] ...the idea of objective truth was an illusion.

(Heywood and Stronach, 2005, p. 115)

Hermeneutics was originally conceptualised by Heidegger (1889-1976) but was subsequently developed by Gadamer (1900-2002) in his seminal work, *Truth and Method* (1960), in which he identified the fusion of horizons between the reader and the writer, as opposed to either the natural science approach, or that of his contemporaries who understood interpretation as that of discovering the meaning of the subject. Gadamer's hermeneutics moves on from the *Verstehen* (Dilthey, 1958) understanding of human actions as empathic understanding. As Glass (2005) states,

...it is through re-living the experience of another that one can gain a visceral understanding of what that other experienced; this can provide sociological and psychological insights and awareness not previously considered.

(ibid, p.1)

Instead, meaning was to be formed in its historical context to '...transcend the 'surface level' of intended meaning' and to identify '...discrepancies between manifest and intended meaning' (Held, 1980, p. 313). Gadamer (1970) highlighted this difference between manifest and intended meaning as '...meaning can be experienced even where it is not actually intended' (Gadamer, cited in Held, 1980, p. 313). Gadamer also conceptualised the 'hermeneutic circle' of interaction between the whole and the parts – without which interpretation could not be made. Habermas (1977) criticised Gadamer's work on the basis of his acceptance of authority and its role in maintaining the present status quo rather than moving to a critical point and that Gadamer failed to appreciate,

... the power of reflection that is developed in understanding. [...] ...in grasping the genesis of tradition from which it proceeds and on which it turns its back, reflection shakes the dogmatism of life practice.

(ibid, p. 357)

For Habermas the role of social processes as well as the 'domination and distortion in communication' (Held, ibid, p. 315) can be concealed within an acceptance of authority and a traditional perception. The potential of hermeneutics is in its capacity to generate *self-understanding* of one's position, including external social limitations (Habermas, 1974). Whereas philosophical hermeneutics is based on a belief in the power of rationality in understanding the human actions within their historical context and 'understanding what is involved in the process of understanding itself' (Schwandt, 2003, p. 304), critical hermeneutics seeks to highlight the various power regimes and how they influence the status of individuals with respect to the social, political and economic consequences. It recognises that,

All thought is mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted...

(Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003, p. 452)

And that hermeneutics,

...engage[s] in the back-and-forth of studying parts in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to the parts.

(ibid, p. 445)

The hermeneutic circle drives the individual to consider the interplay of their present understanding to that of the new and unexpected as well as that of the past (Brown and Heggs, 2005, p. 293). Along with critical researchers, hermeneutics takes a differing approach to the separation of fact from value.

Whilst positivists regard this as a central tenet, critical researchers, have asserted that,

...facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription.
(Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003, p. 452)

Within this study the power relations of FE/HE partnerships will be highlighted and the position of students and their tutors examined. What is the perception of the students of their position vis-à-vis other HE students and their future prospects? Whether the option of moving into HE in FE is perceived to open up social and intellectual as well as economic benefits that are proclaimed to be available to such individuals will be pursued.

The praxis that emerges from a critical researcher's project will intertwine the theoretical and the practical; in both explaining and interacting with the world an individual can influence and shape it. The critical researcher is, ultimately, intent on informing and influencing social movements to support the fulfilment of an emancipatory vision for humans operating within a democratic framework (Alway, 1995). This reflects my position in relation to this study; the outcome of the study will help to inform and influence rather than directly intervene or lead action (see later discussion on Becker, 1967). Using the critical hermeneutic approach, it can be appreciated that human behaviour is socially constructed and not determined by laws which can be observed and applied universally. The essential research question: "what is the role of FE/HE partnerships?" requires an approach that will facilitate the exploration of the perceptions of the constituent actors in such partnerships. As Pring states,

One cannot add together or subtract what are essentially social or personal constructions, each intelligible within a unique and distinct life story.

(2000, p. 248.)

2. Critical Hermeneutics: methodology

A study informed by a critical approach is open to using a range of methods. It is a question of using the method or methods that will facilitate the collection of data (of whatever kind) that will then inform the analysis of the question. A qualitative approach in the context of policy impetuses and demands of the New Labour government in the context of HE in FE is to be used. The study does not seek to provide insights or to supply analysis and strategies to governments to improve their social policies (as positivist social science sought to do in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and contrary to demands made on social researchers today (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 9)). Rather, I am striving, through a critical hermeneutic approach, to identify and explore the interpretations of the actors that are the objects of HE in FE government policy and to provide a link between the agency of individual and structure. By agency, I refer to the capacity and the exercising of that capacity, of individuals to affect their autonomy (see p. 179 for further discussion on agency). Social structure provides the environment, including arrangements and facilities, within which the individual operates; such structures (including social norms as well as organisational structures) can be said to restrict or support the expression of individual autonomy. Agency and structure can be positioned in a dichotomous or complementary, interdependent, complex relationship (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1979; Giddens, 1979) and it is this relationship which informs some

of the questions and discussions in the study. An individual's identity reveals the individual's construction of their understanding and expression of their distinctive being within a socio-economic context and is the core element of agency.

A positivist framework that engenders an evidence-based approach, suitable for the demands of policymaking, might be suitable for research that was seeking a nomothetic outcome generated via the use of controlled experiments that could be replicated by other researchers. The methods used by positivists tend to be associated with empirical, mainly (but not exclusively) quantitative approaches; for example, experiments with controlled variables with statistical results leading to the identification of causal relationships which can then be used for predictive outcomes. Essential to a positivist approach is the notion of duality – the separation of facts and values; the study of the material world through the senses was one of fact not values. At the time of the Frankfurt School, the prevailing hegemonic understanding was one of a commonality between the physical sciences and the social sciences (or what Comte (1798-1857), the 'father of positivism', referred to as social physics and later, sociology). Habermas has provided a critique of Comte's position as being "the propagation of the cognitive monopoly of science" (Habermas, 1972, p. 71). From Comte's perspective this is regarded as justified in terms of the hierarchical development of human knowledge, culminating in the sciences, both physical and social. For Comte, the most complex of the sciences were the social sciences.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have argued that all statements, including hypotheses to be tested, are 'theory-laden' and are, in themselves, based upon assumptions that have not been (and cannot be, without an appeal to other theory-laden statements and hypotheses) tested and proven as verifiable. They suggested that,

...facts and theories are so intricately intertwined that it is impossible to imagine an empirical language that does not depend heavily on theoretical assumptions and formulations for its meaning.

(ibid, p. 63)

A critical hermeneutic model provides the tools, based on an immanent critique, to interrogate the interpretation of action and language and how these may convey the fundamental dimensions of human experience and, in the case of this study, the experience of those social agents attached to HE in FE partnerships.

Nonetheless, using a critical perspective presents a challenge in that there is no one understanding of a critical theory or approach. Critical theory '...has always been loose-limbed, comprising a wide variety of authors subject to diverse influences...' (How, 2003, p. 8). Some authors have identified that there are a number of critical theories (Sparkes, 1992). Lincoln and Guba (2003) tracked the developments of differing paradigms and the controversies and discourses around the multiple approaches; their main contention is that the paradigms themselves are,

...beginning to "interbreed" such that two theorists previously thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear... to be informing one another's arguments.

(p. 254)

In examining critical hermeneutics I will start with my understanding of the essential features of critical approaches as developed from the Frankfurt School and its more contemporary usage. Whilst making reference to certain key thinkers in the foundation of a critical approach [see, Horkheimer (1895-1973), Marcuse (1898-1979), and Adorno (1903-1969) amongst others] I do not intend to be historically-bound and I will include references to current writers. Using this as the foundation, I will examine the potential of critical hermeneutics, using a critical interpretive approach and its value as, according to Kincheloe and McLaren,

...the purpose of hermeneutical analysis is to develop a form of cultural criticism revealing power dynamics within social and cultural texts.

(2002, p. 98)

Held (1980) quoted Habermas (1972, p. 195) stating that,

...knowledge claims in the hermeneutic sciences, Habermas holds, '...grasp interpretations of reality with regard to possible intersubjectivity of action-orienting mutual understanding specific to a given hermeneutic starting point.'

(Held, 1980, p. 307)

Although I have used a critical hermeneutical approach in the analysis of the data I will refer more generally to a critical approach to represent those essential features of emancipation immanently-critiquing social and historical phenomena. However, there is an underlying tension for critical theorists, and one that I felt, between on the one hand, a context-based analysis that focuses on structures and the interplay of power and unequal relations, and, on the other, the role of individual agency in the interpretation of structures and power relations. Whilst interpretivists are concerned with how individuals construct their accounts of life, critical researchers are concerned that

interpretivists neglect the interplay with social, political and cultural forces and the influences on individuals. Sparkes (1992) summarises the interest of the critical researcher as,

...how specific forms of knowledge, ways of knowing, and certain values are privileged and legitimised, that is, given meaning and authority relative to others. The central emphasis is upon human consciousness and the ways in which it is shaped and limited by existing social arrangements in such a way as to serve the interests of some groups in our society at the expense of others.

(ibid, p. 40)

I do not regard the individual as 'free-floating' with little or no relationship to specific context and wider social, economic and cultural forces. Neither do I see them as being mere pawns at the hands of such forces or, indeed, government policy. The position of the individual vis-à-vis contextualised, societal and economic forces has been analysed by Billett (2010) in terms of models of the autonomous self; subjugated self; enterprising self; and the agentic self. It is the tension that exists between certain aspects of these concepts of subjectivity that will be of use to this study. For example, the exploration of the position of individuals in the context of FE/HE partnerships and the influence that their particular social/economic position has upon their perception of education and the benefits that accrue to them from undertaking a FD is undertaken. It is the intersection of individual agency and structural forces and positions that underpins this study.

A critical approach incorporates a methodology with the clear purpose of informing and articulating social progress for humans 'to attain their full humanity' (Freire, 1982, p. 5). As Horkheimer, 1976 [1937] stated,

The theory never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's [sic] emancipation from slavery.
(Horkheimer, p. 224)

Social progress for a critical approach is structured through the emancipation of social agents to identify and work towards that which is perceived to be the exercise of the fulfilment of their humanity. When referring to emancipation or emancipatory interests, it is this notion of emancipation that I am using; it is the freedom for humans to pursue that which enlarges their capacity to engage and participate in society free from the 'administered life' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002). It is not merely a 'naming' of the emancipatory action but, through the naming, the recognition of an alternative way '... men [sic] transform the world by naming it,' (Freire, 1972, page unnumbered).

In asserting its value-base on the grounds of the search for emancipatory version of history, a critical approach also lays claim to an essential difference between itself and the natural sciences; that it is,

...inherently emancipatory ... [it] free[s] agents from a kind of coercion which is at least partly self-imposed, from self-frustration of conscious human action.
(Geuss, 1981, p. 2)

Whilst natural sciences 'objectify' knowledge, critical theories and approaches are reflective and can facilitate analysis that can reveal the ideological underpinnings which,

...prevents the agents in the society from correctly perceiving their true situation and real interests...
(ibid, p. 3)

Critical approaches have influenced and contributed to the development of social theories that have formulated analyses of culture, race, class, gender,

consumption, communication and branches of the social sciences [for example, critical race theory, see Gillborn (2008)], but essentially, using a critical approach involves immanent critique. It seeks to shed light on that which is studied on the basis of its inherent values and to expose *what is*. Antonio (1981) considered critical theory to be,

A method of analysis deriving from a nonpositivist epistemology.
(p. 330)

Habermas identified positivism as limited to methodology with a focus on 'systems and procedures' (Habermas, 1972, p. 68) and an approach that 'renounces inquiry into the knowing subject' (ibid). Whilst facts may 'speak for themselves' and are analysed on a detached basis from a positivist perspective, the critical researcher regards the relationship between the apparent facts and the internal, dialectical forces to be of interest. For the critical researcher, it is the exploration of such dialectical forces, the tension that emerges and a concern with the perspective of the subject within an ideological framework that provides the basis for new perspectives and knowledge. As How (2003) states,

In a dialectical relationship one element in the process is presupposed by, and contains an opposing element as part of its own identity. The two are a unity of opposites.
(p. 4)

In the case of my study, the tensions between the claims of the policy-makers on the one hand and the lived experiences and the perceptions of the students and other stakeholders on the other hand, are what form the basis of my critique of FE/HE partnerships.

The Frankfurt School regarded the social sciences of the time as being not only positivist but accommodating of an inherent benign disposition towards the status quo. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1947]) criticised the Enlightenment's elimination of any construct outside that of positivist method because,

...anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion.

(ibid, p. 3)

And Marcuse (1964) asserted that empirical sociology will sustain the total domination of the technicist society by,

... performing an ideological service while proclaiming the elimination of value judgments.

(p. 254)

For Habermas (1972), positivism excluded reflection and had forgotten,

...that the methodology of the sciences was intertwined with the objective self-formative process of the human species...

(p. 5)

An exposition of the use of a critical approach as a research method and its use of dialectic method, in contrast with that of a positivist approach, is given by Au (2007),

Dialectical philosophy is distinctively different from the individualist rational logic of the Enlightenment because in dialectics things can only be understood in relation to each other and cannot be analyzed as independently existing pieces (Allman, 1999). Contrary to dialectics, in the rationalist tradition, most notably the positivistic sciences, things exist in isolation of each other and are analyzed as if they are fixed in space and time.

(page unnumbered)

Critical approaches, however, are said to be concerned with political intent and action; but this begs the question, for whom is this political action

intended and, if there is an emancipatory objective, who is to be emancipated? Is this limited to a distinct 'revolutionary subject' or is the subject determined by the specific circumstances of the phenomenon under scrutiny? Horkheimer (2002 [1947]) and the early Frankfurt School rejected elements of traditional Marxism, including the revolutionary subject as one of these. The revolutionary subject was replaced by nature or society itself; an objective was to explain why the Enlightenment had failed to produce progress as envisaged through the possibilities of a rational society. The early Frankfurt school still referred to 'the masses' but in a manner that identified them as citizens who had forfeited their position to challenge and to offer remedies; this was to be left to certain (but unidentifiable) individuals. The masses were to be marooned in their subjection as a result of their position in society,

It is the concrete conditions of the work in society which enforce conformism – not the conscious influences which additionally render the oppressed stupid and deflect them from the truth. The powerlessness of the workers is not merely a ruse of the rulers but the logical consequence of industrial society...

(Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, [1947] p. 29)

In the 1960s Marcuse sought the revolutionary subject but failed; workers had become absorbed into the benefits of advanced capitalist economies and had exchanged their freedom for the comforts that the economy offered to them. Marcuse pointed out that,

...there is no reason to insist on self-determination if the administered life is the comfortable and even the 'good' life.

(ibid, 2002 [1964], p. 49)

At a later stage, Habermas (1984), rather than making an appeal to the masses, looked to groups who represented those movements regarded as

outside the proletariat – women's groups, environmental groups and community activists. These characterised his move to a focus on communicative rather than consciousness action and,

...a politics of a plurality of agents, a multiplicity of actions and a vastly expanded arena of political struggle.

(Alway, 1995, p. 129)

It may be that it is the Habermasian notion of the political (but not revolutionary) subject that is more relevant to this study, in that I place the subject in a neo-liberal context, rather than one that bestows a revolutionary significance on the subject. Nonetheless, Habermas's model moves us further away from the notion of the subject itself; whereas the traditional notion of action was one of the struggles to control the object,

...the struggle to develop the correct consciousness and to establish that appropriate relationship.

(Alway, 1995, p. 135)

Habermas's model of analysis replaced the action of the subject with that of inter-subjectivity, rather than the subject-object relationship that locked human beings in a battle of historicity, of the continuing fight to control the natural and social world (Habermas, 1972).

An element of the study is a questioning of whether students are merely being moulded to become the next generation of workers who will be expected to conform to the requirements of the globalised economy. How might students and teachers, despite the undoubted difficulties of the market economy and the pressures that this brings to bear, contest the notion of compliance and seek the implementation of Habermas's 'ideal speech formation' (Habermas, 1984)? For Habermas, this is an opportunity to seek

a consensus that is '...the ultimate criterion of the truth of a statement or of the correctness of norm' (Held, 1980, p. 256). However, ideal speech situation as one that is governed by rules of rational dialogue is one that is rarely realised but can act as a standard by which actions can be judged. Can students and staff identify their role in the interplay of the system of the polity and state that has become dominated by economic interests and that of the lifeworld, which is,

... the context in which actors come to know themselves, where they ask questions of each other raising 'validity claims' about what is true or false, right or wrong, about what should or should not happen.

(How, 2003, p.128)

Although the original formulation of lifeworld was devised by Husserl (1936), my use is based on Habermas's definition as detailed in his work in 1987. For Habermas the lifeworld is that which provides the framework for everyday communication and at the same time brings the horizons and interpretations of experiences, values and culture together (Nelson et al, 2008; Kozoll and Osborne, 2004). Furthermore, it is this interpretation and relationship between values, culture and experiences that provide an area of cultural validity for everyday communication and allow rational exchanges that will lead to 'ideal speech' and offer support for decision-making (Harrington, 2006).

The effect of the system 'shap[ing] and dominat[ing] what happens in the lifeworld' (How, p. 161) will be illuminated, as well as the colonisation of the lifeworld by the needs of the system to achieve technical efficiency. The colonisation of the lifeworld is, for Habermas, a process whereby the system that carries the,

... instrumental [...] imperatives and expedients operative in the institutions of the market, the state, the juridical system and other expert apparatuses invade and disfigure that space of social antagonism whose only sources of legitimate resolution lie in inclusive uncoerced dialogue in the public sphere.

(Harrington, 2006, p. 341)

For Habermas, this was to hamper the exchange of interaction that might provide the groundwork for the development of new knowledge to inform such resolutions.

Within this study, I want to examine the possibility that, through their education, students have the opportunity to develop the skills and approaches that could constitute a social democracy based on these Habermasian precepts. In other words, the possibility of regarding the students with a role in potential emancipation, as opposed to being vehicles for the continuation of the social and economic relationships from which they are purported to develop through the policy of widening participation, is a factor in the study.

3. Qualitative research

Having considered the basic premises of the methodological approach of my study, I will focus in the next section on the discourse around qualitative approaches. In this study I used a qualitative approach. Focus groups and interviews were used to collect data; the details of the methods used will be examined in the data analysis chapter seven.

For researchers in the social sciences, there has been a history of methodological development (Tesch, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 14) that stemmed, initially, from an assumption that the positivist approach

provides the increase in knowledge in the social sciences similar to that experienced in the physical sciences. Researchers in the positivist mode were seen to provide 'hard' outcomes that supply objective, testable hypotheses or theories, whilst researchers in the idiographic, hermeneutic mode provide knowledge on individuals or groups acting within a social context, often constructing, to a greater or lesser extent, their reality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that there were, in effect, two positions; one that represented the positivist approach to research and one that identified multiple realities, based on the individual's construction of their experience and context. Pring (2000) has challenged this and regards the dichotomy of the quantitative versus the qualitative as incorrect and requiring revision.

'Quantitative' and 'qualitative' are frequently seen in opposition. They invoke different 'paradigms', different 'epistemologies'. ...The division between the two has become quite sharp, reflected in their respective languages or in different logical configurations of otherwise familiar words - objectivity/subjectivity, reality/multiple realities, truth/consensus, knowledge/opinion, understanding/perception and so on.

(Pring, 2000, p. 248)

Pring argues that this is a false dualism and that neither position can lay claim to the 'truth'. Humans, in undertaking dialogue, have to have a common basis of understanding and meaning in order to further develop meaning. Qualitative research embraces a number of methods and perspectives; it can be used within a positivist framework (for example, drawing on naturalistic settings and experience) as well as interpretive paradigms. Objections from positivists that qualitative work can result in a diminution of 'value-free' and objective science are still prevalent (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and particularly so in the search for 'evidence-based' research

in education (see p. 47). Qualitative research is not constrained to one approach and, on this basis is suitable for my study.

An important aspect of a critical approach is that it regards research as being value-laden.

...its principal characteristic is an acknowledgement that the researchers are unable to maintain a disinterested stance when collecting, organizing or analysing data, but their belief systems, and more importantly their political projects, are implicated in their work as researchers. They cannot step outside these frameworks and political projects...Values are therefore central to research.

(Scott and Morrison, 2006, p. 48)

So, whilst critical approaches do not deny a multiple-reality viewpoint, they do not accept a value-free standpoint; multiple-realities may be valid but, it may be claimed, certain reference points are those that are to be found in the context of a neo-liberal and capital focussed society whose structures and cultures seek to maintain the status quo or to improve the position of capital. For the critical researcher, the emancipatory vision carries with it a conception of a better world and what that might look like, and, importantly, that individuals have a role to play in that,

...the intentional actions of social actors can play a role in determining the dynamics and direction of social change.

(Alway, 1995, p. 2)

Social actors, according to this argument, are not totally determined and controlled by their particular place within their historical, social and economic contexts; they have a role in the interplay between the possibilities that might exist (ibid, p. 6). There is, however, a structure, culture and history within which the individual actors operate. This position does not reflect that of the early Frankfurt School, who regarded the dominant position of technical

rationality over the individual and which manipulated facts and was ‘...a facility for measuring only what was technically feasible’ (How, 2003, p. 7). Application of this reason allowed greater production of goods but higher levels of ‘...conformity, assimilation and unfreedom’ (ibid) (see also Marcuse, 1994 [1964] and Adorno, 1991). This form of rationality is devoid of any form of discriminating between values and ends. Instead its focus is on efficiency of means; instrumental or technical rationality for the early critical theorists had distorted the possibilities of the Enlightenment in favour of technical control, processes and measurement. As a consequence, understanding of being human is lost and,

Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted.

(Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002 [1947], p. 6)

The extension of technical rationality to the world of education is presumed and examined as an element of this study; does the expansion of HE in FE represent or suggest a submission to the demands of economic forces that both underwrite and direct higher education.

This has implications for HE in FE students as social actors in this context. Critical hermeneutics in particular will help to understand the lot of the students and how in researching this issue, it might be possible to,

... inject critical social theory into the hermeneutical circle to facilitate the understanding of the hidden structures and tacit cultural dynamics that insidiously inscribe social meanings and values.

(Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003, p. 447)

Qualitative approaches are not considered to be standardised; for Schwandt they are,

...more comprehensible as a site or arena for social scientific criticism than as any particular kind of social theory, methodology, or philosophy.

(Schwandt, 2003, p. 293)

What tends to bind qualitative researchers is their rejection of,

...the blend of scientism, foundationalist epistemology, instrumental reasoning, and the philosophical anthropology of disengagement that has marked 'mainstream' social science.

(ibid, p. 293)

Furthermore, there is an appreciation that social inquiry not only attempts to understand social phenomena but that their very inquiry prompts 'a continuous process of critical reflection and transformation' (ibid, p. 295).

This has resonance within this study.

Although it has been asserted that qualitative approaches have become more established within the academic world (Bryman, 1988; 2008), the debate has moved on to reflect the latest developments. Arguments continue on replicability, for example, Tooley and Darby (1998); Slavin (2002; 2008) and for greater generalisability in educational research and the use of those methods normally associated with the positivist approach that attract approval and funding (Maclure, 2004; Hodkinson, 2004; Pring, 2004). The debate continues as evidenced in a salvo from Hammersley (2005) who argues that education research needs some element of self-policing to defend itself against,

...researchers who want to write imaginative literature, poetry or political tracts, *and pretend that these are research*, but also from external agencies engaged in sham inquiry designed to serve commercial or political goals. [original emphasis]

(Hammersley, 2005, p. 152)

Hammersley's approach is one of neo-realism - an attempt to define the objective, to seek the real world independent of our interest in it. This stands in opposition to a pure positivist position, to critical researchers and also that of many postmodernists who see the role of postmodernism as to give voice to those sections of society who, hitherto, have been either neglected or even disparaged. Hammersley's approach has been described as a 'quasi-foundationalist' by Smith and Deemer (2003) in that he attempts to preserve the 'empiricist concept of truth but must reject naïve interpretivism' through the use of the two validating elements of plausibility and credibility to avoid the criticism of relativity (ibid, p. 433). Hammersley's position is clearly in opposition to such researchers as Sparkes (2007) who have made a stand against the hegemony of empiricist research methods and use experimental story-writing that is, according to Sparkes, self-explanatory to the reader and his hope that,

... the reader might think *with* the story and see where it takes them.

(ibid, p. 540)

This has no place in government policy and practice which insists on educational research displaying compliance with a stance that results in evidence-based outcomes; there is no truck with a narrative position and the paradigm it represents. The stance I have taken in this study represents a rejection of Hammersley's approach; and whilst the claim might be made that

research becomes politicised through a critical approach, the counter argument is made that,

...politics suffuses all social science research, from the micropolitics of personal relations in a research project, to issues involving research units, universities, university departments, and ultimately government and its agencies.

(Punch, 2005, p. 135)

This is not to undermine politics in its macro or philosophical sense, but to emphasise that to escape the political is to deny a fundamental element within human society. Neither is my stance one that includes an experimental approach such as that of Sparkes (ibid); my study has taken a hermeneutical approach but one that actualises the individual within a structural framework. It does not take a narrative form, although the perceptions and 'stories' of the individuals are used as a basis for interpretation and analysis.

The practical issues I faced as a researcher were also about the value of the range of methods. For example, the interviews and focus groups were designed to reveal participants' perceptions of their experiences in the FE/HE partnerships.

Interviews lend themselves to the exploration of the perceptions by the respondents of a certain situation or experience, generating data that will reflect the social construction by the respondent of their world as seen through their eyes. There were no post-interview discussions with participants to corroborate the findings or analyses; this reveals a potential limitation to the notion of authenticity (as expounded by Lincoln and Guba

(1985)) and an accurate and faithful representation in checking the interview representations and using the study as an element in work that was committed to a transformative and emancipatory stance that involved the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 2003, p. 257). This could be regarded as a pragmatic approach to the implementation given my lack of direct and regular access to a range of groups of students. In practice, it is considered unlikely that any attempt to conduct a longitudinal study or to incorporate the interviewees more comprehensively with the study would have had the capacity to add value to the narratives identified.

4. Identifying appropriate approaches to questions of validity

Earlier practices up to the 1980s in the social sciences that underpinned an approach based on an emulation of the natural sciences, tended to be based on an assumption that the 'facts' produced from data collected represented reality and that the subject had no voice. According to Hammersley (1990),

...quantitative analysis assumes that people's actions are the mechanical products of psychological and social factors, thereby neglecting the creative role of individual cognition and group interaction.

(p. 598)

However, with a movement towards a different paradigm that has tended to favour qualitative research methods, the search for an appropriate response to the question of reliability and validity has been reappraised (Gergen and Gergen, 2003). The fundamental challenging of universal rule-seeking resulted in a crisis of validity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) for qualitative research in the 1980s and 1990s (Denzin, 2009); this then led to a questioning and search for alternative approaches to issues around the

evaluation of qualitative studies. This challenge has led to a further dilemma of the interpretive mode and the seeking of acceptable criteria to justify one account or narrative over another and being understood as,

...the outcome of a particular textual/cultural history in which people learn to tell stories of their lives to themselves and others.
(Gergen and Gergen, 2003, p. 578)

Denzin (2009) outlines the developments of qualitative research and how the arguments are not new and are constantly in a defensive position vis-à-vis the dominant position of positivist approaches. He emphasises how data have become commodified and cannot be treated as neutral pieces of information to be turned into evidence to inform government policies,

Data are not silent. Data are commodities produced by researchers, perhaps owned by government or funding agencies.
(p. 146)

The researcher in interpretive frameworks is often faced with a predicament of constructing an approach to validity that will satisfy questions such as: is this work rigorous? Would other researchers accept this work as being plausible, comprehensible and is it defensible in the face of scrutiny from others (Lincoln and Guba, 2003, p. 275)? Some authors (see Schwandt, 2003) take the discourse around validity as an expression of issues to do with notions of authenticity, fairness and giving voice to participants. Others challenge these perspectives and regard validity as an opportunity to consider matters of ethical importance, representation (of both participant and researcher) and to challenge the very basis of validity and its regime of truth (Lather, 1993). Lather's transgressive validity seeks to expose the assumptions and limitations of positivist validities and to consider,

... the conditions of the legitimization of knowledge in contemporary postpositivism.

(ibid, p. 673)

Her further concern is to consider,

... the site of emancipatory research and pedagogy, [... helping] us to “get smart” about the possibilities and limits of critical praxis.

(Lather, 2004, p. 2)

Some (for example, Lincoln and Guba, 1985) have argued that both reliability and validity are not appropriate in qualitative studies as they represent a different, positivist paradigm of ‘facts’; a qualitative stance can discard these in its exploration of the representation of the subject’s voice and the representation of more than one account. However, tests of reliability and validity in qualitative studies may be replaced by alternative, but related, concepts. Such alternatives have been suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): trustworthiness, which includes credibility; transferability; dependability; confirmability or objectivity; and authenticity which relates more closely to action research in that it refers to the enlightenment and empowerment of the participants on the research (Bryman, 2008, p. 377 - 380).

Under the pressure of the hegemony of the positivist model in research funding, some feel the need to express a compliance with the prevailing criteria, as proffered through government agencies. According to Morse and Richards (2002) it is essential that ‘determining reliability and validity remains the qualitative researcher’s goal’ (Morse and Richards, 2002, p. 168). Morse and Richards are offering a defence against the criticisms posed from a

positivist perspective. However, they reveal that the underpinning reason is to legitimise a claim for funding, amongst others,

Qualitative researchers can and do defend their work as solid, stable and correct. It is these claims that give qualitative research legitimacy and thus the right to be funded, to contribute to knowledge, to be included in curricula, and, most important, to inform policy and practice.

(Morse and Richards, 2002, p. 168)

The introduction, however, of the relationship between funding and policy and practice, although an uncomfortable situation which researchers may face, detracts from the argument of the justification of reliability and validity in qualitative research. This further endorses what Peters and Humes (2003) have asserted about education research, that,

... at least the mainstream, is inherently conservative, being largely state or federally funded and still strongly imbued with the positivist ethos it inherited during its historical development and professionalisation as an emerging and legitimate field of study. Funders and many policy-makers want handy evaluations of existing policy and research that is 'evidence-based'.

(p. 111)

For the purposes of my research I was aware of these requirements as identified by Kvale (1996),

Validity comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings.

(p. 241)

Validity within my study sits within the framework of authenticity, fairness and voice. Having rejected criteria based on '...a science that silences too many voices' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 15), I have worked to permit the authentic, real voice of the subjects (the teachers, the students and other stakeholders in HE in FE partnerships) to be heard, whilst recognising that I

have a role to play in the interpretation of their voice. The search for the authentic voice of the students and staff in the context of this study is one that acknowledges that individuals present accounts and perceptions that are determined by their personal, specific, context-bound experiences (see for example, DePalma, 2008; Giroux and McLaren, 1986). The reporting of individual voices is not regarded as necessarily representative of the specific group under investigation but allows and surfaces a range of voices that are in contrast to the dominant discourse; in the case of this study this reflects the students and the staff who are involved in HE in FE partnerships as opposed to policy documents and government claims of such partnerships. According to Lincoln and Guba (2003) authenticity is determined by criteria that include the voices of those normally excluded from inquiries and to ensure that their voices are treated 'fairly and with balance' (p. 278). For the participants in my study this involved the initial stages of the research of focus groups and interviews, rather than any involvement in participative inquiry or action research; work with stakeholders that may be able to take this further will be forthcoming at the dissemination stage and the groundwork for this was laid with certain groups at the data collection stage. Limited access to certain categories of the participants may make supplementary direct involvement with them confined to this study. This restricts claims of emancipatory action and raises issues for researchers who, as with some ethnographic work, are restricted to time and geographically-bound studies (see Geoffrey and Troman, 2004). Increasing demands on researchers to conclude projects within a specific period and,

...the pressures from funding bodies for quick completion make a sustained 12 month minimum research period a luxury.

(Jeffrey and Troman, 2004, p. 537)

In a similar manner, researchers wishing to undertake participatory work will find their fieldwork curtailed by the expectations of completion, reporting and publication. The implications for my work are clear; exploration of the authentic voice of the participants will be limited by the restrictions I confronted in accessing students and staff and by the very nature of collecting, reporting and interpreting data from the participants themselves.

The basis of validity used for positivist-based studies is not appropriate in work where,

Subjects...are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 31)

For these authors, as for me, the essential criterion for judging the effectiveness of a method in critical studies is that,

Empirical materials and theoretical arguments are evaluated in terms of their emancipatory implications.

(ibid, p. 35)

Fairness can be interpreted as ensuring that all those 'voices' that are perceived to be relevant to the study are included and, as Lincoln and Guba (2003) identify, this is not an act of pseudo-objectification but intended,

...to prevent marginalisation, to act affirmatively with respect to inclusion, and ... all voices ...had a chance to be represented in the texts...

(ibid, p. 278)

From a critical hermeneutic standpoint, the interpretation of these 'voices' within the framework of engaging with,

Understanding [that] is participative, conversational and dialogic.... [and] produced in that dialogue, not something reproduced by an interpreter

...

(Schwandt, 2003, p.302)

This is not a mechanistic application of a formula applied by the researcher but, rather, an appreciation of the 'lived experience' intertwined with a fusing of the researcher and the actors' interests, action and text (as evidenced in the interviews and focus groups).

5. Educational research today

It is appropriate and pertinent to consider the possible motivations of and pressures on researchers, including myself, involved in studies of partnerships and/or HE in FE. There has been growing pressure on educational researchers to comply with an evidence-based approach to their research (see Hargreaves, 1996; Hillage, Pearson, Anderson and Tamkin, 1998; Tooley and Darby, 1998); an approach that moves research towards explanation and verification using post-positivist methods and away from interpretive and qualitative methods (Pring, 2004). Lather (2004), referring to the United States of America's government's approach to educational research and its role, identified that it was moving to a position that,

...includes governmental incursion into legislating scientific method in the realm of educational research.

(p. 759)

The debate is formalised through research sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council (Furlong and Oancea, 2005). This report strives to map models of applied research and seeks to formulate a framework, so that,

... any researcher should be able to submit applied and practice-based research that they consider to have achieved 'due standards of excellence'.

(ibid, p. 5)

The field of conflict, identified and analysed by Oancea (2005), as between the protagonists of the evidence-based approach and those who defended their position with,

The role of the educational researcher is conceptualised differently, from that of a 'technician' meant to deliver answers of 'what works' to that of a 'public' or 'critical' intellectual whose accountability should be defined not in terms of the immediate impact of national policies informed by research findings, but as a capacity for producing localised, transferable knowledge.

(Oancea, 2005, p. 158)

This position is reflected in this study; I do not see this work informing national policy or practice, and neither is it action-research that will inform the practice of tutors or managers in HE in FE. It seeks to produce knowledge that highlights the interaction of individual agency within structural frameworks that may operate against the claims of national policy. This could be used at a number of levels (that is, at national or local levels) but this is not my concern in terms of this thesis. I am, rather, concerned with how the knowledge produced can be disseminated and used in my role within a partnership and with those within the academic community who have an interest in HE in FE partnerships.

In addition to this, education, as with other public services, is expected to operate within budgets that give value for money, achieve government targets and offer continuing improvements (DfES, 2003). Within this culture, the policy-implementer is seeking justification for the latest initiative in terms of improvements in practice and arguments for increased budgets. The prevailing influence on education organisations is that of evidence-based research leading to improved practice (Cordingley, 2005). A further indication of the surge towards research that purports to serve the practitioner on the basis of evidence comes from the publication of a National Education Research Forum (NERF) (now defunct) Bulletin by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE). The first issue of this bulletin asserts that NERF (2004) will be looking to substantiate research that offers, ‘...really hard evidence about what works in education....’ (p. 2).

A reasoned yet pragmatic approach is offered by Pring (2004) in accepting evidence-based research whilst recognising the constraints of some of the methods normally associated with a scientific approach. However, policy-makers seek answers that are seemingly resistant to dispute and that meet the demands of the electorate in offering perceived value for money and effectiveness. In the field of HE in FE and partnerships, government is seeking research,

... on the development of higher level skills and on engaging employers closely and directly. We expect that provision of HE in FECs will primarily focus on the needs of local and regional communities.

(HEFCE, 2006b, p. 10)

Many academics in educational research work to present arguments and discourse against this backdrop and will inevitably find themselves influenced, be this consciously or not. The production of evidence to support a particular stance then excludes opposition and prevents engagement with, ...intellectual and deeply political contestations surrounding their modelling of research.

(Holligan and Humes, 2007, p. 25)

It is, therefore, appropriate for authors (including myself) to consider their own position in this debate. Furthermore, there is concern that the present climate of policy-driven research will affect studies of HE in FE.

Essentially, the approach of evidence-based research is underpinned by systematic reviews of the extant literature so that analyses can be facilitated to draw conclusions about that 'which works' and inform practice (Oakley, 2002; Evans and Benefield, 2001). Systematic reviews employ strict criteria in terms of identifying acceptable procedures for the analysis of research, as well as the validity of the studies under review. These have been identified as essentially positivist and to the exclusion of other methodologies (Evans and Benefield, 2001; Hammersley, 2001, p. 548). However, it is in the detail of acceptable research methods themselves and their positivistic epistemological and ontological assumptions that give rise to considerable problems. As Hammersley, 2001, states,

What is curious about this dual application of the positivist model to the task of reviewing is that it takes little or no account of the considerable amount of criticism that has been made of that model since at least the middle of the twentieth century.

(p. 545)

Hammersley is also concerned that the use of the terms 'systematic' and 'evidence-based' transmit the notion that all other approaches are *unsystematic* and *not* evidence-based and that other approaches are, through the use of these terms, rendered illegitimate for research purposes. This then determines which research will receive public funding. As Cordingley, the chief executive of CUREE states with regard to access to research funding that was initially open on the basis of open competition but later was available only,

...on the basis of the priorities of the government and the outcomes of earlier reviews...

(Cordingley, 2009, p. 4)

Peters and Humes (2003) argued that current educational research is,

...inherently conservative, being largely state or federally funded and still strongly imbued with the positivist ethos...[and has] ...scientific pretensions of structuralism.

(ibid, p. 111)

Whereas, according to Peters and Humes, the aim should be to,

...expose domination by diagnosing power/knowledge relations...

(ibid, p. 112)

However, the positivist approach, whereby random control trials (RCTs) and nomothetic research generally are deemed to be superior to the 'rigourlessness' of qualitative research (Davies, 2004; Oakley, 2002; Slavin, 2004; Thomas, 2004), is nevertheless promoted. For Oakley (2000), an emphasis on qualitative work does not support those who are vulnerable and needing policy support. The outcomes of such research is localised and contextualised, therefore giving it less value for policy-makers.

Methodologies of the positivistic paradigm are now being promoted through the work of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) based at the Institute of Education, London and the National Foundation for Educational Research NFER (Gough, 2004, p. 48). Hodkinson (2004) sees a new orthodoxy in educational research methodology that imposes an approach grounded in supposed objectivity, and value- free outcomes that control researchers and with,

...centralised sources of funding for educational research make many researchers vulnerable.

(ibid, p. 9)

Maclure's (2005) analysis of systematic reviews identifies them as,

... a backward-looking business. It construes research knowledge as static, transparent and compliant with disciplinary boundaries. It assumes that evidence can be extracted intact from the texts in which it is embedded, and 'synthesised' in a form that is impervious to ambiguities of context, readers' interpretations or writers' arguments (i.e. bias).

(ibid, p. 394)

Maclure critiques systematic reviews on their own terms; that is, they are based on 'extremely small numbers of primary studies, which seriously compromise their capacity to inform policy or practice' (p. 393) and that they are based on a lack of clarity in the language used. Yet, even in the world of science and engineering, the latest report on research support by government by the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE), 2009, argues that policy options for identifying impact need to be better articulated (ibid, p. 12) and that government should increase its support for Research and Development (R&D) and identifies the role of government support as essential given that,

Private investors will under-invest in areas of research where there is uncertain anticipated utility. Even if the work is successful, the original researcher rarely gains from such research, because of the time scales involved, the open dissemination of knowledge and the development work required.

(CaSE, 2009, p. 2)

Of particular interest to me is the claim by Kellner (1999) that research that merely confirms government policy, is as an example of how,

...positivist sciences [are] instrumental in reproducing existing social relations and obstructing social change
(Kellner, 1999, page un-numbered)

What evidence is there that researchers in the specific area of partnerships in HE in FE are under the same pressure to produce research that is merely confirmatory of government policy? It is a climate of what is acceptable rather than direct rejections or instructions which promotes research conducive to government policy. For example, funding has been available for small scale research through the government-backed agency, Foundation Degree Forward (FDF). Methods are not prescribed, but rather the expectation that the research will be used to support the application and impact of FDs is clear. An output of research for FDF are case studies that are marketed to employers that, for example, detail how Tesco, the supermarket, has been 'involved in the design, development and piloting of a FD in Retail' (FDF, 2008). Its focus is clearly on the application of FDs rather than any critique of FDs. A report by Moseley and Blackie (2008) has identified three areas for research on FDs: collection of statistics and other related data; impact studies; and projects. The latter is, as identified by the authors, an array of a mixture of projects on various aspects of the application of FDs with, potentially, some projects that are concerned with

raising and analysing research questions. These are to be the focus of future developments; however, the impact and statistical work is regarded as essential. This permits the exploration of only that which is approved under the given criteria. On a speculative note, it is unlikely that agencies, responsible for embedding government policies for FDs, would be inclined to support such a study as this that explores the relationship between government rhetoric and the perception of those policies by students and other stakeholders in FE/HE partnerships.

For critical researchers, an analysis of research and its application to policy can reveal how the opposite of the policy objectives might be the real consequences. For example, Brookfield (2007), using Marcuse's (1994 [1964]) concept of repressive tolerance, argues that the requirement to include black and ethnic minority (BME) studies to enhance equality and diversity in the curriculum, is more akin to the compliance within a dominant ideology model rather than democratisation and inclusivity in the classroom.

Repressive tolerance ensures that adults believe they live in an open society characterised by freedom of speech and expression, while in reality their freedom is being constricted further and further. The dominant ideology remains dominant as students will perceive this as 'commonsense' and find arguments or perspectives that places other approaches as 'problems'.

(Brookfield, 2007, p. 558)

The academic, researcher or practitioner may be conceived of as in a similar position as those of the students cited by Brookfield. The arguments posited by ministers appeal to the 'commonsense'; that research should reflect the concerns and aims of society and that these are formulated by the elected representatives for consumption through the various agencies, such as

HEFCE. In the foreword to the HEFCE strategic plan of 2008, David Eastwood, the chief executive states,

Higher education makes a major contribution to our economy: well over £45 billion a year, according to some estimates. Many universities and colleges already work closely with employers, through work placements, course development and research collaborations. Such engagement must increase to meet the global challenge for higher-level skills, research excellence and knowledge transfer. That engagement also means developing increasingly flexible courses and study programmes. Foundation degrees are growing in importance, offering more access and greater flexibility. Higher education should also make a fuller contribution to workforce development, with more places co-funded by employers. With our support universities and colleges are vigorously developing appropriate courses.

(Eastwood, 2008, unnumbered)

The message is clear; HE has a responsibility in both its provision in research and its courses to contribute to England's position in the global economy. FDs are highlighted as meeting the policy requirements of improved flexibility and access. It is assumed that the message is almost self-evident. This is Brookfield's 'common-sense'. There is no or little room for debate; an alternative view is likely to become marginalised.

6. Positionality

My position as a researcher and my role in producing knowledge and the acknowledgement of my standpoint is essential. In this study I am moving beyond a practice of regarding data as neutral and objectively construed and interpreted. Rather I am privileging the 'voice' of the participants of HE in FE partnerships in the process of revealing social constructs with their attendant power relationships. In producing knowledge, I am working on the following premises: that power relationships are imbued with social constructs and ideologically

constructed values that are difficult to separate from everyday existence; that the neo-liberal framework permeates the relationships between and amongst individuals and groups; that certain groups hold privileged positions over others; and that practices and systems, including those in education, can reproduce or contribute to the inequalities and subversion of opportunity for individuals and groups held to be in a subordinate position (see Kincheloe and McLaren, p. 452). Such premises are not only acknowledged but form the standpoint of the study. In approaching the relevant research methods, therefore, I am conscious that,

... methods of data analysis are not simply neutral techniques because they carry the epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions of the researchers who developed them.
(Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p. 415)

It is not realistic to operate on the premise that the individual researcher, in analysing the data does not, consciously or subconsciously, allow the interpretation to become a reflection of their own history and values (Hodkinson, 2004). For example, in relation to interviewing, one method used in this study, the method,

...is influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer, including race, class, ethnicity, and gender.
(Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 48)

Alway (1995), in referencing Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972 [1947]) work on the problematic detachment of the intelligentsia [sic] and the impossibility of extricating oneself from one's history, states that,

Those who have insight into their own entanglement might also develop insight into the entanglement of reason in the social reality of unfreedom...

(ibid, p. 44)

Offering the possibility of some reflexivity and self and socio-awareness is regarded as the way to promote the role of the 'independent' researcher. As a researcher and a product of socio/economic conditions and history, I am aware that,

...we do not have a timeless essence or consciousness that places us beyond historical or political practices.

(McLaren, 1995, p. 284)

Furthermore, the researcher, the data and, how the data has been collected initially, are interconnecting and contributory factors in the development of meaning.

The interpretation of data does not produce a single output of meaning; the researcher, in the process of the collection of data as well as the interpretation of the data, represents the data from their perspective. As Charmaz (1995) stated,

I assume that the interaction between the researcher and the researched *produces* the data, and therefore the meanings that the researcher observes and defines.

(p. 35)

This was an issue that Hammersley (1990) identified; that ethnographic descriptions could not be merely a description '...that reproduce some portion of the world' (ibid, p. 606) but that the researcher needs to make explicit their values that lie behind their selection of the material and subject. Although other aspects of Hammersley's critique may be disputed (for

example, the assumption that one can discover the 'truth') this particular criticism of the interplay of researcher, historical/socio location, subject is addressed.

The claim of Becker (1967) is that the academic and particularly the sociologist *should* take a partisan approach as opposed to an objective, distanced stance, in order to effect a radical interpretation which, ultimately, leads to a political stance in a particular direction. This has been the commonly-accepted argument of Becker (1967) which Hammersley (2001a) critiqued. According to Hammersley, Becker differentiated between a relativist sociology of knowledge position and that of the application of method such that,

Whatever side we are on, we must use our techniques impartially enough that a belief to which we are especially sympathetic could be proved untrue (p. 246).

(Becker, cited in Hammersley, p. 98)

This is a position with which I can associate; whilst the researcher may have certain sympathies there will be no benefit to the work of research or, indeed, the plight of the 'underdog' (Gouldner, 1968), if the methods are abused and distorted to suit the particular stance of the academic. It will leave itself open to claims of limited value, if any, and bring the role of research into disrepute. I also agree with the argument that criticises those sociologists who merely serve the interests of government, a particular dominant group or the status quo and provide evidence that ignores any alternative. The temptation of government funds that underwrite such research is one that may attract researchers in the face of the anticipated cuts in HE over the next few years. The

results of research, may, nonetheless, result in, or influence, political and social outcomes; research may reveal power relationships that destabilises the prevailing power positions and present possibilities for change. This reflects my position; in undertaking the analysis of the data and the interplay between individual, social structure and policy, the perceptions of the individuals may reveal power relationships and structural barriers that were previously not recognised or rejected in government strategies. Researcher values are not negated through this process; my values are ones that reflect an overarching objective of progression towards and the use of, democratic practice as well as a concern for the educational opportunities for individuals, whatever their social position.

The power relationship between researcher and researched is such that, from both the theoretical and practical perspective, it needs to be recognised and reflected in the structuring of any interaction with those being researched as well as the analysis and interpretation of data (Coffey, 1996). From a critical hermeneutics perspective, the role of the researcher is to decode the relationship between the subject and their position within the socio-economic context and to recognise the influence of ideology,

Domination, legitimated as it is by ideology, is decoded by critical hermeneuts who help critical researchers discover the ways they and their subjects have been entangled in the ideological process.

(Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003, p. 451)

The position of the researcher in this study is one that is reflected in my standpoint on a critical approach (identified earlier in this chapter). My particular perspective, professional experience, life history and position in a

HE in FE partnership all have a bearing on my original formulation of the study and its questions. Having a number of years' experience in both FE and HE and, in particular, working in HE in FE and having a management brief within a HE in FE partnership, my experience of both FE and HE is considerable and this study has given me the opportunity to explore some of the hypotheses that have been postulated during this time. Furthermore, as an experienced practitioner, and both teacher and manager in FE, HE in FE and HE, my own perspective is an element that needs to be articulated within this study. Lapadat (2009), referring to autobiographical narrative, makes the point that individuals not only describe their own life story, but in so doing, they,

... not only represent but also construct their identities through autobiographical narratives.

(ibid, p. 959)

My own entry into teaching and specifically, FE, was initiated by a desire to support a widening participation agenda (that was not, at that time, expressed in policy) through teaching a wide range of students in the FE context. This was partly a socio/political objective and partly a personal/vocational objective; I considered that if I were to become a teacher, I could accomplish more in supporting those students who had not been able to achieve their potential as a result of the barriers created through their position in the social structure. There was also personal satisfaction in being party to the development of individuals who previously had been rejected by the education system as 'failures' or, at the most, second-best, and who went on to succeed from a personal, educational and economic perspective (see Yair, 2009). I have witnessed a considerable shift in the locus of power with

regard to the inception of policy and practices over the last 20 or 30 years in the 'widening participation' agenda. In the developments of Access and HE in FE courses in the 1980s the main thrust in developments came from a combination of individual lecturers in both FE and HE institutions identifying a need to expand opportunities for potential (or actual) students to progress onto HE courses (be they within the FE institution or to a partner HE). Whilst there are claims that such expansion came from the HEIs (mainly polytechnics at that time) keen to increase HE numbers on a fees-only basis with limited impact on their capital expenditure (see Abramson, 1996; DES, 1991; Parry and Thompson, 2002), and FECs keen to increase their profile in HE provision, the impetus was local and parochial rather than driven by central government policy. For my part, I was party to a number of developments in Access courses, Women's courses, degree course development in FE and, ultimately, the provision of Initial Teacher Training courses franchised from a HEI to FE partner colleges. As HE in FE has come under greater scrutiny and control and the technicisation which FE experienced from the incorporation of colleges in 1993 has spread into HE, government policy has become much more clearly focused on the activities of HE in FE. Whereas HE and FE had relatively greater freedom to form partnerships to promote widening participation or other objectives, the shift to government interest has been one of greater intrusion and control. Previously, the curriculum and partnership developments were undertaken on the basis of the lecturers' understanding of how they perceived and understood the needs of potential students. In the main, this was undertaken on the development of the courses and students, rather than a genuine engagement with communities who were under-represented in HE and

perhaps only slightly less so in FE. There was an unspoken assumption that the lecturers knew what was needed and that it would be to the benefit of students to enter HE. There was little or no dialogue with either students or 'stakeholders' such as employers in the development of the curriculum and provision. This was in stark contrast to similar developments over the last decade. Stakeholder (that is, for example, employers, providers of courses as well as students themselves) involvement is seen to be certainly the norm if not a requirement and HEFCE has played a part in recommending partnership memorandum of agreements (HEFCE, 2000). The consultation over HE in FE colleges (HEFCE, 2006b; Parry and Thompson, 2007) and University Centres (HEFCE, 2008) demonstrate not only the centrality of HE in FE policy by government agencies, but also the clear expectation that consultations are undertaken with both sectors; neither sector is excluded.

The thesis has been written in the first person. My first inclination was to write in the third person as this has traditionally been the norm in academic texts, other than where the narrative approach is taken or where the researcher takes the stance of a participant (which could be the case with ethnographic research). The criticism of this is that,

By not insisting on some sort of personal accountability, our academic publications reinforce the third-person, passive voice as standard, which gives more weight to abstract and categorical knowledge than to the direct testimony of personal narrative and first-person voice.

(Ellis and Bochner, 2003, p. 201)

This can be seen to be a reflection of the power relationship between the researcher and researched; the position of the researcher as the 'objective' onlooker collecting data is criticised by some and in particular those who

have a postmodernist approach. Traditional critical theory is divided on this. Horkheimer and Adorno abandoned the notion of a subject who stands as the main protagonist of the historical development that was identified in the Enlightenment; Marcuse sought but was unsure of the subject, whereas Habermas replaced the subject with inter-subjectivity. I incorporate my position in terms of my values and personal and professional history.

Chapter 3

HE in FE Partnerships and extending opportunities: policy directions and cultural environments.

1. Educational Partnerships

Introduction

The format of the next three chapters is on the basis of themes that surround the main proposal of the study. They present both literature review and analysis of the issues that form the context of HE in FE partnerships and the context and culture of such partnerships. These three chapters are presented to allow the exploration of the issues and how critical approaches, and a hermeneutic approach in particular, facilitate this exploration and investigation of the questions as raised in chapter one. They are divided into the following themes: HE in FE Partnerships; Further Education and HE in FE; Students. Throughout this analysis I am considering how the development of HE in FE partnerships offer genuine widening participation opportunities, as presented by the New Labour government, or whether these partnerships position students within a stratified HE framework. This chapter examines the role of educational partnerships on a generic basis but with particular reference to the use of partnerships in the public sector. It also instigates the debate around the purpose of partnerships as a political tool that served the marketisation project of the former New Labour Government.

The second part of this chapter then proceeds to examine FE/HE partnerships and how a critical approach supports the examination of them.

It focuses in particular on Habermas's approach to the 'public sphere', the 'lifeworld' and how the perceived invasion of the lifeworld and public sphere by administrative forces limit the potential for effective operation of democratic processes, including partnerships.

1. Public Partnerships in the context of the New Labour Government's policies

Partnerships can be regarded as a means whereby two or more organisations or groups of people cooperate to achieve a common purpose and that the common purpose is normally recognised as being of benefit to both or all parties (Davies and Vigurs, 2006a; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Partnerships as a term and in their application are not confined to any particular aspect of operation or sector of society. They can be seen to be used in the private sector in business and commercial activities and range across both legal and informal relationships; in the public sector, across health services, social services and education; and in the community and voluntary sector. However, other terms such as collaboration, networking and cooperation are often used in association with partnerships and are commonly used to describe some of the beneficial features.

For government they are employed as a strategy not only to encourage improved ways of working in state organisations, but they have become an embodiment of a major philosophical approach by government and their implementation of policy (Powell and Exworthy, 2002). The overarching strategy of the former New Labour government was embodied within a social market paradigm; a neo-liberal approach founded upon dominance of the

free market but tempered with (some would say contradicted by) social inclusion strategies that ameliorate the worst effects of an unfettered free market and maintain 'old' Labour's position of addressing the imbalances of social inequality and developing policies on the basis of social justice (Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; Mulderrig, 2003). Hall (2005) has argued that New Labour's agenda has been to not only continue but *embed* the free market paradigm of the Thatcher years, such that individuals as well as institutions are 'colonised' to accept this state,

...through the enlistment of the consent and 'freedom' of individuals.

(ibid, p. 237)

New Labour's 'Third Way' was promoted as a means of avoiding the bureaucratic constraints of the post-second world war centralist welfare state and the free-market de-regulated economy with its pockets of inequalities and its power of the price mechanism (Cardini, 2006; Powell and Exworthy, 2002). The 'Third Way' purports to pursue an intermediate path that offers the benefits of social inclusion but bereft of the strictures of the command and control systems (Giddens, 2000). Within this framework, partnership became part of the armoury of government to pursue both social inclusion policies (Clegg and McNulty, 2002) as well as to improve the application of 'joined-up' thinking that strives to combine the many tentacles of government agencies that impact upon increasing areas of life and results in a plethora of laws, regulations and strategies. Partnerships are seen as a catch-all to incorporate multi-agency working for the regeneration of socially deprived areas (Dickson, Gewirtz, Halpin and Whitty, 2002). For some this is 'The

indefinable in pursuit of the unachievable' (Powell and Glendinning, 2002, p. 2).

Dhillon (2005) sees the increase in the use of partnerships as a pragmatic response to New Labour's policies in providing genuine opportunities for people to collaborate, and '... to see beyond the goals of their own organisation and practices and learn from others' (p. 216). Alternatively, their use is regarded by Burchill (2001) as an '...unrestrained forcing model followed by a social contract of arm's length accommodation based on compliance' (p. 148) that ensures that responsibility for the implementation of government policy rests with the partnership and failure to achieve government targets lies with the specific agency, rather than with government itself. Cardini (2006) and Davies (2002) also view the use of partnerships as a means of enforcing central policy directives, thereby increasing the power and influence of government in a much more direct and interventionist manner across a wide spectrum of activities, whilst giving an illusion of democratisation and a veneer of devolution of power (Clarke and Glendinning, 2002). At the same time, this relieves central government of responsibility for policy implementation and passes this to local government, quangos (quasi non-governmental agencies) and partnerships with specific remits. In a similar vein, Ainley (2000; 2001; 2006) argues that local accountability and democratic control have been replaced by the contracting state where,

...power contracts to the centre whilst responsibility is contracted out.

(ibid, 2000, p. 5)

The role of central government in promoting partnerships fits into this model of greater centralized control, direction and compliance whilst divesting itself of that responsibility and onto the agency instead. There is scepticism as to whether there is more of a concern for the legitimisation of central directives rather than power decentralisation (Cardini, 2006). This is in contrast to Giddens's assertion that the Third Way policies of the New Labour Government will be 'empowering rather than heavy-handed' (Giddens, 2000, p. 5).

On a more positive note, Balloch and Taylor (2001) observe that partnership '...reflects ideals of participatory democracy and equality between partners' (p. 2) despite the fact that they can be regarded as a response to the '...fragmentation of services that the introduction of markets into welfare brought with them' (p. 2). This displays a tension between, on the one hand, an awareness of the role that partnerships appear to play within a neo-liberal framework in exerting control over the partnership players and, on the other hand, real opportunities for those same players to use partnership processes as a means to learn about other related organisations and within a context of nominally-perceived equality, respect and mutual regard. Indeed, it is these notions of respect and regard that are discussed by a number of authors when identifying the factors that might promote or destroy the effective operation of partnerships, including education partnerships (see, for example, Hodgson and Spours, 2006).

It is useful to consider the earlier work of Habermas and how his approach can help this analysis. The framework of central government direction

through agencies regarded by Habermas (1971) as an example of the extension, not only of state power, but state power acting in the interests of those who already hold power and that the matters of state and politics become increasingly dressed as technical issues that require rectifying,

...politics becomes the sphere for the technical elimination of dysfunctions and the avoidance of risks that threaten 'the system.'
(Held, 1980, p. 251)

In the words of Habermas (1970),

The manifest domination of authoritarian state gives way to the manipulative compulsions of technical-operational administration.
(ibid, p. 107)

Marcuse's (1964) work also supports this and the claim that the incursion of what Marcuse dubbed technical rationality was entering into a wider range of aspects of life,

Compliance and the subordination of thought to pre-given goals and standards was now required of 'all those who wish to survive'...Propositions concerning production, effective organization...are judged true or false according to whether or not the 'means' to which they refer are suitable or applicable (for an end which remains, of course, unquestioned).
(ibid, p. 67)

For the neo-liberal objectives within a globalised economy, the function of partnership in education and specifically in the context of FE/HE partnerships can be regarded as maintaining and extending the 'means'.

There are a range of characteristics that appear in the literature on partnerships, one being trust. Vangen and Huxham (2003) refer to their work previously undertaken on collaborative arrangements and the emergence of themes that appear as causing concern to participants in such arrangements;

these inevitably include issues around trust. They develop a model of five types of trust as applied to partnerships and collaborative arrangements and underline the need to maintain and build trust on a continuous basis. They link the management of trust to power imbalances; if trust is to be maintained and built, there is a need to acknowledge power imbalances and that inevitable shifts in power need to be managed; the proviso that '... shared power is maximised ..' (p. 18) wherever possible, is given. Relationships between the members of partnerships are a crucial feature and will be scrutinised in terms of such trust and power.

Griffiths (2000) is also concerned with trust and power in the processes of collaboration and partnerships. A critique is made of the Liberal Humanist approach that identifies individuals as having a private, differentiated life and a public life wherein individuals are assumed to be equal in rationally-based decision-making. Griffiths' postmodernist contention is that there is no one single public space wherein collaborative work takes place; rather there are numerous public spaces, which have increased through the technology of cyberspace, and that there is '... a vision of a web of collective action which lets everyone have a say' (p. 393) and that allows individuals with differing power bases to come together to influence and address local common interests. As a comparison to this, Habermas's (1987) notion of the public sphere, as an intermediate area of life between the formal political sphere and the private individual life is pertinent to this study. The public sphere to Habermas is fluid, open and essential in promoting debate and political will-formation. According to Kellner (undated), the public sphere,

...mediates between the domains of the family and the workplace - where private interests prevail - and the state which often exerts arbitrary forms of power and domination.

(Kellner, page unnumbered)

It is permeated by both formal and informal systems and processes but is essential in a democracy that is based upon open and informed debate.

Habermas formulated that,

...only democratic procedures of political will-formation can in principle generate legitimacy under conditions of a rationalised lifeworld with highly individuated members, with norms that have become abstract, positive, and in need of justification, and with traditions that have, as regards their claim to authority, been reflectively refracted and set communicatively aflo.

(Habermas, 1987, p. 344)

But, according to Kellner, for Habermas,

...the thrust of his study is precisely that of transformation, of the mutations of the public sphere from a space of rational discussion, debate, and consensus to a realm of mass cultural consumption and administration by corporations and dominant elites.

(Kellner, year unspecified, p. 6)

If the public sphere declines, it reduces the opportunity for the political will-formation to function and eradicates effective means of challenging government. According to Habermas the public sphere is in decline; spaces to collaborate with any true meaning are being reduced,

As the private sphere is undermined and eroded by the economic system, so too is the public sphere by the administrative system.

(Habermas, 1987, p. 325)

At the same time the lifeworld, according to Habermas, is also becoming colonised; the lifeworld is,

... the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful...

(ibid, p. 131)

The lifeworld is the function whereby individuals undertake actions open to mutual understanding; this has now become colonised by the system imperative of capitalism,

People's cultural assumptions... [have] had to be restructured along more individualistic and opportunistic lines to meet the steering needs of the system...

(How, 2003, p.131)

These issues are pertinent to this study; to what extent are partnerships an extended tool of government and contribute to limitations through a greater differentiated HE sector and the position of such HE in FE partnerships?

Another approach to the position of partnerships and power distribution is that of Byrne (2001). Byrne attacks the view that partnerships support social inclusion and empowerment to the dispossessed in society. For Byrne, empowerment through partnerships is about the dispossessed in society working together '...to transform the oppressive social structures that block the fulfilment of their human potential.' (p. 244). However, he cites an impoverished area of Newcastle and how it forms part of the marginalised element of society that provides a reserve army of workers. Within the context of Neighbourhood Renewal partnerships, Byrne identifies the role of education partnerships as developing the workforce to the requirements of employers – and no more. Empowerment becomes a rhetorical call to soften the reality of those trapped in the margins of society. The use of partnerships

to alleviate the problem is perceived to be impossible; the reality of such partnerships in alleviating the plight of the 'dispossessed' contradicts the rhetoric of the claims for partnerships (ibid, p. 256). From a critical perspective this can be cited as an example of the destruction of both social communities and physical environments that is wrought as a result of the contradictions inherent in, and consequences of, the marketisation of all that can be marketised including education. Such social, economic and psychological impoverishment is, according to Raduntz (2005), an example of a production and capital/labour process whereby,

...what were formerly inalienable, organic relationships surrounding productive activity became alienated and converted into discrete 'things' related only incidentally.

(ibid, p. 239)

A critical approach, in analysing education within this paradigm, suggests that partnerships do not fulfil their intention as proclaimed by government policies; rather the opposite has become the case. A further critical perspective on this (Apple, 2005) refers to the commodification and reification of education that has developed consistently but more intensely over the last 30 years in particular. Students are now presented as consumers and teachers and lecturers the producers of knowledge. Education has become trapped by,

...an increasingly limited range of ideological and discursive resources [dominating] the conceptual and political forms in which the[se] debates are carried out.

(Apple, 2005, p. 211)

Furthermore, according to Naidoo and Jamieson (2005), the commodification and consumerist practices distort and corrode the teacher/student relationship into one of exchange-value rather than use-

value. Of particular relevance to this study is their argument that consumerism will further distort and emphasise the hierarchical nature of the HE structure as the elite universities will be able to protect themselves,

...with high levels of academic, reputational and financial capital [and can] draw on superior resources to engage in practices intent on conserving the academic principles structuring the field of education, thereby maintaining their dominant position,

(p. 878).

This is particularly pertinent in the shaping of the HE landscape.

Ramsden, Bennett and Fuller (2004) give further evidence of the role of partnerships within the government's strategy to ameliorate the impact of the market economy through partnership operations, whilst supporting human capital development for economic growth. They detail the rise and fall of one such government partnership. Learning Partnerships for the post-16 education sector were established in 1998 to deliver a strategic role for education within the context of social inclusion and regeneration. The history reveals that the partnerships between the various bodies soon moved to a subsidiary, 'sounding board' role for the Learning and Skills Council initiatives. For Ramsden et al (2004), the resulting effect is to confirm the nature of top-down policies that stultify rather than empower local communities and, in addition, contribute to a society seen to be more risk-conscious and fearful of the future with short-term remedies that fall into abeyance. The disappearance of Learning Partnerships confirm that,

They will then have been an interesting short-term initiative in a long line of experiments, which go back to the 1970s Manpower Services Commission and its predecessors.

(ibid, p.162)

The overwhelming use of partnerships was recognised as potentially self-defeating by the New Labour government itself and in 2000 it was announced that new Local Strategic Partnerships were to be established to ‘...rationalise the existing plethora of local partnerships and central government is actively seeking to reduce partnership requirements on local agencies’ (LSDA, 2001, p. 1). However, these were to be clearly facilitated, accredited and evaluated by Government Office civil servants and reports to ministers were to identify whether or not progress in reducing bureaucracy had been made. This is yet further evidence of central control through partnerships. Hodgson and Spours (2006), writing about 14-19 networks, challenge the benefits of collaboration which have been introduced to,

...offset the negative effects of a predominantly competitive and divided system in order to meet the ... progression needs of particular groups of learners in a local area.

(ibid, p. 329)

For Hodgson and Spours these partnerships attempt to ameliorate the negative aspects but against a backdrop of the emasculation of the Local Education Authorities that have been replaced with bureaucratic (now defunct) local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). Such are the examples of centrally-driven policies which are based on assumptions that institutional diversity and learner choice will increase participation, yet the opposite seems to be true. The resulting divisions are then regarded as a problem that has to be addressed through the introduction of another layer of bureaucracy that individual institutions are directed to implement through various funding systems.

Whilst central control can be identified as one feature of partnerships, other aspects of their function are evidenced both in terms of strategy and application. Indeed, partnerships can have a variety of functions. Cardini (2006) cites three forms of collaboration that focus on both the nature of partnerships and their structural forms including the promotion of the claimed 'good practices' of the private sector. Further models for partnerships in the public sector are offered in a similar vein by Mackintosh (1992) in the search for solutions where local economic regeneration is needed. The potential for synergetic relationships is acknowledged and processes can be introduced that feed on the synergy by incorporating the potentially competing partners into a new association. Partnerships are seen as a way to maintain the existence of a threatened public sector organisation that is facing additional demands from central government in straitened circumstances. Arguably, partnerships can be seen as a defence against further encroachment by government or their agencies. HE in FE partnerships may have the potential, in the face of deep cuts in public expenditure, to offer such a strategy in supporting local communities.

Hudson and Hardy (2002) explore the processes of partnerships as an arm of the modernisation objective of New Labour whereby partnerships can provide the structures within which 'joined-up thinking' can flourish across public and private sector organisations. This exemplifies again the focus on the belief that the public sector will benefit from the market practices and culture of the private sector organisations in the partnerships. The model offered provides strictures not only on the provision of clear structures and

clarity of purpose but also the importance of the development of trust through interpersonal processes.

2. Section conclusion

This part of the chapter on partnerships has reviewed the literature around the role and function of partnerships in New Labour's overarching philosophy and implementation within a Third Way paradigm. The literature so far has provided information and approaches on the research question of the role of partnerships within neo-liberal and the last government's policy perspectives. Whilst the present Coalition government's position on partnerships is not yet evident, it seems likely that some aspects of the policy will remain. There is evidence of a contradiction in the declared objectives of government partnership policy (whether rhetorical or assumed) as a means of providing frameworks to facilitate social cohesion, as opposed to a greater command-control through partnerships. A critical appraisal contributes to this analysis through its modelling of the role and the impact of the market economy on partnerships within an overwhelming drive towards the domination of technical rationality. It has demonstrated the basis of this approach further in the potential relationship between the system and individual agency through 'lifeworld' (Habermas, 1987) that will be explored in the study. These aspects will support the exploration of the research question on the role of partnerships; their potential to support the education of those who might take advantage from such benefits as offered by partnerships.

Issues of processes as well as structures have been identified; these will be explored further within the research in terms of partnership relationships and

the perceptions of FE staff of the partnerships, particularly in relation to their perception of power.

2. FE/HE Partnerships

The next section considers the position of FE/HE partnerships within the marketisation agenda of the public sector . Further literature on the wider aspects of the provision of Higher Education in Further Education is reviewed in chapter four.

Development and Policy

Partnerships between FE and HE have a history that dates back to the 1940s when a number of previously partnered colleges to the University of London became universities (for example, the University of Nottingham) in their own right (Hilborne, 1996, p. 61). Further associations developed piecemeal and at the discretion of the institutions concerned, at a relatively slow pace until the late 1980s and early 1990s when up to half of the FE colleges in England became involved in partnerships with Higher Education (Bird, 1996; Parry, 2005). At this stage, government displayed little or no concern (or 'low policy' as identified by Parry and Thompson, 2002) with such partnerships. Many such partnerships developed in relationship to the provision of pathways from Access courses and offered greater flexibility of HE via the FE colleges. Further increases were due to the expansion of HE numbers, mainly from polytechnics or post-92 institutions to meet the demand for places that could not be met within those institutions themselves and to accommodate increased numbers without a commitment to heavy investment costs of new build. This reveals how strategies were driven more

by immediate concerns of resourcing, rather than alliances with FECs to promote widening participation and improved progression for local communities. FE colleges had been involved through Local Authority organisation with HE and polytechnics and had seen their numbers grow but at a declining rate and,

The only reason why the proportion of higher education students taught in FECs did not fall was because of the phenomenon of franchising.

(Parry, 2005, p. 2)

This enlargement of partnerships through franchising sustained HE in many colleges in this period. The post 1997 period, described as 'high policy' (Parry and Thompson, 2002, p. 35), signified much greater attention from government and its agencies and had been prompted by the Dearing inquiry report (1997) as well as earlier reports (for example, DES, 1991) that had pointed to fundamental policy directives that culminated in this period of greater direction from government. Now government had HE in FE firmly in its sights.

As early as the 'low policy' period, there had been indications that there was to be a growing focus on an increase in HE student numbers including a national target for HE student numbers. Yorke (1993) reveals that,

Government White papers of 1987 and 1991 both strongly stressed the need for a greater uptake of higher education, with the latter advocating a participation rate of one person in three by the year 2000.

(ibid, p. 169)

Expanded HE numbers were regarded as a policy steer to support HE in FE either by tacit or overt means. However, the expansion did not fulfil FE colleges' aspirations for greater independence in HE provision,

Both the switch to indirect funding and the need to enter into 'structured partnerships' with degree-awarding institutions was not altogether welcomed by colleges.

(Parry, 2005, p. 4)

Abramson (1996) highlights income-generation motives for expansion of HE in FE; although partnerships between FE colleges and HE institutions can be regarded as 'A blend of commercial and academic imperialism' (Woodrow, 1993, quoted in Abramson, 1996, p. 8) and not necessarily an opportunity to build genuine affiliations. Bridge, Fisher and Webb (2003) also refer to the monopolisation of knowledge within the ramparts of HE institutions and that this is challenged through partnerships that offer genuine collaboration; in their case, in the format of a consortium model of partnership as introduced by HEFCE in 2000 (HEFCE, 2000). They reiterate the criticism made by Weil (1999) of Dearing in ignoring the issue of funding and that the report,

...unwittingly colludes in the 'iconisation' of higher education and perpetuates patterns of social exclusion.

(HEFCE, 2000, p. 310)

This gives an indication of power relationships before the intervention of New Labour policies for HE in FE.

Whilst increase in income through the expansion of student numbers was regarded as a motive for forming arrangements with FE colleges, this was not seen as sufficient on its own; other benefits were seen to be those of increasing market penetration by closing competition from other regional

universities and the clear policy steer for widening participation (Abramson, 1996; Davies and Vigurs, 2006). Such was the increasing interest in the provision of higher education through FE/HE partnerships and shifting government policy in the development of this as a separate sector, that HEFCE commissioned research and two reports were produced in 2003; one concerned with strategy (HEFCE 2003/16) and a second to support development and aimed at practitioners (HEFCE, 2003/15). Their immediate remit was to evaluate the use of the HEFCE Development fund that had been established to support development of HE in FE specifically those which were directly funded; its further remit included the role that collaboration between FE and HE institutions played. The reports clearly identified that FE colleges had a role to play in the expansion of HE student numbers and that they are,

...well placed to recruit and teach non-traditional students, and are able to do so at a lower cost than HEIs.

(HEFCE 2003/16, p. 3)

Interestingly, there is no reference to staff conditions of service and salary comparisons that supports lower costs. Furthermore, the reference to lower costs is one that has been challenged in recent empirical studies of HE in FE; delivery in FECs tends to be in smaller groups with more intensive support and FECs are under-resourced (Marks, 2002). The reports offered guidance for strategic planning and management and various examples of good practice were presented for practitioners to consider. The detailed aspects of policy, as well as practice, highlights the distance travelled in the position of FE in delivering higher education and can be regarded as a defining moment in formal FE/HE policy in this period.

1. Quality

One aspect of FE/HE partnerships that has bedevilled provision of higher education through partnerships is the perception of quality. This is an issue that extends beyond the standard notions of quality and, rather, raises questions about HE itself and particularly the position of vocational HE. The notion of quality was seen as an aspect of both quality assurance and its achievement through early franchise arrangements (Hilborne, 1996; Selby, 1996; Yorke, 1993). In the following decade, HEFCE (2000) favoured consortia arrangements whereby HEIs could maintain quality assurance, and,

... saw attractions in the involvement of a higher education institution both from the view of quality and accountability.
(West, 2006, p. 20)

Quality in the 1990s was reported as being,

...the quality of teaching and learning experienced by HE students in FE colleges is similar to that of comparable students reading similar courses in universities.
(Hilborne, 1996, p. 59)

The difference between quality of the provision and the quality assurance system is highlighted and it may be that,

...all may not be well with the quality assurance systems that universities use to assure themselves and others that the standards of university awards and the courses which lead to them, offered in collaboration with other institutions, are satisfactory.
(ibid, p. 60)

Further development in approaches to quality review has resulted in the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) (QAA, 2006) system for FECs delivering HE. This system attempts to reassure stakeholders that

quality assurance procedures of HE in FE are robust; at the same time, it provides a pathway to further development of HE processes as preparation for potential FD awarding powers and FE colleges integration into the HE framework.

HEFCE reports from 2003 (HEFCE, 2003/16) and 2009 (HEFCE, 2009) also provide evidence of the focus of staff development for FE staff on quality assurance systems, although there were differences in opinion amongst FE colleges as to the need for a separate HE quality assurance system,

The most striking feature of the information on quality was the polarisation between those who believed that a separate QA system for HE was essential and those who saw no difficulty in reconciling their HE and FE systems.

(HEFCE, 2003, p. 15)

Furthermore, there is no evidence to show that a separate HE system results in a more successful score in the QAA's audit. As the institution responsible for quality assurance however, a university may take a different view. The question of quality may be perceived to be merely a technical, but nevertheless, important matter. Alternatively, this could be viewed as an example of the externalising of the deeper issues that are concerned with the very nature of HE itself. Quality assurance systems might be used to genuinely maintain standards and eliminate those FE partners who are deemed to have unacceptable standards, or they could be used to impose a particular 'brand' of HE that the universities wish to maintain. With the introduction of IQER systems for FE colleges and their partner HEIs (QAA, 2006) the question becomes even more complex. The position of the QAA itself is an interesting one; there is the potential for this, as an independent

agency, to maintain the standards of HE; or possibly to impose a vocationalised HE, first on FE and then on those HEIs considered to be relatively low-down on the ladder of research and commercial attraction and deemed to be suitable as leaders of FE/HE partnerships.

Smith and Betts (2003), analysing the introduction of consortium arrangements between HE and FE institutions for the purposes of developing and delivering FD courses, also raise the issue of quality,

FE/HE partnerships of any sort produce challenges for quality assurance. FE institutions are not universities. They have different cultures, learning philosophies, resource strategies, management styles and research traditions. Yet, ultimately, in the context of QAA processes the university is held responsible for the quality of the provision in that area.

(ibid, p. 231)

Partnerships may be caught between the demands of maintaining notions of academic standards and the demands from both government and individual students to extend opportunities for widening participation. There is a prospect of conflict between these two objectives. The suggestion is made that HE-led partnerships may dissolve as a result of the expansion of dual institutions of HE in FE (see Bathmaker, 2010) and the 'mixed economy' colleges may develop higher profiles in HE, through the Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP). FECs may seek to deliver their own 'brand' of HE through their own awarding powers. These issues will be discussed further in the chapter on HE in FE.

2. Research and Scholarly Activity

Research and scholarly activity can be seen to be a key aspect of the power relationship and the positioning of FE tutors who teach HE. Some of the literature on quality issues ventures into the difficult territory of its relationship to research and scholarly activity within a partnership (Bridge et al, 2003; HEFCE, 2003/16; Hilborne, 1996; Widdowson, 2003). Some partnerships seek to support scholarly activity (for example, see CPCET, 2009; Turner et al, 2009) but it may be that these are the exceptions rather than the norm. Turner et al's (ibid) work highlights the tensions that FE staff, operating in the different culture of FE, face. The claim is made that evidence of research was needed when going through university validation or for other external purposes and is,

... only of interest to the college when required to provide evidence of scholarly activity and research within their institution.
(Ibid, p. 260)

A further issue that is revealed in their study is the perception of research and scholarly activity that their interviewees had was one of a traditional HE experience, similar to the one they had experienced some years ago, but which was not necessarily extant in today's HEIs. Widdowson (2003) sought to clarify the difference between scholarly activity and research but found little that can be regarded as definitive. He recommended that with a target of 350,000 additional HE students in FE colleges, staff development needs to be addressed although, in a partnership agreement,

Few if any ...agreements... make specific reference to staff development activity.
(Widdowson, 2003, p. 4)

Although some pragmatic proposals are made, such as access to university courses and the use of Advanced Practitioners, the real impasse issues of conditions of service and funding are not satisfactorily addressed. Bridge et al (2003), however, face the difficulties head on,

A major practical feature and source of concern in the delivery of HE in FE arises from the different terms and conditions of staff in the respective sectors....staff in higher education are expected to be active in research and scholarship since these are seen as essential to maintain the quality and vitality of the curriculum and of teaching...If staff teaching HE in FE are, normally with annual teaching loads significantly in excess of 800 hours, not able to engage in research then there are HE quality issues to be addressed.

(ibid, p. 309)

The HEFCE report (2003/16) devoted an entire section to the relationship between research, scholarly activity and teaching and learning. It indicated a challenge to the assertion that there is indeed a positive relationship between research and teaching at HE level within HEIs themselves and that such propositions are '...more articles of faith within HEIs than proven foundations of pedagogic practice' (HEFCE, 2003/16, p. 21). Whilst evidence on this relationship is evident in research-active HEIs, in FE colleges it is scant. However, the conclusion is that, whilst not elaborated,

A more research-led approach to teaching may be developed without direct involvement in research.

(ibid, p. 22)

The updated publication of HEFCE's report on HE in FE (2009/05) presents a different approach on research; one that cites a list of the expanded notion of scholarly activity in FE with case studies. However, the requirements of FDAP are cited as a reminder that colleges must address scholarly activity and that this should be undertaken as an autonomous institution, as opposed

to a partnership with the support of the HEI. Here is an initial indicator of the weakening of partnerships as the opportunity of FDAP that is now available to FECs becomes more prominent and realistic. However, the question of the extent to which HEIs will go to assert and support the right of their FE colleagues particularly those teaching on the same course, to participate in research is a moot point. Ecclestone's work (2001) disputes this; her empirical study of franchised arrangements demonstrated little support for FE staff in their development of the assessment at HE level. This is an aspect of the study to be undertaken.

There are various perspectives on this seemingly intractable problem; on the one hand the presentation of research and scholarly activity as a critical but almost unattainable role of the HE in FE teacher, and, on the other, the presentation of the extension of research into the agency of the FE teacher as almost simply a matter of time allocation. Alternatively, the matter may be regarded as contentious and open to dispute and one that will have to be resolved through a new approach. This is clearly a site of potential conflict both in terms of discourse but possibly also in terms of intra and inter-institutional relationships. A critical approach and analysis of the potential conflict between the objectives and concerns of one group and those of another, where one group is considered to have a dominant position, can illuminate the contradictions and the true nature of their relationship and how this reflects the structural relationships between the two sectors. The stance of the critical researcher is to challenge this positioning by exposing it and revealing its true nature (How, 2003, p. 171; Held, 1980, p. 16). Brookfield (2005) asserts that for educationalists this might be regarded as an example

of the maintenance of the dominant ideology and the power and structural relationships that help to maintain it. Using a critical hermeneutic approach will facilitate the exploration of staff perception of the function of scholarly activity and the relationship between the staff from the two sectors in a partnership. An added dimension will be a consideration of how a partnership can promote scholarly activity for FE teachers. A further exploration of the literature on research and the analysis of its role in HE in FE is made in chapter four.

3. Benefits of Partnerships

A feature of partnerships that appears in the literature is one of distribution of the benefits of partnership. The assumption is sometimes made that the HE institution, as the lead partner, will be dominant and ensures that benefits accrue to the university (Smith and Betts, 2003). However, research that I undertook with Hammersley-Fletcher (Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006) shows that this is not necessarily the case and evidenced disgruntlement amongst HE staff within the partnerships, where,

HE staff questioned the appropriateness of the funding to HE and lack of clarity about how any funds received moved into the faculties.

(ibid, 2006, p. 36)

Rather than direct financial benefits, it may be more appropriate to consider an array of dividends for both partners; for HE this will provide progression routes, enhancement of regional profile, market penetration, market expansion or diversification (Davies and Vigurs, 2006). For FE colleges, there will be benefits from indirect income generation; institutional mission to serve local community and extending their portfolio, an enhanced prestige

from association with an HEI and, particularly in times of financial constraint, the maintenance of independence (Trim, 2001a). For both HEIs and FE colleges there is access to networking and opportunities for development of knowledge and expertise (Trim, 2001b). Connolly, Jones and Jones (2007) claim that organisations will only collaborate when,

...the key decision-makers believe that they can secure protection, if not enhancement, of the key organisational resources.

(ibid, p. 160)

This may be a crucial factor as to whether FECs decide to seek awarding powers for FDs and move away from partnerships with HEIs and will be considered in the empirical study. The potential for FECs to assert their independence through FDAP may be attractive. Alternatively, the costs and associated risk of FDAP may be perceived to be too hazardous.

4. Mergers versus partnerships

Davies and Vigurs (2006b) examine why partnerships between Further and Higher Education exist in the first place, as opposed to mergers of the institutions concerned. Using the model of transactions costs economics they analyse the principles that underpin this approach which can be encapsulated within the question 'to make or to buy in'? If the analysis demonstrates that the benefits of partnership outweigh the disadvantages of partnership and the benefits of merger, the likelihood of opting for a partnership rather than a merger is high. It is not until the transaction costs become high that a merger is likely to take place. Furthermore, government policy, as early as 1992 (DES, 1992), claims that releasing both Higher Education and Further Education to operate on a more entrepreneurial basis

and, in acting in their own self-interest, would be more likely to act in the interests of the public. Hence, all other factors being equal,

...we might expect that partnerships will always be a preferred option since these preserve control for senior management of all partners.

(ibid, p. 14)

The evidence of the underpinning philosophy of the benefits of the market is clear in this approach.

Brown (2001) identifies four models of collaboration in HE, ranging from ad hoc collaboration with both HEIs and FECs to mergers but suggests that the ad hoc collaborations are the most common form of alliance. Patterson (2001) has formulated a spectrum of FE/HE partnerships. This moves from an alliance approach ('let's be friends') through legal and contracting partnerships ('let's be partners') to a full merger ('let's get married') with various stages in between. This covers the range of types of partnerships that are open to educational institutions and reveals either a myriad of arrangements that cause confusion, or, demonstrate a flexibility that has met the organic development of collaborative arrangements. Patterson tracks the movement of further and higher education institutions as they position and re-position themselves in the bid to take full advantage of policy demands for growth in student numbers.

The costs and benefits of partnerships to colleges were analysed by Trim (2001a; 2001b) who portrays partnerships with potential for networking, thereby giving access to knowledge and expertise that would otherwise be closed to them. The post-incorporate college, according to Trim, is focused

on maintaining independence and will value this highly, although, 'Power of control will to a certain extent remain with the institution of higher education' (Trim, 2001a, p. 112). There will be the additional advantage of potential access to research support that will benefit staff and the links with local business, who hold higher education links in combination with the vocational skills base of the further education college, in high regard,

The link between institutions of higher education and tertiary level colleges is considered vital from the point of regional development vis-à-vis the transfer of knowledge and skills acquired...firms and colleges can undertake research programmes together and this will help produce qualified staff for academia and facilitate technology transfer through research cooperatives.

(Trim, 2001b, p. 192)

Whether this has been the case will be explored in this study; projected and claimed benefits as opposed to the reality of the experiences of the teachers and participants in FE/HE partnerships will be explored.

As an example of a study of a specific partnership benefits, Mellors and Chambers (1996) analysed the collaboration between the University of Bradford and Bradford College between 1990 and 1996 and concluded that, despite positive developments, there still remains a sensitivity to the maintenance of independence and the need to '...reduce the threats to institutional autonomy' (ibid, p. 178).

Competition between colleges, post-incorporation, is cited by Lumby (1998) as a threat to effective partnerships, given the compulsion of the market requirements of the post-incorporation college. She refers to the criticism made of the increased competition and its potential damage to students as

cited in the Kennedy Report (1997). Perhaps a portent of what may appear in the future with FE partnerships is presented by Belfield and Bullock (2000); they exemplify the pressures on FE colleges to demonstrate achievement of marketisation through over-extending their remit by franchising-out courses to partners in the community or business. Such use of public money is questioned in terms of quality concerns and provision of public funds to private companies, and,

In particular, some of the franchisees are private sector firms
which are obtaining subsidies for training their workers.
(Belfield et al, 2000, p. 7)

Although this is not specifically concerned with partnerships with higher education, it highlights the pressure on further education colleges to focus on funding and might raise disquiet about their motives in entering into partnerships. Whilst the same may be said of HE, there is evidence of greater pressure on FE both in terms of financial constraints and the requirement to achieve targets. From a critical perspective, the requirement of educational organisations to ape the free market system through financial targeting is revealed in terms of the consequences on education and students. McLaren (2005) refers to the 'deep grammar of capital itself' and, 'The commercialisation of higher education, the bureaucratic cultivation of intellectual capital' (ibid, p. 2) and how,

Education has been reduced to a sub-sector of the economy,
designed to create cybercity within a teledemocracy of fast-moving
images, representation and lifestyle choices.
(ibid, p. 2)

What part does the development of FE/HE partnerships play in this and what is the effect on the HE landscape and the students themselves?

5. Structures of Partnerships

The structure of partnerships can promote or hinder the intangible qualities of culture, ethos and trust that are highlighted as essential elements of collaborative arrangements (Bridge et al, 2003; Foskett, 2005; Robinson and Burrows, 2004; Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006). Transparency, which can be regarded as an embodiment of the subtle and fragile essentials in organisational and strategic issues, can become either the bedrock of a fruitful relationship, or a cause for mistrust and eventual breakdown of the partnership. This is most pointed in financial arrangements,

Without a doubt, the issue of transparency and control of funding is paramount to those in both the FEC and the HEI that are involved in partnership.

(Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006, p. 45)

And

Where less attention is given over to developing effective communication, trust deteriorates and relationships rupture.

(ibid, p. 44)

The above literature further identified the benefits of consortia as a form of partnership where,

...consortia are in effect the management and operations arm of the partnership.

(Smith and Betts, 2003, p. 227)

Such that,

...consortia do not seem to present the potential problem of a differential in power relationships in such sharp contrast as might be the case in a franchise relationship.

(Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006, p. 43)

Parry and Thompson (2007) also found in their analysis of the responses to the HEFCE consultation of 2007 regarding HE in FE, that the 'Code of

Practice' (HEFCE, 2000) for consortia was endorsed as representing fair and transparent management practices by which all partnerships should abide.

This contrasts with the recent policy and strategic shifts in England of HE in FE and the potential threat to partnerships. For example, although the 'University Challenge' (HEFCE, 2007/07) refers to FECs drawing on,

... the strengths of the respective institutions through realisation of the benefits of collaboration...

(ibid, p. 6)

The objective is to establish independent university centres that support the provision of high-level skills. Whilst partnership is to be encouraged, it is not to be focused on associations with HE institutions but,

A multi-partner approach to funding will demonstrate the strength of the commitment and provide a firm foundation from which to grow HE. Typical partners would be RDAs [Regional Development Agencies], local authorities and community groups, but need not be restricted to these organisations.

(ibid, p. 6)

An indication of a further shift away from FE/HE partnerships is clear.

Partnerships have been focused on what have been referred to as 'the borders' of levels four and five or sub-degree level between HE and FE. The border areas have resulted in some boundary issues between FE and HE that reflect not just issues of structure but also the more fundamental discourses around the role of education within a globalised economy and the role of education per se. West (2006) asserts that the 'border lands' of HE and FE are the basis for partnerships and that the blurred boundaries are,

... in some sense the testing ground for our notions of what constitutes each.

(ibid, p. 11)

For West, the real question is around the diminution of HE in FE rather than its expansion. At the turn of the 21st century FE experienced a reduction in the number of directly-funded students following HE courses; this was reduced by over a quarter by 2002 with ultimately 140 FECs receiving direct funding and 260 indirect funding in 2006-07 (Bathmaker et al., 2008). Higher National Diplomas were moved into HEFCE control in 1988 followed by Higher National Certificates in 1998, leaving only the non-prescribed funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This was the elimination of Advanced Further Education and its transference into HE control (ibid, p. 19). In this model, partnerships can be regarded as the policing of HE in FE (see, also, Bird, 1996). Parry (2006) also refers to FECs' role in the 1990s and suggests that the prevailing policies,

...lessened the role of further education colleges as providers of higher education in their own right.

(ibid, p. 399)

The introduction of FDs, although initially identified in the Dearing report (1997) as the expansion of HE in FE at sub-degree level, were also offered to HEIs who now provide the majority of part-time FDs and 33 per cent of full-time FDs (HEFCE, 2010). This highlights the complications and idiosyncrasies that have been present in the 'border lands' for some time but which have been further complicated by the provision of FDs by both FE and HE. In the past, this did not present the same problems of identity between the two sectors as it does today; with the increased diversification of HE,

Such issues throw into relief the complexities of participation and progress under mass conditions and the blurring and questioning of boundaries that once framed an elite system.

(Parry, 2006, p. 406)

The expansion of HE in FE is questioned as is the role of partnerships; the suggestion is that there been a past curtailment of HE in FE which is now being given permission to resume on a basis of supporting a certain brand of HE (vocational, employer-focussed and sub-degree level) and providing a model for HEIs to follow. Bathmaker et al (2008) highlight the concerns of FE colleges in terms of their perception of the unequal relationship between HE and FE and the lack of confidence in their continued dependence on an HEI for their HE work. As a consequence, FE tends to,

... associate duality with dependence and difficulty.

(ibid, p. 135)

6. Partnerships and differentiated HE

Past and present developments of FE/HE partnerships might be considered to represent a dominant ideology of academic education over vocational education and as the prerogative of the higher social classes. The provision of a higher vocational qualification, specifically Fds, might be perceived to offer a less prestigious route for those who need to become compliant within the neo-liberal paradigm and yet consider themselves to be a successful member of society. This then ensures the continued expansion of the market, this being a requirement for the maintenance of the system of capital and the free market, particularly in a global context (Raduntz, 2005, p. 236). Government policy has articulated and reinforced this through its focus on the vocational and employability of students who are undertaking HE within the FE sector (DES, 2003; HEFCE, 2001, 2006c, 2007/07). The message is that this is differentiated HE and that its objective is the inclusion of those who have previously been excluded, but not necessarily on the same basis or with the same service or product as that provided to HE students

previously. The exploration of such objectives with staff and students will be included in the data collection and analysis.

Partnerships between HE and FE are being tested; provision for University Centres (2008), FDAP and severe economic restraints are placing a strain on HE in FE partnership relationships. As Ian Tunbridge, Deputy VC at Thames Valley University stated in the 'Welcome' to a HE in FE Conference Programme,

..there are some worrying signs of some in the FE sector signalling a lesser commitment to working with HE, and equally a temptation for some universities to retrench and reduce their collaborative provision.

(Tunbridge, 2009)

The next few years may well result in a different landscape of HE in FE and the present partnerships; a much more highly differentiated and stratified future seems to be in the offing.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of partnerships per se within the context of the modernisation programme of the New Labour government. In particular, partnerships are seen as providing a form of hidden and extended power of government, disguised as 'empowerment'. A critical approach provides the tools to analyse this relationship and to offer a revealing paradigm.

The development of partnership between FE and HE has been identified over the years as moving from organic, informal arrangements to one where

government has formulated policy to encourage partnerships (HEFCE, 2006) in its bid to move the HE landscape towards its (now weaker) target of 50 per cent of 18-30 year olds experiencing higher education. A re-formulation of a 'third' sector of HE in FE may be emerging with the University Centres and FDAP for FE. The benefits and pitfalls of partnerships have been noted and the reasons why mergers are not considered as extensively as one might imagine. The format of partnership, including the recommendation of consortia, has been included and why such a format is preferred, particularly by FECs. This is seen as reflecting a rejection by FECs of the hegemonic position of HEIs. The role of partnerships as curtailing and controlling FECs rather than empowering them has also been acknowledged. Partnerships may be seen as promoting an increasingly differentiated HE, with the elite HEIs unchanged and an expansion of students in the 'teaching' HEIs that accept those students with vocational and lower entry qualifications. The question as to why so few FECs, at this stage, have yet applied for FDAP needs to be raised; given the opportunity that is now presented to FECs through the FDAP and the University Challenge initiatives one might have expected more. The suggestion is made that partnerships may fade away as FECs increase their confidence in HE provision and that partnerships are indirectly facilitating FE colleges' move to FDAP. Partnerships may dissolve as dual institutions of HE in FE expand (see Bathmaker, 2010) and be left as the franchisors to those FE colleges too small to undertake their own HE provision. Areas of concern in FE/HE partnerships, such as quality assurance, scholarly activity and trust and their relationship to positioning of FE tutors were addressed.

From this chapter, the issues to be addressed that have been identified are: the use of the FE/HE partnership model as a tool of central government in extending its control over the education system as an arm of its economic and social policy objectives within a neo-liberal paradigm; the nature of the relationship between FE and HE as partners; with a critical approach providing the tools of analysis. The next chapter goes on to explore the role of FE in the context of the expansion of HE in FE.

Chapter 4

Further Education

1. Preparing the ground for HE.

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the place of further education in terms of a brief description of its history in relation to its role today and with reference to HE in FE. Staff and their function, particularly vis-à-vis the understanding of the FE teacher as professional, will be examined. The issue of managerialism and its impact on the culture of FE features strongly. The second element moves onto HE in FE.

2. Purpose and brief history of further education

The position and purpose of further education is one that in some respects has not changed fundamentally since its inception. This is significant in informing the discourse of the role of further education and its place in delivering higher education. Its history is founded upon a combination of adult liberal education provision and technical and vocational education and training (Ainley and Bailey, 1997); these two strands will be found to be intertwined across most of the development of further education and is highly pertinent to the debates that rage over contemporary policy proposals (Temple, 2001). Gleeson (1996) refers to the tension between the academic and vocational as longstanding and persistent and,

Such tension also has its roots in the struggle between old humanists, industrial trainers and public educators which has characterised the history of state education in England.
(Gleeson, 1996, p. 89)

Raggatt and Williams (1999) provide a useful introduction to their work on vocational qualifications, with an overview of the initial developments in the 19th century that laid the foundations of vocational education and that were still extant up to the 1960s. The critical feature of the early development of further education is that it was based on voluntarism, in terms of employer support, and was perceived to be of low status. Many of today's colleges had their origins in the mechanics institutes of the 19th century and were formally recognised with the production of the Haldane Report on technical education in 1906 (Maclure, 1965). The origins of many universities were founded in technical colleges; for example, Imperial College which became a college of *higher* education and then a member of London University. Over the subsequent 50 years or so, vocational and technical education was recognised as necessary and the secondary education system itself recognised this in the establishment, after the Second World War, of a tripartite divide that recognised technical education (Maclure, 1965).

With the White Paper 'Technical Education' (Ministry of Education, 1956) and the Crowther Report (1959) the expansion of further education colleges was assured; however, it is in the latter that we see the first reference to technical education as a means of offering a fresh start to those 'tired of school' (HMSO, 1959, p. 412). This resonates in today's policies of vocational education and the 14-19 policy developments. It was also here that the first foray into governmental expectation of the link between education benefits from this sector and the needs of the economy was signalled,

The White Paper made it clear that the needs of the economy were the principal objective of this first political engagement in the post-compulsory sector after the war.

(Bailey, 1997, p. 26)

The following 30 years can be regarded as an expansion of the role of further education under the auspices of the LEAs but with ventures into the HE domain, as well as maintaining its provision of general education in the form of adult liberal education, Ordinary and Advanced General Certificate of Education and the development of various Access courses to support adults seeking alternative routes into higher education. This is regarded by authors such as Ainley and Bailey (1997), Gleeson (1996) and Raggatt and Williams (1999) as a period of expansion free from the attention of policy-makers (or 'benign neglect' (Lucas, 2004)) until the breakdown of consensus politics that was a product of the changes that were emerging from the initial impact of globalisation and the consequential increase in unemployment, particularly youth unemployment and the perceived threats that that posed to social stability (Ainley and Bailey, 1997).

The shift of policy that materialised was towards an increasingly antagonistic relationship between state and the role of education; the education system was regarded as 'failing' the economy (Ainley and Bailey, 1997; Furlong, 2005; Gleeson, 1996). A progressively dominant feature of education and training then became the extension of state central control, as opposed to local direction, as the state sought to formulate an investment return on the amount it spent on education and training. As the number of interventions through, for example, the New Training Initiative (NTI) (1981) increased, government progressively directed not only take-up of education and training,

but also the form and content of the curriculum. During the 1980s government intervention extended to the form and content of vocational/technical curriculum (see Raggatt and Williams, 1999); a fundamental shift towards competence based education and training and away from time-based skill development and a knowledge-based approach became established. This is an indicator of later developments that impact on HE itself. Various agencies (such as National Council for Vocational Qualifications and today's Skills Funding Agency (SFA)) with a range of titles and detailed portfolios emerged to fragment the once overarching, but relatively loose, control by the local education authority and became the proxy for state control of an increasingly directive yet arms-length approach. The implications for the role of HE in FE partnerships are broached here,

Government creates partnership to control, provide accountability,
set standards, increase access and expand provision...
(McBride, 1994, p. 12)

This offered the freedom to government to introduce frameworks that were clearly designed to restrict movement of colleges away from policy-direction, but couched in a language and structure that moved responsibility to the agencies and the colleges (Ainley, 2001; McBride, 1994). This came to its ultimate incarnation in the incorporation of further education colleges and sixth form colleges in the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. This not only brought an end to the binary divide as polytechnics were given university status, but also the status of corporate bodies was given to further education colleges with responsibility for their finances, estates and human resources (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). Withers (1998) reported however, that the so-called independence was in fact controlled by government via the Further

Education Funding Council (FEFC). This is an indicator of the role of agencies and the extension of government controls through a veneer of supposed independence,

...the Funding Council is fast becoming the biggest LEA in the world. It is certainly clear that Incorporation does not mean independence.

(Withers, 1998, p. 45)

3. Developments since 1993

The incorporation of colleges is regarded as a watershed, and was not necessarily welcomed by the stakeholders of further education colleges at the time. Goddard-Patel and Whitehead (2000) highlight the fact that colleges were previously given the opportunity to claim corporate status in the Education Reform Act (ERA) in 1988 but that not one college expressed any interest in this. According to the same authors, the impetus to move to incorporation came from the demands of the market-led philosophy of the government of the day and the political requirement to reduce the poll tax by shifting the burden of further education from local authorities to central government. Furthermore, the position of staff and their relationship to managers changed drastically post-incorporation. This relationship also extended to the culture of HE in FE and is, therefore, pertinent to this study. Goddard-Patel and Whitehead (2000) point to the deteriorating conditions of service, salaries and increased number of redundancies for lecturers whilst this had no impact on chief executives. For example, senior managers were given greater powers, including control over their own remuneration. However, the turn-over of chief executives was some 32 per cent between 1996-1998, indicating that the climate and culture of incorporation that was emerging was not congenial to many of those who had previously

been principals under the aegis of the local authorities. Withers (1998) reported on a survey of 30 staff and 13 principals/senior managers he undertook after incorporation. Whilst the views of a senior manager tended to be more optimistic,

...for the College and himself, Incorporation was like a breath of fresh air and a release from LEA strictures.

(Withers, 1998, p. 228)

Yet, the views of many teachers in FE colleges were quite the opposite,

If you can't count it, it's not valued...the downside was personal stress...creates a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity...

(Withers, 1998, p. 227-235)

Additional authors such as McDonald and Lucas (2001), Beale (2004) and Williams (2003) analysed the impact of incorporation on funding and human resource/industrial relations. Funding was drastically reformed such that colleges received allocations based on student numbers for courses with different weightings and identified elements for student achievement and to support initial guidance and achievement. The end result was a complexity that found managers (who were often those lecturers promoted on the basis of their skills in teaching) struggling to apply the funding formulae and having to spend an increasing amount of time establishing systems that often failed, and required further additional resources to manage. However, Leney et al (1998) found that in the interviews they conducted in 12 colleges, despite the fact that benefits were identified, such as support for students with learning difficulties, there were disadvantages around the cuts in course hours and,

The disproportionate amount of resources devoted to administering the funding methodology and meeting its data demands were referred to by nearly all those interviewed.

(Leney et al, ibid, p.6)

In particular, employee relations became strained, as evidenced in the move away from the 'Silver Book' conditions of service that had been negotiated and agreed on a national basis in 1981, and 22 per cent of all working days lost as a result of industrial action in 1994, were located in the further education sector (Beale, 2004; Williams, 2003). Beale also identifies that there was an increase of 25 per cent in the number of students and over the same period, a drop of 20,000 lecturers and that by 1998, two thirds of colleges were identified as having serious financial problems. The resulting effect, according to Beale, was an emphasis on managerialist quality systems that focused on compliance and,

...the strong consensual traditions of FE industrial relations were smashed apart in four intensive years in the 1990s...
(Beale, 2004, p. 476)

Goddard-Patel and Whitehead (2001) in detailing the closure of Bilston College in 1999 by the FEFC identified that this was not a unique incident and that there were a number of colleges which fell afoul of the arcane, almost unfathomable funding system that was based upon a market philosophy promulgated by the Thatcher government and extended into the public sector. They identified features of a regime which are all too often evidenced in today's colleges,

Fear of failure (and the naming and shaming which, inevitably accompany it) is a powerful disciplining tool, and in FE its use has become widespread, almost routine.

(Goddard-Patel and Whitehead, 2001, p.192)

According to Beale (2004), Cope et al (2003), Goddard-Patel and Whitehead (2001) and McDonald and Lucas (2001), the theme of performativity and

managing colleges through the fear of failure continued under the New Labour government after 1997. Indeed, Hodgson and Spours (2006) argue that the continuities between the Conservatives of Major and Thatcher and that of New Labour were greater than the differences - the main one of which was 'style' rather than any real substance. These features of the post-incorporation FE college became embedded in FE culture and are being extended further. For example, the DfES White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (2006) introduced new powers for the LSC to close failing or 'coasting' colleges,

There will be a robust intervention strategy to address inadequate, barely satisfactory and coasting (satisfactory, but not improving) colleges and provision, linked to the new funding method...

(DfES, 2006, p. 56)

Now government policy is to take this framework to what might be considered to be its definitive conclusion and the ultimate in technical rationality – the elimination of failure,

Any provider or provision judged to be failing or coasting will be subject to an improvement notice...Our goal is to eliminate inadequate or unsatisfactory provision across the learning and skills sector by 2008...

(DfES, 2006, p. 55)

This is the backdrop to today's FE colleges; in understanding why aspects of FECs are different to that of universities and why HE in FE may be operating in a different cultural environment to that in universities, an appreciation of the developments since the early 1990s needed to be referenced. The message to colleges has been made clear and also mirrors that given to the schools sector (DfES, 2005, p. 56). However, the implementation of such strategies is based upon a more fundamental philosophy of marketisation

and the means by which this is engineered; the introduction of managerialist forms of control.

4. Managerialism

The mantra of managerialism pervades a number of papers and books on FE from incorporation in 1993 to the present day. Avis (1996, 2002) is clear on the role and purpose of managerialism within the New Labour's project for FE; the professional lecturer is converted to the manager to ensure the extraction of surplus labour whilst at the same time, identifying,

A regime of truth that portrays its singular interests as universal
and as being able to satisfy the tenets of social justice.
(Avis, 1996, p.117)

The thrust of FE is inherently authoritarian and controlling, whereby the 'good' manager not only operates the system efficiently, but manipulates the pattern of social inclusion to effect a veneer of social equality. However, for Avis, 'Such a technicised process silences an overt politics' (2002, p.82) and issues around racism, gender and social exclusion are cloaked behind the paradigm of individualisation. The individual (student as well as staff) is drawn into a moral Foucauldian (1975) code of self-discipline and control; there is now no alternative model and this is almost a 'commonsense' or hegemonic approach,

A form of confessionality is developed which promotes an
exploration of the self with a view to overcoming its flaws and
improving the processes of learning and production. ...In whatever
sphere we operate, we are all consumers and producers.
(Avis, 1996, p. 109)

The lifeblood of managerialism is technical rationality, which,

...creates the impression of disinterestedness and objectivity. It implies that there is a common framework for people with fixed goals.

(Furlong, 2005, p. 127)

The appeal is made to professionals, students, employers and parents that this is the only way to proceed and that there is no concern with the underlying concepts, philosophies or paradigms.

The managerial is also gendered; Kerfoot and Whitehead (2000) refer to the impact of the new managerialist culture pervading FE as male managers seek to 'sustain a sense of self as purposeful, powerful and in control' (Kerfoot and Whitehead, 2000, p.184). The male managers they interviewed considered themselves to be 'real men', entrepreneurial and being 'driven', which is the culture that is sought and approved,

Thus the classed and gendered culture of FE can be seen to provide a fertile soil for the kinds of macho instrumentality and bully boy tactics which are sometimes evident.

(Kerfoot and Whitehead, 2000, p. 197)

Alternatively, Gleeson and Shain (1999) regard the female manager as viewing the introduction of incorporation as an opportunity for promotion through the culture of long hours and self-exploitation. They see the middle managers in FE as negotiating the boundary between the lecturers and the senior staff; the lecturers as representative of the 'old' culture of professional independence and collegiality, and the senior managers of the new culture of the marketisation of the public sector that will introduce efficiencies and effectiveness.

Essentially, managerialism is seen as the crux of a marketised public sector; a public sector that is required to behave as a business and where competition is engineered and is formed on the basis of a market fundamentalism, despite the flaws of the market system and the fact that the market,

...downplays the importance of socio-economic and cultural factors in shaping identity and values.

(Smith, 2007, p. 53)

A more pragmatic approach taken to the function of managerialism in education is that of Simkins (2000) who undertook an analysis of managerialism as experienced in schools and colleges. He identified four criteria that can be used to differentiate managerialism from an earlier paradigm of organisation management referred to as the 'bureau-professional' (Clarke and Newman, 1997). He cites the criteria as: the agenda (the basis of the professional versus the efficiency-ruled decisions of managers); the attachments or allegiances (the professional versus the generic management); the decision-making formats (professional discretion versus specialist management techniques) and the norms (well-being of the client versus efficiency and customer-orientation). However, the experiences vary considerably between and amongst the organisations within each sector; neither can one generalise about a supposed 'golden' earlier age,

...it is important not to idealise the situation before the reforms...it has been argued that the new managerialism often presented itself as a modernising alternative...

(Simkins, 2000, p. 328)

Some writers challenge the notion of the all-embracing managerialist culture (Simkins and Lumby, 2002), or, alternatively, ignore the issue of the market

economy and focus on the skills and role of managers as leaders within the new culture of corporate further education college and their contribution in maintaining a balance between pedagogy and business culture (Leader, 2004; Watson and Crossley, 2001). Muijs, Harris, Lumby, Morrison and Sood (2006) report on research that identified transformational leadership, based on an appeal to values, as a form of leadership that could be regarded as an indicator of an effective further education college. Wright (2001; 2003) however, criticised the use of the term leadership as a rhetorical function of managerialism and insists that,

...‘bastard leadership’ represents a capture of the leadership discourse by the managerialist project.

(Wright, 2003, p. 139)

The essential difference being that true leadership will focus on the ends as opposed to the means. This ‘bastard’ or deformed leadership style is inherently compatible with a technical rational paradigm.

An element of the culture associated with managerialism has been audit and inspection, including self-assessment. Holloway (1999) and Commons (2003) approach these matters from different perspectives; Holloway associates audit and in particular the Audit Commission’s report *Obtaining Better Value from FE* (1985) as representative of the move to rationalist efficiency force which encompassed a focus on outputs, whereas Commons identifies a positive relationship between average curriculum grade and average curriculum inspection grade and that self assessment is regarded as being useful. Ball (2003), Beckmann and Cooper (2004) and Ozga (2000) offer an indictment of managerialism in education generally that results in a

culture of compliance, local surveillance, the imposition of the hegemony of targets as opposed to attention to the development of relationships and nurturing that is a major aspect of a teacher's role,

Devolution of financial management to [schools] greatly enhanced the capacity of managerialism because it installed surveillance of the workforce at the level of the institution...

(Ozga, 2000, p. 224)

These writers identify the harm that is done to the morale and the agency of staff collectively and individually and the resulting damage to education that becomes more focused on the achievement of time-consuming secondary activities (e.g. the monitoring of numbers) as opposed to the primary function of teaching the learners (Ball, 2003). Performativity, alongside managerialism and marketisation, is a policy technology (Ball, 2003) which is,

...a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic).

(Ball, 2003, p. 216)

For the majority of writers, the feature of managerialism within education as a paradigm of the globalised, and target-focussed society, is one that has contributed to its commodification and had a negative impact on the provision of education itself. For example, Furlong (2005) tracks the development of the Conservative governments up to 1997 and the New Labour government's approach to teacher development and although there are differences, the one feature which is enduring, is one of acceptance of market forces as the dominant theme within modern societies worldwide. He refers to Giddens' (2000) work on the Third Way and how this is regarded as the path to

maintain economic growth whilst improving social inclusion; however, the forces of the market must now be accepted as the norm,

There is no known alternative to the market economy any longer.
(Giddens, 2000, p. 164 quoted in Furlong, 2005, p. 124)

5. Staff and Professionalism

Associated with the managerialist and modernisation project has been the agenda to reform the teaching workforce and to 'professionalise' those who teach or train in the learning and skills sector, particularly focussed at those in further education colleges. In 2001, the DfES issued regulations that introduced the requirement for all teachers in FE colleges to complete a teaching qualification endorsed by the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO), and subsequently the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) sector skills council, and to support the overall development of the profession and standards of teaching in the sector. Further regulations have required (DfES, 2003b) all FE teachers to become accredited as qualified teachers and a continuing professional development (CPD) requirement has been introduced, monitored by the Institute for Learning (IfL). Whether these requirements have supported HE in FE teachers in either their status as HE teachers, or their development needs that are specific to HE in scholarly activity, is a moot point. This agenda has resulted in teaching staff having to live with the contradictions inherent in their expected compliance with the regulations yet seeking to maintain their values and commitment to the students.

Robson's work on the status of the FE teacher as a professional, identifies that the profession is, by the very nature of entry from a diverse range of

vocations and other professions, highly porous and has led to a situation where,

FE teachers appear as an anomalous group, with an ambivalent status and an unclear identity.

(Robson, 1998, p. 586)

Prior to the time when teaching qualifications became a requirement, the perception of teaching itself was seen as perhaps less satisfying than in other educational institutions,

...due to the repetitious and fragmented quality of the work (many short-courses, a large student turnover and part-time attendance patterns which affect the development of staff-student relationships).

(Robson, 1998, p. 590)

The professionalisation agenda is questioned as are the opportunities for genuine collaboration for teachers. According to Robson, professionalisation has become a euphemism for the extension of the managerialist agenda of audit and control. How do HE in FE tutors perceive their position in the partnerships and their development as professional teachers?

Simmons (2006) in referring to the degradation of further education teachers' labour, reflects the notion that teachers are acting as the servants of a capitalist framework that now,

...equate[s] the work of FE teachers with that of industrial workers to the extent that some see an analogy with production line factory workers...

(Simmons, 2006, p. 18)

Avis et al (2003) and Avis (2006) highlight the formation of professionalism where there is no sense of collegiality, little evidence of learning development and the modus operandi has become one of survival (Avis et al, 2003, p.

186). Entry to FE teaching is regarded as a process of proletarianisation and extraction of surplus labour; teachers are expected to be complicit in their own exploitation through the acceptance of managerialist control and the continued formation of inequality (Avis, 2006). Ainley (2006) also refers to the proletarianisation of the profession,

Widening participation is presented as professionalising the proletariat while actually disguising on-going proletarianising of the professions, notably the academic professions.

(Ainley, 2006, p. 3)

For Lankshear, Peters and Knobel (2000) the teacher becomes the facilitator and a teacher of skills to achieve the objective of education – that of performativity as opposed to a universal welfare right.

Robson, Bailey and Larkin (2004) and Hodgkinson and Hodgkinson (2004) take a different approach. Robson et al argue that the professional further education teacher requires more than technical skills identified as the crux of the pedagogy of the 'modernised' education sector; rather the teachers see themselves as interleaving their judgement based upon their vocational expertise and that they have a duty to develop the whole person and offer protection from the exploitation of the employer,

These teachers have a broader perspective and in their expression of it, their narratives support a wider discourse of professionalism, concerned with expertise, commitment and care for others.

(Robson et al, 2004, p. 189)

Hodgkinson and Hodgkinson (2004) reference Bourdieu's habitus in their analysis of professional identity,

Habitus is a largely internalised, subconscious battery of dispositions that orientate a person's actions in any situation...Habitus is a means of expressing social structures and person (body and mind) as indivisible.

(Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004, p. 175)

They identify how two teachers respond to the same work environment differently; one employs a strategic compliance approach and the other embraces the perceived opportunities through performance management.

Teachers, however, tend to accept and reinforce the 'doxa' or orthodoxy of managerialism. Hodkinson and Hodkinson's work reveals the complexities of analysing individual dispositions within the managerialist framework and alerts us to the dangers of simplifying and making assumptions of responses by staff to their work situation. Gleeson, Davies and Wheeler (2005) formulate the dichotomous or dualist position of the FE professional and refer to Ball's (2001) reference to teachers as either,

...the recipients of external policy reform or as an empowered agent of educational change.

(Gleeson et al, 2005, p. 446)

The FE teacher can be regarded as either the dupe (succumbing to management) or devil (needing to be controlled) (Bathmaker, 2001). At the same time,

Few FE practitioners can trace the roots of their profession to an established desire to teach in FE.

(Gleeson et al, 2005, p. 449)

Staff within such a system can be variously viewed as 'trusted servant, rather than empowered professionals.' (Avis, 2003, p. 329)

Bathmaker (2006) formulates a typology of the practice of the FE professional and identifies four versions of professionalism: corporate, personal, collaborative and critical. The corporate professional complies with the managerialist framework and works to achieve the targets established; personal professionalism expounds the individual experience and commitment to both the students and the specialist field; the collaborative professional utilises a strategic compliant approach that can lead to a paradoxical position of both working against and for management objectives for the corporation. The critical professional stands in opposition to the corporate professional; they understand the social, political and economic power relationship that constitutes the backdrop to the sector and,

...seek[ing] opportunities for human agency, that is, spaces for social action.

(Bathmaker, 2006, p.132)

Although a warning note is given from other quarters that there is a danger that the focus of critical pedagogy and the critical professional becomes more of a political project and that,

Critical pedagogies and critical professionalism need to connect with the everyday concerns of teachers...

(Bathmaker, 2006, p. 133)

A critical professionalism might be considered a meta-professionalism; one that develops the disposition on the part of both students and teachers to,

... encourage metacognitive understandings of the tasks and purposes of teaching and learning, and which opens up for debate the official curriculum, the curriculum as enacted and the hidden curriculum of teaching and learning interactions.

(Bathmaker, 2006, p. 139)

I will consider the evidence of tutors engaging at a critical professional level or succumbing to the combined pressures of a managerialist culture within their institutions and the relegation with a HE in FE partnership to a subsidiary role.

6. Conclusion

The backdrop to the present climate and culture of FE and one that affects HE in FE is one that was fundamentally altered with incorporation of FE colleges in 1993. Changes to relationships between tutors and managers as well as the instillation of a marketised approach to education resulted in a managerialist, target and audit-driven *modus operandi*. These feature as Ball's (2003) policy technology and effect a resulting compliant workforce, although Bathmaker (2006) applies a more sophisticated analysis of the position of the FE tutor, through her typology of approaches to professionalism. Staff have been 'professionalised' through a government policy and strategy of introducing a requirement for all FE teachers to achieve an approved teaching qualification (DfES, 2003b) but their professional identity is regarded as less defined and the teaching conditions less satisfying than other educational sectors. The dual professionalism that teachers from vocational and professional backgrounds bring to FE creates tensions that also impinge on HE in FE.

2. HE in FE: a new beginning?

1. Introduction

Given the focus on HE in FE policy over the last decade and the higher profile of HE in FE, the impression may have been given that HE in FE is relatively new and is providing considerable new prospects and opportunities for improved access to HE. This will be explored in this chapter. Related aspects such as, policy shifts and discourses around vocationalism and employability will be explored in relation to their impact on, and association between HE in FE. The issues of the boundaries or the 'seamless web' are themes that will also be considered. The positioning of students and tutors in the HE in FE landscape will be addressed and whether the policy-push represents a contribution to the maintenance of social inequalities in education and the perceived benefits.

The profile of HE in FE has previously been low-key; when reviewing the literature on higher education the norm is for little or no reference to be made on HE in FE. Relatively little has been written on HE in FE until quite recently; this is, in itself, an indication of its lower profile and comparatively recent development in policy terms. An apposite reference is made by Bathmaker et al (2008) on the position, role and future development of HE in FE and,

... especially how they serve to reduce or reproduce patterns of social inequality ... Where growth occurred through hierarchical differentiation, with less-selective and lower-tier institutions absorbing much of the new demand, arguments continue about whether this should be viewed as a process of democratization (bringing new populations into higher education) or diversion (steering them away from elite institutions and opportunities).
(ibid, p.126)

This quotation reflects both the aspiration of improved access and democratisation (that is, in Bathmaker's terms above, 'bringing new populations into HE') of HE and the concern that the provision of an HE that maintains present inequalities within a highly differentiated and elitist system. This section will consider aspects of this recent emphasis and anticipation of increased numbers of HE students in FE and whether this is fulfilling policy expectations or merely re-formulating what has been a previous approach to HE in FE.

2. From whence HE in FE?

It is a particular aspect of the HE and FE sectors in England that they are seen as two separate sectors, each with its own peculiarities in terms of structures and other factors,

In England, the division of post-compulsory education into sectors is long-standing, although the number, arrangement and description of sectors have changed over time.

(Bathmaker et al, 2008, p. 125)

This partly reflects their separate histories but it also reflects a fundamental tension that still exists in government policy today in terms of the nature of the provision offered by each sector. Previous provision of HE has been offered by the FE sector; so, for example, since the end of the Second World War, the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were responsible for higher education delivered outside the 14 universities that existed at that time. However, the 'brand' of HE offered by LEAs was clearly focused on providing specific vocational and professional education and training and normally referred to as advanced courses. In contrast to the position today, such courses were either accredited by awarding bodies, professional bodies or, if

they were degrees, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), (Parry and Thompson, 2002). The provision of London University external degrees through FE colleges were the exception to this development. This strand of HE has a progeny in the development of the 10 Colleges of Advanced Technology in 1956 and the polytechnics of 1966 through to the recent development of FDs. The tendency of upward academic drift in the further education sector is identifiable here. These developments all ultimately, culminated in university status, funding and curriculum control and thereby contributed to an increasingly stratified and differentiated HE sector. Furthermore, according to David (2010) this binary system of polytechnics and universities for HE contributed to an emerging and perceived relationship between HE institutions and socio-economic status,

A system of structured higher educational opportunities, around types of academic or technological courses, and linked to socio-economic status was thus embedded within UK policies and practices for expanding higher education from their inception.

(p.8)

Parry and Thompson (2002) outline the development and the types of HE in FE. Prior to 1988, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) regarded the provision of advanced education (that is, courses offered through the polytechnics which were part of the LEAs' remit) and non-advanced (that is, LEA education that formed part of the further education college's remit) as a 'seamless robe' and, to some extent, could be regarded as providing a de facto partnership between HE and FE through the auspices of the LEA. It was through these embryonic arrangements that HE provision was expanded by the use of franchise agreements during the 1990s when funding was limited yet student demand was expanding. This, however, did not result, as

might have been expected, in a widening of the social base of the student make-up of universities (Bathmaker et al, 2008; Maton, 2005).

The LEAs continued to provide advanced education, referred to as non-prescribed higher education after the 1988 Education Reform Act, and which continued to be funded by LEAs until 2000. Confusingly, FE colleges did continue to run some prescribed courses (that is, funded by the Polytechnic Funding Council); although a minority of the HE provision in FE colleges, it still constituted some 20 per cent of the HE provision during this period (Parry and Thompson, 2002). The bulk of LEA higher education (any first degrees or postgraduate courses, full-time and substantial part-time sandwich courses, training courses for teachers and youth workers) was removed to the aegis of the polytechnics (Parry and Thompson, 2002). This established the binary system of universities and polytechnics between 1970 and 1992, the latter being focussed on ‘technological and vocational opportunities’ (David, 2010, p. 8). In some ways, this period might be considered reminiscent of the present period of expansion of vocational HE and the proposals to develop new University Centres through the ‘University Challenge’ proposals (DIUS, 2008) and provokes the claim that present policy is a response to the upward academic drift of the post-1992 universities and the need to replace that strand of vocational HE. The University Challenge (2008) document is unashamedly economic- focussed with the majority of its objectives referring to skills and economic regeneration (p. 3).

The period between 1988 and 1994 when the funding arrangements encouraged the take up of 'fees-only' students and the numbers, particularly those at polytechnics (post-1992 HEIs) and those at FE colleges, increased dramatically may be a portent of what may happen during a period of reduced funding, but with increased demand for HE places. Typically, little reference to the role of higher education in the newly constituted FE colleges was made in the incorporation of FE colleges in the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (Parry and Thomson, 2002, p. 7). This was the 'elephant in the room' that was neglected in its policy identification and development and continued during the period of the HE in FE expansion during the early 1990s. Such expansion was essentially a market tool to increase numbers on an economic basis and was an imperative from HEIs rather than the FECs, as can be seen in the White Paper (DES, 1991). Parallel comparisons of the position in the HE sector and the demand for increased student numbers today are evident here. It is likely that HE in FE partnerships will be able to play a similar role to that of the 1990s and provide opportunities for the expansion of student numbers off their premises.

A further legacy that affects both funding, identification and status of HE in FE today can be found in the differentiation between prescribed and non-prescribed courses (mainly vocational and professional courses) (Clark, 2002) that were left with the FE colleges post 1992. Although both types were identified as higher education, the non-prescribed were funded from the Further Education Funding Council (and later the LSC) funds, despite their being no reference to HE strategies, whilst others were funded directly by the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE),

...the FEFC had adopted a policy of 'no-policy' in respect of higher education it funded, regarding its inheritance of these courses as very much anomalous and residual responsibility...

(Parry and Thompson, 2002, p. 12)

An additional complication that FE colleges accommodated over the period of expansion in the 1990s that still exists today, is indirect funding of HE courses, franchised from HEIs as part of partnership arrangements. The situation of mixed messages and perceptions of FE as being new to HE, yet having a substantial history of delivering HE continued up to 1995 when policy at a national level became formulated through a HEFCE discussion document which raised the perceived advantages of HE in FE and called for an examination of the funding of this interface as they were becoming,

... increasingly difficult to relate to the rapidly changing academic boundary between these two overlapping territories.

(HEFCE, 1995, quoted in Parry and Thompson, 2002, p. 8)

The landscape of HE in FE was to move to a clearer foundation when Dearing (1997) identified a role for FE colleges in delivering HE and advocated that HEFCE should control HE funding, thereby both confirming and establishing relationships between the two sectors. The LSC has focused on vocational progression routes and has ventured little and with hesitation into the territory of HE until recently (see LSC, 2006, 2007 and 2008) despite the increasing interest of colleges. To date some 140 colleges receive direct funding with 260 receiving indirect funding via a partnership with an HEI; some of these receive both (Bathmaker et al, 2008). This reveals the ambiguity in implementation of policy compared to the rhetoric; is there a hesitation in allowing FE colleges to take the reins of HE funding for reasons of practical application (for example, the complications of funding

some 400 FE colleges with relatively small amounts) or does this display financial, territorial and power relational issues (Bathmaker et al, 2008)? There is a perceived risk that the Association of Colleges' (AoC) call for FE colleges to receive all their funding directly from HEFCE (FE Focus, 2010), predicated on an assumption of 'higher skills at lower costs' (ibid), combined with some HEIs withdrawing their HEFCE numbers from partnerships, will result in a collapse of HE in FE partnerships, a reduction in the range of HE courses offered in FE colleges and the further hierarchical, differentiated HE provision.

3. The statistics of HE in FE

When attempting to analyse the statistics of HE in FE, the complexity of the two separate systems and the fact that there has been little interest in undertaking analysis of this element of HE, makes the task very difficult. This was identified in 1997 by Parry,

HESA has yet to be in a position to include data on students registered on courses of higher education provided by establishments of further education – an area of provision which has traditionally commanded less attention from analysts and commentators.

(Parry, 1997, p. 8)

Parry and Thompson (2002) have undertaken what was the first analysis of statistics of HE students in FE. Over the period 1989-1999, the share of higher education enrolments in FE colleges grew by 18 per cent whilst growth of HE students in England increased by 60 per cent (p. 76). Furthermore,

As a result of this differential pattern of growth, the share of HE students registered at FE colleges fell over this period, from 12% in 1989-1990 to 10% in 1994-1995, and dropped to 9% in subsequent years.

(Parry and Thompson, 2002, p. 78)

The statistics are complicated by whether or not various categories of HE students are included in the figures; these include non-prescribed HE, those students who are registered at a university but are taught and funded directly at the FE college, and those students who are classified as franchised students. Nevertheless, the FE colleges provide a minority but not inconsequential proportion of all HE numbers. The HEFCE has noted, however, that it is somewhat concerning that this percentage has remained at around 10-12 per cent over the last 15 years (HEFCE, 2006a). Over the period from the mid-1990s to quite recently, the bulk of HE in FE has continued to operate as non-prescribed courses,

Over two-thirds of students enrolled on courses of higher education provided by colleges of further education are in the non-prescribed category, the great majority (88 per cent) studying part-time.

(Parry, 1997, p. 23)

A monitoring and tracking system of HE in FE student numbers was introduced in 2005-06. According to the AoC, colleges now include some 117,000 HE students, who are mainly part-time and mature (over 21 years) and of the 352 colleges that provide a progression route to HE, 248 already offer HE courses themselves (AoC, 2010a, p. 1). In other words, the majority of FE colleges offer HE provision whether on a partnership basis and with indirect HEFCE funding provided through their HE partner, or with direct funding from HEFCE.

Whilst it may be difficult to identify HE students in FE, identifying those teachers who are delivering HE in FE is virtually impossible (HEFCE, 2006b).

4. Is there a difference between HE, and HE in FE?

When making reference to HE, the assumption is often made that HE is a homogenised product and that all HE students have similar features in their entry requirements and their experience is similar. However, the expansion of HE in FE can be regarded as the further endorsement of the massification of HE. The term mass higher education as an element in a typology of higher education was formulated by Trow in 1970. According to the formula, higher education is identified in relation to the proportion of the relevant age cohort (normally 18-21 year olds) who are participating in higher education. An elite system is one which includes under 15 per cent of the age cohort, mass is one that includes 15 – 39 per cent, and, finally, a universal higher education system is one that has breached the 40 per cent point. At the time of Trow's writing, the English system contained approximately 8 per cent of the age cohort and even by 1981 had reached a mere 13 per cent of the age cohort (Ainley, 1994) and, therefore, was still classified as an elite system. However, between 1987 and 1992, the participation rate moved to 27.8 per cent and according to Trow's classification had progressed to a mass system (Scott, 1995). The participation rate has now increased again and gone beyond the 40 per cent. Indeed, some authors refer to the participation rate of middle class children (i.e. those from families who have normally anticipated and experienced HE) as universal, whereas that of children from lower social classes, is far less; three quarters of higher

education students come from one third of the population (Watt and Paterson, 2000).

As the massification of the HE system has moved towards a greater level of participation, with some 43 per cent of young people (18 year olds) participating in HE (a total of 2,027,085 UK students in 2008-09 (HESA, 2009)) and the increasing spotlight of government on HE in FE, a clear, coherent policy might have been anticipated. Greater state control has been exerted over HE via budget restrictions, directives, greater dependency on such funding and the increasingly inspectoral role of the QAA with resulting lower resistance to state intervention (see, for example, moves by HEFCE to assert powers to remove vice chancellors (Times Higher Education, 2010). However, the policy formation has been dogged by a framework and conception of the divide between the academic and the vocational which has confused and complicated the developments. The academic construct has been seen as the preserve of the few, maintaining a separation from the practical concerns of the world (Ainley, 1994; Taylor, Barr and Steele, 2002),

... 'higher' has always been associated with the professions while 'further' is associated with the trades... Higher is also regarded as looking down and having an overview...

(Ainley, 2006, p. 2)

The expansion of HE since the 1960s has been represented by two pathways; one devoted to the maintenance of the elite image of the university and one to the expansion of HE provision on the basis of a vocational aspect – mainly on part time courses and focused on the Northern and Midlands industrial heartlands and situated within the polytechnics/post1992 universities which were mainly derived from LEA colleges pre-1956 (Scott,

1995). FE colleges fit within this latter model in terms of their earlier and present provision of HE. However, this model of HE of vocational, local and part-time, which may at one time have been regarded as the province of the FE colleges operating at the margin and at the behest of the HE institutions, has moved on for both HE institutions and FE colleges. Emphasis has shifted towards an agenda of employability and an increasing emphasis on the vocational aspects of higher education. What was the domain of the FE 'Cinderella' has become the mantra of government policy. As Davies perceived in 1997 and further endorsed by HEFCE (2006b), a shared agenda for both HE and FE has developed as,

... academic specialisation and technical training hold the centre stage.

(Davies, 1997, p. 11)

Wagner (2001) regards the development of FDs as avenues to employability, as distinct from vocationalism,

This could in the longer term be one of the revolutionary impacts of foundation degrees, namely substituting employability for vocationalism and thus bringing the whole issue out of the ghetto of overspecific knowledge and competence towards a more general enabling usage. The word 'vocationalism' is now a damaged brand in higher education. It is almost impossible to use it without the adjectival prefix 'narrow'. Higher education has never been about narrow vocationalism and, as the term 'general vocationalism' has never taken off, it might be best to drop the word altogether. From now on, vocationalism is out and employability is in.

(Wagner, 2001, p. 2)

The position of FE colleges in delivering HE can be seen to represent a view of HE that is subservient to that in universities and offering opportunities for those sections of society that are essentially from the lower tiers of the social class structure. Note that work undertaken recently by Thompson (2009) on the class distribution of young people (16-17 years) in FECs has identified

the presence of a substantial minority of middle class but that nonetheless, FECs are predominantly populated by working-class children.

The provision of HE as a marginal activity of FE also operated as a safety valve for the uptake of the numbers of the university (Parry, 2003) yet also permits the preservation of the HE/FE boundaries (Bathmaker et al, 2008; Smith and Bocock, 1999). As a consequence, there is no real threat to the identification of the FE and HE institutions and their separate characteristics.

Alternatively, Davies (1997) saw the provision of HE in FE as an opportunity to innovate and forge new associations.

As we move towards a mass, or even a universal higher education system, such alliances may bring innovations at the margins to the centre of events.

(Davies, 1997, p. 12)

HE in FE is perceived as being closer to the student (local provision), widening participation (accessibility to under-represented social groups) and knowledge that is 'useful' and vocational (responsive to employer needs) that presents the dichotomy of the image and profile of higher education in further education. If the role of HE is to create knowledge and to engage students in that creation (see Nolan 2005; Robertson and Boud, 2005), then HE in FE needs to participate in that knowledge development. However, the more FE is perceived to be influenced by the widening participation project and vocational aspect, the less cachet and social capital it can offer to the middle classes that now regard the experience of HE at a traditional (preferably) university as an automatic expectation.

These issues engage us in the iterative question of what is further education and its difference to higher education and their relationship to the academic/vocational divide. Young (2006) clarified the distinction in terms of an institutional or structural connotation; further education can mean, quite simply, beyond compulsory schooling and has become associated with the wide spectrum of what is delivered in FE colleges, including both vocational and general education; whereas higher education denotes a level of achievement in compulsory school qualifications that then gives access to application to a university to follow a degree level qualification. However, his comment on the academic/vocational divide and further education is worthy of note here,

...the term 'further' has been used to replace vocational with its associations, most evident in the UK, with the inferior side of the academic/vocational divide.

(Young, 2006, p. 4)

Reference is made to the hierarchical nature of the differences between the two sectors,

...[the] categories merely mask deeper hierarchies (for example, those between theoretical and practical knowledge and learning) and deeper differences between occupational and knowledge domains.

(Young, 2006, p. 4)

His contention is that the call for the 'seamless web' between further and higher education, often associated with the widening participation agenda, may not lead to what we might anticipate. Firstly, there may be a further incomprehension established around any attempt to re-structure what is a complex area of learning, comprising not only differing levels, but a variety of modes and purposes of study and again,

It treats real differences as of little significance and masks the hierarchies and inequalities that underlie them.
(Young, 2006, p. 5)

The thrust of present government policy has become more pronounced towards a vocational and employability emphasis for all higher education,

The government's framework for science and innovation highlights the considerable role that the HE knowledge base can play as a source of the country's global competitiveness, creating ideas, entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs as well as enhancing skills, management capability and productivity.
(DfES, 2006c, p. 26)

Given the prominence of the vocational and employability discourse, perhaps there should be greater focus on how universities can become more like FE colleges, rather than how FE colleges can emulate the academic traits of HE in universities; in some respects the HE 'brand' is moving towards FE (Ainley, 2000; 2005). Becher and Trowler (2001) cite evidence of an increase in administration and other related non-academic work for HE tutors in post-92 HEIs.

One element that is claimed to be a major distinction between HE and FE and, therefore, a potential barrier, is that of culture. A definition from Schein (2004) on culture, although based on organisations per se, rather than educational institutions is helpful,

... a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. ...culture as the accumulated shared learning of a given group, covering behavioural, emotional, and cognitive elements of the group members' total psychological functioning.
(Schein, 2004, p. 17)

The question of the development of an HE culture in FECs is one that has an increased profile, given demands for greater HE in FE. In a paper presented to the Learning and Skills Research Network conference, Simmons (2003) speculated that developing an HE culture in FE, where a deficit model is dominant, will be difficult. Furthermore, culture is 'enacted, constructed, contested' (Simmons, 2003, p. 3). Nixon at al's paper (1998) recognised the changes that were taking place in HE culture itself. For them, universities have lost their earlier ground of credibility of independence and authenticity, in the face of market forces and they had contributed to the,

...construction of the consumer society, of monopoly capitalism, and the rise of the middle class...

(p. 293)

HE itself has not only lost its perceived status but it has continued to maintain,

... relationships of power and domination, even while they challenge them.

(ibid)

For those in partnerships with HEIs this may ring true.

Simmons (2003), drawing on criteria for HE in FE identified by Trowler (1998) and confirmed by Parry (2003), featured the need for the following: a defined HE space; a specific pedagogy, the use of small groups and attention given to individuals; support for students that is local and nurturing; and resources, for both learning and teaching. As an example of the perceived difference between FE and HE, Paterson (1999) expresses the lived experience of a course leader within the context of HE in FE where there is gap between,

...the actuality of the course leader's role and the perceived role voiced by members of the senior management.

(Paterson, 1999, p. 113)

The course leader finds that a considerable amount of time is taken up with low-level administration which is not considered to be the lot of the equivalent in HE. This might be contended by a growing number of HE course leaders in universities and particularly those that are teaching-focused.

5. Research and Scholarly Activity in FE

At this point, it is pertinent to focus on the issue of research and scholarly activity as it relates to lecturers in FE, the substance of research undertaken, and to the support delivered by FE/HE partnerships. Page (1997), Cunningham and Doncaster (2002), Young (2002) and Harwood and Harwood (2004) all described the approach to research as being pragmatically based and grounded in action research that can be justified in terms of their teaching, as opposed to any research that might be perceived to be 'blue skies'. Young (2002) underscored the difference in the role between FE lecturers and HE lecturers; FE lecturers concentrate on the,

...interpretation and modification of information rather than
originating and researching as is the case with most HE staff.
(p. 276)

Yet this same assertion can be made of some HE lecturers in some departments in post-92 HEIs. The observation is also made that as employees within a volatile sector, FE lecturers need to maintain their flexibility in teaching and that to invest in a focus on one aspect of their work may leave them vulnerable in times of the numerous cut-backs, re-organisations and redundancies that they can face in FE. Such tensions may now be found within and across some HEIs. Harwood and Harwood (2004)

reported on a survey of FE teachers of HE and confirmed previous findings of the perception of the FE teacher as *teacher*, rather than researcher and where scholarly activity is not recognised by college management. However, reports such as Turner et al (2009) and Turner, McKenzie, McDermott and Stone (2009) point to recent developments and support for scholarly activity that is being developed in FE colleges, in part as a response to validation requirements and also QAA processes in the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) (QAA, 2006) that is undertaken on HE in FE processes, but also respond to FE lecturers' needs and aspirations in undertaking scholarly activity. Yet diminishing resources and lack of prioritisation of partnership arrangements within universities can lead to FE staff not receiving the appropriate level of support and thereby losing one of the main benefits to staff in a HE in FE partnership.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) regards research as an essential element of teaching at HE level and calls for work that demonstrates how research can be embedded across all HE undergraduate studies (Jenkins, Healey and Zetter, 2007). Their assertion is that,

...the teaching-research nexus is central to higher education.
(p. 2)

This reflects a counter-argument against the growing tension between the claims for HEIs to be either research or teaching focused. These arguments are not new; Wilhelm von Humboldt was perhaps the first to assert the relationship between learning and research and to maintain the connection. Humboldt's notion of the research university from 1810 is based on his claim that,

Universities should treat learning always as consisting of not yet wholly solved problems and hence always in research mode.
(cited in Elton, 2005, p.108).

Other authors have asserted the same (see Brew and Boud, 1995; Elton, 2005) yet others consider that there has been a shift in the paradigm of teaching and learning in higher education and that the massification of higher education has resulted in an elemental transformation in our understanding and the practice of higher education such that the division of HEIs into teaching as opposed to research HEIs is already upon us in practice (for example, Brennan and Osborne, 2008). The DfES White Paper, 2003 'The Future of HE', identified a lack of correlation between teaching and research and, thereby, justified a separation of teaching and research (Rowland, 2005). To some extent, this division is already apparent, particularly between the pre and post 1992 universities, and reflects the original conception of the polytechnics as institutions of practical knowledge as well as the extension of the comprehensivisation theme that was being undertaken in the compulsory sector in the 1960s (Ainley, 1994). Nevertheless, government policy has moved towards a position of greater direction over research, despite its perceived superiority and association with the elite universities. Research is regarded, and increasingly funded, as a basis of developments that will support the economy and, consequently, researchers feel the constraints on their freedom to pursue questions that they might otherwise have chosen (Evans, 2002).

If these arguments hold true for HE where does this place HE in FE? Moves to improve the profile of scholarly activity (rather than research) have been

initiated with support from the Higher Education Academy (see for example, Houston, 2008 and Turner et al, 2009). Yet research indicates that FE is not a natural home to research and stretches the resources of FE colleges and their lecturers themselves.

6. Vocationalism and Employability: the role of foundation degrees in the HE landscape.

In order to both extend and change the provision of higher education (HEFCE, 2005), the two tenets of the mass higher education system, widened participation and employability, have been incorporated into a purportedly new qualification – the FD. The issue of employability is placed squarely and unashamedly as one of the main pillars of the degree, ‘...from now on, vocationalism is out and employability is in...’ (Wagner, 2001).

The prospect of the development of a sub-degree qualification related to the needs of employers within the highly competitive globalised economy was first flagged through the Dearing Report in 1997; it also gave a clear signal that government intended ‘to more closely integrate the worlds of academia and work’, (Wilson et al, 2005, p. 112) and most pertinent for this work, they should provide,

...a key vehicle for enabling the Government to meet its widening participation targets and for a clearly focused expansion of Higher Education in further education....blurring the distinction between the two sectors, making them work closer together in partnership and directly attacking the social and cultural prejudices against sub-degree vocational learning (and students) found in many older universities.

(Wilson et al, 2005, p. 116)

Such a qualification would be targeted at the intermediate level and operate on a similar basis and, perhaps, a similar student market as that of the Associate Degree as offered in Community Colleges in the USA (Wilson et al, 2005). The intention to develop such a degree was announced by the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett in a speech at the University of Greenwich in 2000; this was followed by a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) consultation paper and HEFCE calling for bids for prototype FDs; a DfES White Paper in 2003 detailed the support that would be made available for the development and delivery of FDs up to 2006. This included the establishment of the FDF, an agency designed to promote the new qualification and to provide links between universities and employers. FDF has time-specified funding presently allocated until 2011.

A revealing response from the FE sector for the proposal of the FD is portrayed in a paper from the research agency for the further education sector at the time, the Learning and Skills Development Agency, which responded to the DfES White Paper by highlighting essential elements, if the objective was to ensure achievement of the government's targets and widening participation,

We regard it as crucial that the foundation degree is established as a credible and attractive option to a wide range of students lest it reinforce the concentration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in a narrow group of institutions, including FE colleges.

(LSDA, 2003, p. 4)

Relatively little was written about FDs (Nelson, 2006), until more recently when empirical studies have reported on their findings (see, for example,

Dodgson and Whitham (2005), Tatlow (2007) and Webb et al (2006)).

However, from the outset, the organisation given responsibility for development, FDF, has allocated a high profile to research and ensured that it is not left to the margins of the field of development. Perhaps this might be regarded as a strategic move to lay claim to a research profile within the culture of higher education, thereby promoting FDs as a member of the higher education family, as well as policy-related principles of ensuring funding as in the rest of higher education (Beaney, 2006).

Nevertheless, there has been reluctance on the part of the traditional universities to get involved in FDs (Wilson et al, 2005), despite the fact that growth funded by government since 2001 (until recently) has been firmly dedicated to FDs. The 'new kids on the block' are perceived to be not only proclaiming the death knell of the established Higher National Diplomas (Wagner, 2001), but are also regarded as a further step towards the occupation of higher education by vocationalism. Furthermore, the debate around the new qualification and the antagonism expressed against FDs has to a certain extent, exacerbated the debate of the role of further education colleges in higher education.

7. Move to FE validation of foundation degrees

A further twist in the development of HE in FE, but one that might have been anticipated, is contained within the FE and Training Act, 2007, for FE colleges to validate their own FDs and eliminate the need for any relationship with a university, no matter how tenuous any present partnership links might be,

... to grant further education institutions powers to award their own foundation degrees. Currently, further education institutions must get their foundation degrees validated by a university. This provision reflects the Government's commitment to reducing bureaucracy and to delivering more higher education through the further education system.

(DfES, 2006b)

This had been anticipated to a certain extent by Roodhouse (2006) in a call for FE colleges to validate their own FDs but through the auspices of the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC).

But, perhaps, this is a re-run of previous scenarios where FE colleges, not for the first time, are regarded as the lower tier of higher education, behind the traditional universities and the post-92 universities. Parry (2003) in describing the position of FE colleges vis-à-vis higher education in the period of the 1970s said of FE colleges,

Standing outside the university sector and operating as a 'third' tier from the rest of higher education providers in the further education system, the colleges were running the most local, vocational and distributed parts of the English higher education system.

(Parry, 2003, p. 313)

So, just as more attention is focused on HE in FE, the possibility of a separate HE sector, contained within the FE colleges, is being proffered, as it was with the introduction of the Colleges of Technology in 1956 and with the polytechnics in 1966. However, Ainley (2006) argued that there is a danger that FE will lose its distinctive role if it moves closer to the HE agenda with the possibility of being absorbed into HE,

As long as the LSC exists separately from HEFC, the colleges may still be protected from merger or absorption by the universities...In this new tertiary tripartism there is no place for FE as the sector offering a second chance for those failed by academic schooling.

(Ainley, 2006, p. 6)

The debate is around whether FE colleges will be able to provide the flexibility called for to meet employer requirements and widen participation (Morgan, 2007; Widdowson, 2007) versus the fear that the FE FDs will become classified as second class and that perhaps, universities will withdraw from investment in progression routes to honours level degree awards (Lockley, 2007; Tatlow, 2007; Warwick, 2007). The point is also made that there was no consultation on this proposal (Tatlow, 2007, p. 20) and that the FE/HE partnerships that have been established on a successful basis may be threatened with de-stabilisation (although there is a variation of opinion on this (Lockley, 2007, p. 29)).

The impact of the FE and Training Act (DfES, 2007) on HE/FE partnerships will be monitored through the remainder of this research. Indicators of threats to FE/HE partnerships have already been signified; a notable presentation at a recent HE in FE conference, Tunbridge (2009) sounds a warning of impending issues confronting FE/HE partnerships due to the economic climate and the potential for FE colleges to validate their own FDs,

...there are worrying signs of some in the FE sector signalling a lesser commitment to working with HE, and equally a temptation for some universities to retrench and reduce their collaborative provision.

(p. 3)

Calls from the AoC for direct funding for HE and full HE validation powers (2010a), thereby eliminating the need for partnerships with HEIs for foundation and other degrees completely, reinforce these concerns.

8. Conclusions

The development of HE in FE is identified as the advance of vocational HE through the LEAs since the Second World War. However, at the same time, a process of what may be perceived as academic drift, has been underway with the earlier conversion of FE colleges into Colleges of Advanced Technology (1956) and later the polytechnics (1966) that ultimately then emerged as post-92 universities and later still the Colleges of Higher Education (1973). The question as to whether this demonstrates the thread of the vocational in HE, or a continuation of a hierarchical and differentiated HE sector that continues to re-trench itself with the advent of greater opportunities for those from lower socio-economic classes who are being encouraged through certain aspects of government policy and certainly rhetoric, to enter HE will be analysed through the empirical data. The policy development identifies the low status or backwater that HE in FE inhabited through the LEAs up to the instigation of FE/HE partnerships, based upon the HEIs' expansion at the margins, and FE colleges' opportunistic or genuine objective of widening participation and development of ladders of progression for local students.

The statistics of HE in FE show that in total, HE in FE has included up to 20 per cent of all HE students (Parry, 1997), but that the figures excluding the non-prescribed students stabilised at around 10-12 per cent over the last 15 years (HEFCE, 2006a). Today, the absolute figures are increasing (AoC,

2010b) through government support for FDs, yet the percentage remains around the same as it has been for some years. It is to be noted however, that during the period of considerable HE growth in the 1990s, the growth of student numbers was focused on the HE sector rather than the FE sector. This may have been an expression of a preference for HE that is full-time (and supported through grants at that period) as opposed to limited opportunities for learning engagement, no fee support and the strain of undertaking both work and study; alternatively, the choice may have been an expression of a perception of HE in a university as being different and preferred to that in a FE college.

The demands of globalisation as interpreted by the previous New Labour Government have moved the scene on, however. With targets for 50 per cent of young people aged 18-30 experiencing HE by 2010 (but not achieved), a greater articulation of employer interests and widening participation, it can be argued that FE colleges are inevitably allocated a higher profile and a specific role for HE in FE. What was (and still is?) regarded as the second or even third rung of HE has been promoted through government policy to extend itself across all HE; HE that incorporates the vocational is now proclaimed to be the aspiration for all HE (HEFCE, 2006c).

This chapter also considered the role of research for those involved in HE in FE and the issues that this raises, yet again, about the role of HE and FE and the nature of knowledge itself that the two sectors purport to display. This theme continues in the debate over the FE and Training Act (DfES, 2007) with its controversial provision to allow FE colleges to validate their own FDs.

It is to be noted that at the time of writing only a limited number of colleges have applied for FDAP. In a further dimension to these developments, Willetts (2010), the present Education Minister for HE, has proposed that FE colleges should consider the opportunities of offering degrees on the basis of the London University External system. This provides access to those students who cannot afford the higher tuition fees and costs of living away from home to undertake their degree at the local FE college. The award is that of London University and, although similar to franchising, gives greater freedom to FE colleges in the range of programmes that they can offer.

So, will there be a 'seamless web' with little, other than notional levels to differentiate HE and FE, or will there be improved partnerships and articulation agreements between FE and HE enabling the maintenance of identities and boundaries and maintaining a different but valued provision. Or, are the organisational structures less relevant than the underpinning paradigms that speak of the web of globalisation with its demands for a flexible and compliant workforce that is prepared and updated on a regular basis by the education system across all the ages; an education system that frames its values on technical rationality where the focus of education is not on the end value of education but the economic benefits that purportedly accrue to the economy; and the fundamentalism of the free market, rather than the values created by humans themselves? HE in FE, according to government policy (DIUS, 2009), will provide the intermediate professional and higher level vocational grades in the economic structure, with the FD forming the bedrock for this expansion. Universities themselves, as a result of globalisation, have become a '... transnational bureaucratic corporation'

(Peters, 2004, p. 3) with a focus on vocationalism and the production of consumers ready to respond to employers' needs. Rochford (2008) points to the effect of this on learning itself; it is conveyed as a shift towards propositional knowledge that is assumed to be easily transmitted to individual units of production. The prospect of HE in FE as merely encapsulating and promulgating such a model may be a possibility.

Chapter 5

Students in FE/HE partnerships: widening participation?

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the role of the student in the FE/HE relationship and refers to the issues of widening participation, the positioning of such students in the HE landscape, their location as individuals in the socio-economic structure and the claim that participation in HE will improve social mobility. The FD student is used as a focus for this exploration as opposed to the more traditional undergraduate degree as these may be regarded as more representative of the 'new' HE student.

Using a critical hermeneutics approach will facilitate an exploration of the individual's understanding of their position as a HE student and as a prospective or present employee within the socio-economic context. A critical perspective seeks to disclose the assumptions behind both government and institutional assertions of both the increase in the numbers of HE students in FE and the widening participation agenda. Both government and HE and FE institutions have a vested interest in supporting a discourse that presents the increase in student numbers as evidence of the success of the widening participation agenda.

The rest of this section considers the widening participation agenda of students in FE/HE partnerships and then moves on to consider the position of FD students in particular.

2. The students in FE/HE partnerships

As partnerships have developed and been subjected to closer scrutiny and control from central government, it has been made clear that it is the *type* of students entering such partnerships that is of interest, rather than the mere increase in numbers (although quantity is an element of the equation) (Dearing, 1997; HEFCE, 2006). It is useful to include the data that is presently available on HE in FE students. The analysis of data is difficult, given the categories and different funding formulae used. Students are classified through indirectly funded courses (where HE allocates HEFCE funding to FE colleges delivering a HE course), through directly funded HE in FE courses, or through non-prescribed HE in FE which are funded by the LSC (Clark, 2002). The official Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics themselves do not necessarily reflect that which they purport to reveal; for example, many categories include missing data such that the category 'not known' is the largest ethnic group among students in England (HEFCE, 2006a, p. 129). Unless readers are made aware of such factors, misinterpretation could occur. On this reading, analysis of lower socio-economic groups' participation could be distorted by a reliance on dubious statistics. Recently, the claim that widening participation policies have made an impact on the proportion of students classified as 'widening participation' (Trends in Young Participation in HE: Core results for England, 2009) reveal, however, that there has been a slight decline in the number of students from lower socio-economic groups in UK universities from 28.6 per cent in 2005 to 28.2 per cent in 2006. What is not necessarily revealed in these particular statistics is that students from different social classes undertake different types of HE. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) also highlight that the

number of students from state schools and low income families dropped to their lowest level in three years in the same year. To explore this issue further with the latest statistics available, I have accessed the latest figures (2009) from HESA for widening participation (according to the HESA criteria) undergraduate and 'other' undergraduate entrants' statistics (2007-2008). The 'other' full-time category includes diplomas, certificates, other undergraduate courses and, those of particular interest to me for the purposes of this study, FDs.

These are given below in the following categories and identified in the first column: full-time undergraduate entrants; other full-time undergraduate entrants, including FD students and others taking courses other than full-time undergraduate; and, part-time undergraduate entrants. Although the total number of undergraduate entrants for the UK is indicated in the first row, the subsequent statistics relate to England only. This is because my study focussed on policy and practices in HE in FE for England.

The second column gives the absolute numbers of entrants in each category with the percentages in the third column. HESA criteria in determining 'widening participation' students are limited to those entrants who are 'mature' (that is, over the age of 21 years) and those whose family have had no previous HE experience and whose postcode is indicative of a low participation neighbourhood. This is a system that has been introduced to try to overcome some of the problems associated with identifying those students originating in those 'under-represented' categories. However, this, as Gorard et al (2006) have debated, is fraught with problems. HESA categorisation of 'widening participation' is determined through geographic information systems (Gorard et al, 2006, p. 126) which, whilst avoiding the problems

associated with other classifications of students (particularly of class) do not avoid their own problems of clarity. For example, an assumption is made that the socio-economic classification of the student is compatible with the 'background characteristics of the area in which they live' (p. 126) and therefore, are representative of the average occupational classification of their postal address; furthermore, it is assumed that this also applies to the profile of 'mature' students. The statistics include all entrants registered through a HEI for the 2007/08 year, including those students that are associated with a partnership. Such partnerships include HE in FE students; however, those HE in FE students funded through the LSC are not included and therefore a reliable estimate of HE in FE students per se is difficult to identify. Even with these caveats my analysis below of HESA statistics reveals some fundamental issues that highlight concerns about any claim that might be made of the numbers of 'widening participation' students. Further criticism can be found of the robustness of 'widening participation' numbers and statistics that are used in research on widening participation in Gorard and Smith (2006),

All of the large data sets relevant to establishing the nature of the problem that WP [widening participation] research is intended to solve are deficient.

(ibid, p. 577)

The table below presents my analysis of widening participation figures, based on HESA's criteria.

Table One:
Widening Participation

Full time undergraduate entrants 2007/08	Number	Percentage
Total UK	352,400	
England	302,875	
Mature (over 21 years of age) entrants - England	63,600	21
No previous higher education and from a low participation neighbourhood (mature)	6,906	11.5 (of mature entrants)
Other Full time Undergraduate entrants *1		
England	47,195	
Mature entrants	28,555	60.5
No previous higher education and from a low participation neighbourhood (mature)	2,850	11.2 (of mature entrants)
Part time undergraduate entrants		
Total - England	253,695	
Young (under 21 years of age)	19,205	7.6
Mature	234,695	92.4
No previous higher education and from a low participation neighbourhood	13,660 * 2	6.8

* 1 other undergraduate students are those studying for foundation degrees, diplomas, certificates and other undergraduate courses.

* 2 Omits those mature students transferring from HNC onto a degree course
(Derived from HESA, 2009)

The figures above show that, in terms of HESA's widening participation classifications, only 11.5 per cent of all mature students on full-time courses could be categorised as 'widening participation' students and a similar proportion (11.2 per cent) on the 'other full-time undergraduate' courses. Yet, it is this 'other' category where a much larger proportion of such widening participation students might be anticipated. Whilst the part-time statistics do not identify 'other' courses, the proportion of widening participation students falls to 6.8 per cent for mature students and 7.6 per cent for young students (those up to 21 years of age). HESA has initiated (2009) the collection of data on those students who are on collaborative

provision as a separate category and this will facilitate the specific identification of HE in FE students through partnerships. This, along with the separate collection of data on directly funded HE students in FE colleges, will then supply a more accurate representation of HE in FE students. The numbers of HE in FE students are not given separately for England and this distorts the basis of the claim to student increases and that the number of HE in FE students is an increasing and substantial number (Parry, 2006). Yet, according to the 157 Group (2009) (an association of large FE colleges), the number of HE in FE students has reached 155,000 in the UK. So, whilst the claim that the percentage of FE *colleges* offering HE has increased from 20 per cent in 2001 to 90 per cent in 2009 (157 Group, 2009) is acknowledged, this does not necessarily reveal an equivalent increase in *student* numbers and given the above concerns, raises doubt that the numbers of students has risen to anything like the same extent. Parry (2006) identified a growth in HE in FE student numbers through collaborative arrangements in England from 30,000 in 1994 (ibid, p. 400), to 36,200 in 2001 and 51,000 by 2005 (ibid, p. 406). As a percentage of total numbers, this represents some 11 per cent; a figure that has changed little since the end of the 1980s. This indicates that HE in FE student numbers have not increased as dramatically as government and other agencies have claimed. According to David Lammy, the Minister for HE in the last government, in a policy document produced by the 157 Group (2009) of colleges,

Not so long ago, higher education was the preserve of a small minority of school leavers. That's not true anymore. And colleges have played a key part in giving the chance to study at HE level to a much wider range of students than ever before.

(ibid, 2009, p. 5)

The claim that 'a much wider range of students' is open to question and does not clarify how 'range', for example, is defined. For, as the document notes, around 90 per cent of all those classified as general colleges, deliver HE but it is still not clear that the figures demonstrate an equivalent expansion of HE in FE compared to HE in universities, or that the overall expansion of widening participation students in HE has grown significantly. Indeed, a recent report for the Office for Fair Access (2010) revealed that, although there has been an improvement in the participation rates of students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, those attending elite universities are more likely to be from privileged neighbourhoods. This indicates that the greater take-up for disadvantaged students is more pronounced in post-92 universities and FE colleges.

In contrast, Scottish statistics show 24 per cent of all HE students are based in FE (although these tend to be mainly sub-degree courses); the equivalent for Wales is only one per cent (Parry, 1997, p. 8). An essential feature of the structure of HE in FE in Scotland compared to England is that funding for sub-degree courses in Scotland is allocated via the FE colleges and not HE (Bathmaker et al. 2008, p. 129); this reflects the greater independence and control allocated to FE colleges as a contrast to the situation in England. HE in Scottish FE colleges is not determined through a partnership with HE (Parry, 2005, p.10). Other comparative analyses reveal that, according to the Union of Colleges and Universities (UCU), the percentage of students in the 15-29 age group in education (both full-time and part-time) is in comparative decline compared to other countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),

In 1995 18% of 20-29 year-olds in the UK were in education, 12 years later (2007) the figure had, like for the 15-19 year-olds, dropped by 1% (down to 17% for 20-29 year-olds). The drop, coupled with other countries' improved participation rates meant that the UK has dropped from a mid-ranking 15th out of 30 in 1995 down to 25th out of 30 in 2007.

(UCU, 2009, p. 4)

Perhaps these statistics are another indicator of the failure of widening participation as a policy instrument evidenced in the stalling of increases in student participation from socio-economic under-represented groups (Osborne, 2006, p. 5). Analysis of data on FD students will be made later.

The typical features of HE in FE provision has been outlined by a number of authors and they have tended to agree on certain common features. For example, Bird and Crawley (1994) and Opacic (1996), writing at the time when partnerships and franchising were becoming more commonplace, commented on the following characteristics of HE students in FE: preferred accessibility, cost-effectiveness, an intimate atmosphere in small classes, greater support and flexible modes of attendance at their local FE college as opposed to attending to a HEI. More recently, Hoelscher et al (2008) also confirmed that location was the highest single factor for about one third of all the students surveyed in his study; Morrison (2009) states how financial concerns, social safety with their peers and greater support is important. This indicates that HE provision in FE has certain features which differentiate it from other HE; students seek these as positive attributes for their uptake of HE.

Widening participation as a term used to denote the improvement in access to post-compulsory education, including higher education, is not new. Many in FE might claim that this has long been one of their *raison d'être*s, along with the provision of vocational education and training at pre-degree level. It is, and has been regarded, as a progressive element within education that supports social justice and inclusion in ensuring that those who might otherwise be deprived of educational prospects, are given the opportunity to access them. By the 1960s it was clear that, despite the introduction of universal secondary education, the aspirations of the first post-war Labour government in using education to reduce social imbalances in society, had not been achieved (Stuart, 2002). The Robbins Report (1963), published when only around seven per cent of eighteen year olds entered higher education (Ainley, 1994), called for the expansion of higher education with a greater social spread and a new type of higher education that featured vocational education; this came to fruition with the upgrading of ten colleges of advanced technology (CATs) to university status. A further expansion of vocational HE became operationalised with the development and launch of the polytechnics in 1966 with their focus on vocational education (Robinson, 2007). However, despite the expansion of higher education places, the middle class domination of universities continued. Eight 'new' universities were built to accommodate the anticipated rise in the number of working class students and were based on greenfield campuses to accommodate such students into the dominant culture that prevailed within universities (Maton, 2005). These green and pleasant lands were, however, populated more by the middle classes than the sons and daughters from industrial heartlands.

Whilst these were non-HE students, they point to a model that permeates all sectors of the education system; the benefits of education are known and understood by the higher social classes; 62 per cent of classes I and II access higher education whilst only 1 per cent from class V avail themselves of its opportunities and the end of the twentieth century. Three quarters of higher education students come from one third of the population (Watt and Paterson, 2000). As Scott, 1995, stated,

Higher education has been used by the middle class to preserve not just its cultural hegemony but, more crucially, its privileged access to superior jobs.

(p. 173)

More recent statistics of participation in HE by lower socio-economic groups reveal that, whilst absolute numbers have risen, the percentage of students from these groups has increased slightly compared to the anticipated figures (Leathwood, 2003; HEFCE, 2005, 2006a). Government policy struggles to improve a pattern that has been persistent for more than fifty years and has proved resistant to such policy. From a critical perspective, this study requires an analysis that exposes the issues that underlie such seemingly intractable features of education. On the surface there is a case to redress the imbalance; in terms of the statistics alone, it is asserted by government, a programme of widening participation is needed to address this disparity and rectify the social inequalities (HEFCE, 2006a). My empirical study will seek to expose and explore the tensions and contradictions between government policy claims and the experiences of the students and staff involved in the policy instruments, particularly those of FE/HE partnerships.

3. Widening Participation and New Labour

Widening participation, as determined by government policies as evidenced in HE and FE White Papers (DfES, 2003; 2006a, 2006b), became an icon for New Labour educational objectives and espoused through the 'Third Way' philosophy (Giddens, 2000). Widening participation is presented as a means to achieve two main objectives for government – social justice and economic success within a globalised context. New Labour came to power with a clear focus on education with a social purpose and one that promoted its supposed economic benefits. Reports such as Dearing (1997) and Kennedy (1997) pointed to support for an increase in numbers from the lower social classes who would not only benefit from the opportunities that education presented to them, but that the globalised economy necessitated this. Globalisation is seen as '...an inexorable force of change to which nations and individuals must be prepared to adapt' (Mulderigg, 2003, p. 3) and which must be incorporated into all educational levels. There is almost a call to arms in exhorting individuals to take up their pens in defending the wealth of the nation and the position of the UK in the world league table of gross domestic product and productivity. Within this paradigm, the individual plays a greater role and bears the responsibility of a continual striving for improvement and success,

In New Labour's Britain it seems impermissible for the citizen to be anything other than successful.

(Bradford and Hey, 2007, p. 595)

Webb et al (2006) also claimed that,

...education increasingly becomes a site for the moral regulation of individuals, where, pathologised and individualised, they are expected to develop themselves in the interests of global and mobile capital.
(p. 566)

This is further underlined in government policy that has decreed that the *individual* should pay for the benefits of HE education that are claimed to accrue to the student (David, 2010, p. 10).

The widening participation agenda has shifted over the lifetime of the New Labour government from a focus on younger, full-time students to one of lifelong learning to the inclusion of older 'mature' students who presently and increasingly, will form the majority of students in HE (HEFCE, 2005). The estimated demographic decline in the number of 18 year olds between 2010 and 2020 presented the government with an opportunity to raise the skills agenda whilst incorporating the aspirations of individuals to achieve access to graduate and/or intermediate level occupations that FD students represent. The Leitch Review (2006) reported that 40 per cent of adults should achieve level four (HE level, year one) by 2020 and this was accepted by government. Presently, the proportion of adults who have achieved level three and are, therefore, potential candidates for HE level four is around 20 per cent (Fuller and Heath, 2010). Many of these students, in progressing to HE, will do so via FECs.

Widening participation is projected as a force that will promote the economic well-being of the nation as well as that of the individual and that this benefit should extend to those who had previously been excluded by their social position in society. The government has promoted HE in FE generally as the means by which widening participation can become a reality (157 Group, 2009; DfES, 2003; DfES, 2006b; DIUS, 2008).

Yet, whilst government claims that a wider range of students access HE (see Lammy, 157 Group, 2009), New Labour's commitment to widening participation has been called into question by Archer (2007) as a contradiction within a neo-liberal framework, challenging the notion that the market can deliver social equity. She comments on the hierarchical, differentiated structure of HE and its reinforcement and extension by government and that this, indeed, maintains those very inequalities it seeks to reduce. Indeed, Archer argued that,

... New Labour's discursive distinction operates as a key mechanism within the production and sustenance of social class inequalities between institutions and within the student body.
(ibid, p. 641)

Skeggs (2004) takes a related tack; she argues that, for the lower social classes, the notions, agendas and policies that have been introduced, supposedly to improve the lot of the 'excluded', have become institutionalised and results in individuals being held responsible for their lot, rather than structure. In order to escape their position, such individuals must participate in the programmes presented to them to facilitate their contribution to the national economic performance; the alternative is that they are regarded as being 'problematic' and a 'drain' on resources. This questioning of the assumptions of common-sense approaches to widening participation will challenge this cornerstone of HE in FE and higher level vocational education policy. This is further highlighted by Osborne (2006); the policy of expanding HE in FE as an element of widening participation has also been called into question as,

...the reinforcement of earlier school to tertiary education transitions that are skewed according to socio-economic disadvantage.

(ibid, p. 10)

Ainley (2009) also challenges the notion of widening participation as a positive force in education. His concern is not only that, 'Widening participation presents itself as professionalising the proletariat' but that it also,

... disguis[es] the ongoing proletarianisation of the professions, including the academic profession and the professions higher education previously prepared its graduates for.

(p. 257)

Widening participation is seen to be an instrument of the state in implementing another strand of the neo-liberal framework, as opposed to offering a genuine programme of engagement of policies to promote social mobility.

In the next three sections this and similar concerns are explored within the concept of widening participation and its function as contained in present policy framework.

4. Is Widening Participation new?

There is a substantial history of attempts to improve access for working class people to education; the development of the Mechanics' Institutes and the Workers Educational Association played their part in the nineteenth century (see, for example, Watson, 1987), although there are claims and counter-claims as to the extent that these were more middle class enclaves rather than genuinely open to working class people (Walker, forthcoming).

Attempts to reduce both the social and vocational/academic divide have been

in existence since before the end of the 19th century (Hyland, 2002).

However, social imbalances in accessing post-compulsory education continued throughout the twentieth century and as the impact of globalisation began to intensify; economic constraints were placed on public services that then moved from demand-led resource allocation to finance-based budgets. Prime Minister Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976 sounded the end of the previous relationship between state and education and the teaching profession in particular, from trust to suspicion and blame (Hayes, 2003); education was to become a focal point for much that was wrong with the economy and society and challenged the purpose of schooling to prioritise the needs of the economy (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). At the same time, according to this perspective, education was to bear the burden of becoming the lead partner in improving the social and economic position of the country and its citizens. With the collapse of heavy industries and increasing unemployment in the late 1970s and 1980s, the 'new' vocationalism of such initiatives as the New Training Initiative, 1981, were introduced and designed to re-focus vocational education and, according to Ainley (2003) re-designed the world of work into,

... the unproblematic and natural arena in which individuals could find self-fulfillment and achieve 'vocational maturity'.
(ibid, p. 396)

The new training contract between the state, employer and individual would also serve to allay the fears that those who had previously been regarded as the 'backbone' of the industrial heartlands would become a social problem. This is not to say that there had not been unemployment and socially dispossessed before, but the earlier decades of rising standards of living and

low unemployment that could contain social discord were now at an end. Issues such as the standards in adult literacy and numeracy and their contribution to widening participation agenda moved up the government's agenda (Appleby and Bathmaker, 2006; OECD, 1997).

Government policies have recognised these issues and policy called for an understanding that the UK should maintain its position in terms of the [then] fourth largest gross domestic product (GDP) country in the world, and that *all* are required to play their part, including those who had previously not been the focus of government policy. 20 per cent of adults were classified as illiterate and almost 25 per cent innumerate (DfEE, 1999); if the UK was to make the most of its human capital, government could not allow this level of illiteracy which (according to government) potentially prevented further skill development, to remain. Furthermore, the government extended their concern for skills training to the *upskilling* of the workforce, such that 40 per cent will be qualified to level four by 2020 (Leitch, 2006). This was an extension of the policy under the guiding principle of an assumed association between human capital and returns to the economy as opposed to any clear identification in employers' support for such upskilling. Accordingly, the role of both further education and adult education increasingly shifted to a focus on the needs of employers to respond to the impact of the new globalised economy. This is an on-going and all-pervasive policy objective for all sectors of education. How students and staff in partnerships regard their position in this scenario will be explored.

5. More of the same?

And what of the situation in higher education? Whilst participation rates increased from 30 per cent in the 1990s to the present 44 per cent, a closer scrutiny of the participation rates amongst social classes four and five, show that the increase has again, as in the 1960s, been predominantly from the middle classes. Absolute numbers of all students have increased and, whilst the proportion of women and certain ethnic minorities have increased, participation rates of the lower social classes have decreased in this period (Stuart, 2002; HEFCE, 2005; Parry, 2010).

As already identified, the proportion of HE students in FE, a barometer of widening participation student numbers of HE experience, has remained at around 11 per cent over the last ten years. Indeed, according to a HEFCE report (2006b), the numbers may be in decline. Another recent Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) report has identified that,

The pattern of social and economic under-representation in HE for young students is already apparent in the qualifications obtained at Level 3, and among those with pre-university qualifications equivalent to NVQ Level 3 or 2 or more A-levels.

(HEFCE, 2006a, p. 23)

Gorard and Smith (2007) also point to the limitations that are imposed from birth on the individual through a combination of family, societal and economic influences. Reay (2001) has underlined further the position of the working class mature student entering HE and the tensions that are imposed on the individual between their search for a new 'improved' self whilst maintaining their working class culture and roots, for,

...higher education poses a threat to both authenticity and a coherent sense of selfhood [...] Feelings of being an impostor are never far away.

(ibid, p. 337)

Reay challenged the notion that a meritocracy can lead to the recognition of those working class individuals who have been seemingly excluded by the education system; a system that has, paradoxically, led to improvements for the middle classes as they use the greater educational opportunities to maintain their social position. Instead, Reay suggested, the notions of meritocracy and its claimed impact on social mobility itself should be challenged. Reay et al (2001) also highlighted the reduction in gender inequality whilst class inequality has remained fixed or even deteriorated. In their empirical study they revealed how students from lower socio-economic groups will not, for the most part, consider the traditional pre-1992 university but prefer to apply for post-1992 HEIs where they feel they will be accepted. For these students,

Conceptions of the 'good university' are both racialised and classed.

(ibid, p. 865)

Their experience of applying to HE and the choice process is,

... for the most part, [...] qualitatively different to that of their more privileged middle class counterparts...

(ibid, p. 871)

My study, in using a critical hermeneutics approach, seeks to illuminate the crucial and contradictory features of student experience and the perceptions of that experience.

Whilst the main divide in progression into traditional higher education still privileges those from higher social classes, the working classes themselves should not be viewed as a homogeneous group. As Brine (2006) identifies in her paper on lifelong learning, 'this classed construction is further gendered and raced' (Brine, 2006, p. 653). Through a discourse of deficit, an array of individuals is presented as *at risk* and *the risk* (ibid, p. 656) to the expansion and success of the knowledge economy, which is projected as the basis for future growth. The single teenage mother, the unemployed youth, the part-time employed older female, the illiterate and innumerate, the single mother, those on short-term contracts, the remnants of the last vestiges of heavy industry, the ex-offender, the disabled, ethnic minorities and those who appear to be in danger of joining any of the above as a result of their location within their communities are all to be encompassed within the 'at risk' group. These are the classifications of those least likely to progress onto higher education and most likely to leave. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) also write of these 'new' students as being representative of,

... 'the masses': homogenised, pathologised and marked as 'Other' compared with existing students who are perceived to be there as of right...

(ibid, p. 599)

The image of a learner who is not pathologised is that of their opposite,

... a high-income, able-bodied, white, male, British citizen, who is neither an early school leaver nor a lone parent.

(Brine, 2006, p. 662)

Warmington (2003) examined the motivations and sense-making of students on an Access into HE course in their search for an alternative to '... the dependency upon state welfare and the vagaries of the peripheral labour

market' (ibid, p. 106). He found evidence of students' perceptions of qualifications as a panacea to resolve their past exclusion from mainstream society, whilst providing them with access to an improved social class position and providing a new self-identity that ' "Nobody can take [that] away from you" ' (ibid, p. 102). Students regarded education as a neutral site determined, through their perception, as,

...a conduit between their own socio-economic/identity requirements and a labour market 'responsive' to diligence, talent and industriousness.

(ibid, p.106)

The interplay of individual agency and social structure can be seen to highlight the position of students that, whilst realising their ambition to escape their present position, leaves '...the poorest sections of the working class even more firmly embedded in state welfare dependency' (ibid, p. 106).

The categories of so-called widening participation students carry further complications. As statistics from the National Audit (2002) show, both ethnic minority females and males are more likely than their white counterparts to participate in higher education; 60 per cent of ethnic minority young women compared to 31 per cent of white women and 50 per cent of ethnic minority young men compared to less than 30 per cent of young, white men (Beck et al, 2006, p. 674). The data from Beck et al's paper suggests that the aspirations of the young people within their survey cannot be understood on the basis of ethnicity or gender other than in a general way; the inter-relationships between and across race, class and gender are complex. Furthermore, the continuing disadvantage to women, in terms of their return on higher education (see Smetherham, 2006), demonstrates that progress

onto higher education in itself, is no guarantee of secure and high profile employment within the knowledge economy, and that structural inequalities persist (Brine, 2006, p. 659). Bennett's survey (2004) of students' motives for enrolling on a Business degree identified a range of issues that influenced the students' take-up of the course. 70 per cent of the students were classified as disadvantaged and three quarters were from ethnic minorities. The main outcomes of the survey highlighted a focus on job prospects and the strong influence of parents; a feature of the outcomes was that some students had a perception that HE work was regarded as relatively easy, yet the university concerned had one of the highest drop-out rates in the country. Another survey (Cooke and Barkham, 2004) undertaken at the same time, of students from a range of social backgrounds, revealed an interesting aspect of the students' perception and experience of the social milieu of university. Brown and Hesketh (2004) refer to a 'personality' package that individual graduates need to market to potential employers (p. 35) which includes the cultural capital that they may carry which attracts employers and which normally excludes 'widening participation' students. Brown et al (2003) referred to employability as socially constructed and carries with it the power and social position of individuals in their struggle to achieve employment in an overcrowded graduate market. Both Bennett's and Cooke et al's survey exposed a relative disinterest in engagement with other students through social activity which may result in an exclusion from those social networks that may offer information and access to future job prospects. This is of particular interest in terms of marketing HE with reference to widening participation; an assumption is sometimes made that the prospect of social

activities, and more so for males (Quinn et al, 2006) is an ingredient with high priority in the decision-making for an HE application.

Whilst the norm for studies of disadvantaged communities and social divisions has focused on groups on the basis of their class (lower social classes), ethnicity (ethnic minorities) and gender (female), the agenda has shifted somewhat to include masculinity as an issue for gender discourses and ethnicity to include white as an ethnic group although 'White seems to be, for many, simply unremarkable' (Hughes et al, 2006) and not commented upon. The white, working-class male youth is now emerging as a feature of the debate; less likely to enter higher education, more prone to under-achieve and drop out from their course and remain on the margins of their own communities as well as society generally (Francis 2006; Quinn et al, 2006). They, along with the other disengaged categories, are said to represent a threat to government targets and the knowledge society that is regarded as a pre-requisite for economic well-being and social harmony (Quinn et al, 2006).

6. Challenging the model of Widening Participation

The discussion so far has been based on a model of deficit and the dysfunction of non-participation in higher education. This model is challenged both historically and conceptually and tests the role of education in reproducing present social structures and power distribution.

Learning itself, as understood within the prevailing model of education, is that which is formal and accredited and contributes to national government

targets, be they in achieving the benchmarks of national qualifications in vocational qualifications or in participating and achieving in higher education. Although traditionally there has been recognition of the value of informal and leisure learning, particularly in adult and community education, the recent policy shift and reduction in funding for such courses demonstrates that the drift towards formal, assessed and certificated learning as 'real' learning has become more hard-edged. This is despite evidence that reveals how access into the first stages of accredited learning can be facilitated via informal learning, particularly for those who have foundered at the compulsory stages of education. Cullen et al's report on informal learning and widening participation (2000) for the DfEE, revealed how, for individuals, communities and interest groups, informal learning opportunities increase skill development, boost confidence to consider further activities and learning and capacity-building for action focused on communities, amongst others (ibid, 2000, p. 39). Although there was little evidence to show that the learning of the participants within the survey led to increased employability *directly*, the impact of improving self-confidence and self-esteem for those previously socially excluded, provided a basis in,

...enabling people to reconstruct themselves: to get out of the cycle of unemployability by enhancing their meta-cognitive skills.
(ibid, p. 41)

Where there were local opportunities however, there was evidence of improved employability.

Tight (1998) argues for the recognition of informal learning and that lifelong learning is presently conceived in a narrow formal sense. Quinn et al (2006)

cite the role of flexible, informal learning in the lives of white working class youths and how this is regarded as a way into channelling their interests 'into high-status accredited study' (Quinn et al, 2006, p. 747). Paulo Freire's (1972) work, both as a writer and as a community activist, set an example of both a theory and a framework for action that inspired some within adult and community education to follow his principles of consciousness-raising within the reality of the lived experiences of the poor in Sao Paulo. The pedagogy of the oppressed has become a byword for the development of those trapped within the confines of their state within a wealthy country, just as much as the poor of the shanty towns of Sao Paulo (Byrne, 2001). The passage to HE for those seemingly caught in communities of high deprivation may be curtailed by the closure of informal, unaccredited adult education, despite the activities of HE in FE partnerships.

Beneath the contention of informal versus formal, accredited learning is the discourse around education as the tool that reproduces the stratifications and processes of power and resource distribution of society. Within this model, those who are perceived as lacking aspiration and failing to comply with the educational requirement of participating beyond the age of 16 years, are condemned as dysfunctional, resulting in greater pressure from the state to participate and achieve higher level skills and qualifications (Leitch, 2006) . The debates of inclusion and widening participation are, in themselves, part of the problem; the spotlight is focused not on the conditions that have created the problem, but on those 'dysfunctional' individuals and communities who are, according to some authors (see for example, Reay et al, 2001 and 2010) more the victims of the systems that are, more and more,

beyond their control or influence; structural inequalities are overlooked or dismissed as relatively less important. The days of the punitive 'Restart' programmes that compelled the unemployed in the mid-1980s to attend generic courses on job-seeking skills on pain of losing their benefits can be seen as an example of this. Later, New Labour's 'New Deal' programmes followed a similar pattern. The acceptance of the unseen hand of globalisation and the structures and systems that sustain and facilitate it go unchallenged and even unacknowledged. The impact goes beyond those that are branded as dysfunctional to those who are within the system, but fear that they may fall from grace if they do not maintain their support for the system through re-training and embracing directed change. Furthermore, the commodified and certificated learning that is undertaken has less meaning other than that related to its utilitarian value in the jobs market (Ainley, 2003). However, education must be seen to ensure that students engage with learning as a passport to becoming a participant in the globalised economy (Robertson, 1999). Adult Education in particular has been regarded as offering an opportunity to students to access a process and pathway to 'self-determination'.

In contrast to this pessimistic image of the constrained, directed and fearful individual who strives to maintain a display of compliance through education and training, is that presented by Watts (2006) of the young people who have rejected the scenario of higher education as the route for them for their career trajectories. Their,

...paid employment had a purpose and meaning for them that unpaid education did not...they found their work...to be intrinsically satisfying.

(ibid, p. 172)

They were found to have aspirations, but aspirations for a vocational route that they were able to expound on a rational basis. This route favoured paid employment as a means for fulfilment not only in a financial sense, but also as a more realistic means of achieving competence, job satisfaction and access to a social milieu in which they felt comfortable (see Goldthorpe, 1996, Wolf, 2002 below). They also avoided a system that had previously labelled them as inadequate and 'second-best'. Undoubtedly, these young people's trajectories are highly influenced by their environment, the people that influence them and their own understanding and personal preferences at the time they make their career decisions (Hodkinson et al, 1996). However, the message that is promoted to them is clear; higher education should be the preferred route whilst vocational education and training is regarded as an inferior alternative. Policy contradictions are evident, however, in that vocational and particularly employer-led HE, is promoted as the model for future expansion of HE (Edmonds et al, 2009). Yet, whilst the increase to HE courses has continued to swell, the assumption of a positive relationship between qualifications and social mobility has been scrutinised. Smith (2009) has analysed social mobility and its relationship to the labour market over the latter part of the twentieth century. Policy rhetoric has asserted that improved qualifications will lead to better career opportunities and improved social mobility. However, Smith found that class and gender continue to have a significant negative influence on mobility and that there has been, ...the creation of immobility at the bottom of the occupational and class structure.

(p. 385)

A recent report (Milburn, 2009) from government has identified that access to professional careers is limited for those in lower social classes, raising the question of cultural and social capital as a barrier to entry, even for those with the appropriate qualifications. The young people who enter the labour market at the higher end of the occupational structure tend to maintain their position with individuals from the middle classes able to enter only as a result of the increase in higher-level occupations. Whilst 'non-traditional' (i.e. those who are often classified as 'widening participation') students may be able to maintain their present social position, it does not seem likely that they can improve it. In a similar vein, Goldthorpe (1996) challenged the assumed rationality for all in choosing progression to HE programmes. Whilst educational attainment has increased generally across all classes,

...class differentials in educational attainment have changed rather little across successive birth cohorts... [they] follow courses that through the kinds of qualifications to which they lead, reduce their chances of continuing further.

(ibid, 1996, p. 487)

This is because, parents and young people make decisions based upon their evaluation of the risks involved in entering HE as opposed to a vocational qualification where achievement carries less risk. At the same time, middle class parents strive to ensure their children access HE as a positional good and to maintain, if not improve, their social location. The experience of HE therefore, and in contrast to children from the working classes, becomes a *norm* rather than an aspiration. Wolf (2002), also asserts the basis of decision-making on the perceived benefits to the recipient and hence the resistance of take-up onto certain courses. Hoelscher et al (2008) critique a study that examined students' reasons for entering HE and the subject they

studied that also supported a perceived benefit and reduction of risk to the student and their family (particularly if a mature student). Those students with vocational qualifications were more likely to have an instrumental approach to their choices, were more likely to enter a post-92 university, and, on the basis of their degree choice and were more likely to experience lower returns (in terms of salaries and longer-term career prospects) on their HE qualification after the achievement of their degree. The authors concluded that widening participation policies and strategies have resulted in a less than optimal return (in terms of perceived returns to expenditure) to both individuals and government and that,

Additional experience in the labour market might produce as good a return, or better, as investment in HE

(ibid, 2008, p. 149)

The assumption of high returns to both individuals and the economy generally is challenged by Mason (2002) and Brown and Lauder (2006). Mason considers the employment of graduates and points to a number of graduates in non-graduate work and, that unless employers in the UK adopt,

...skill-intensive high value-added product or service strategies, the continued expansion of mass HE may only contribute in a slow and uneven way to improve economic performance.

(ibid, p. 455)

This questioning of the benefit of HE experience across a wider spectrum of the population can be found in a report from HEFCE itself (2006a). Its report on widening participation and an article by its main author, Gorard, reinforces the message of the danger of relegating those who reject the prospect of higher education to non-aspirants,

We in higher education are in danger of appearing arrogant by assuming that everyone capable of gaining from study at university should attend, and so denying the existence of rational non-participation.

(Gorard, 2006)

The acknowledgement is made that,

...the likelihood that the solution to educational stratification lies neither in higher education nor even in schooling. The problem is a manifestation of the same inequality that emerges in studies of housing, crime, birthweight or transport.

(ibid, 2006)

The role of social class is further reinforced by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009).

They demonstrate that inequalities in society have a wide-ranging and divisive effect on individuals and that this is true in education as it is across social phenomena of health, crime, imprisonment and social mobility. Gorard and Smith (2007) also point to the limitations that are imposed from birth on the individual through a combination of family, societal and economic influences. Aspiration and participation in HE are determined many years before the individual accesses those points of entry to HE; consequently, attempts to remove barriers, particularly institutional barriers, will, according to Gorard and Smith, have relatively little impact.

HEIs also play a part in promoting and incorporating widening participation. Greenbank (2007) identifies that the culture of individual HEIs will determine how widening participation policies are mediated within and between departments and that senior managers present their policies as sustained and considered policies when it is more likely to be the case that,

...new universities and colleges of HE [...] accept students with lower A-level grades and are more likely to take students with vocational qualifications, they naturally end up with a greater proportion of students from lower socioeconomic groups, low participation neighbourhoods and state schools.

(ibid, p. 215)

According to Yair (2009), educational institutions have a responsibility to accommodate 'turning points' in students' lives for second-chance opportunities to become reality and that these are,

...organisationally produced and socially distributed [and] ...high socio-economic status students are more likely to turn their prior problematic academic careers around.

(ibid, p. 365)

Within this model the role of higher education is clear, according to Maton (2005),

Higher education is delegated autonomy by the dominant class to the extent that it reproduces and legitimates existing forms of social stratification.

(ibid, p. 696)

Consequently, it could be asserted that HE and FE/HE partnerships are complicit in the model. If HE is to escape the allegation that it is merely a utilitarian instrument for achieving political outcomes, it needs to consider its role in embracing conformity to a standard pattern of linear progression into HE (Maton, 2005). There is a range of literature that asserts and argues that HE is becoming further differentiated in terms of both widening participation and the addition of FDs as another strand in the ladder. As Morrison (2009) has identified, for those students from working-class and minority backgrounds,

...not all forms of HE and not all institutions are considered possible or reasonable within a highly differentiated system which is also characterised by on-going inequalities of class and race. (Morrison, 2009, p. 217)

Molesworth et al (2009) embrace a similar analysis of the expanding HE market,

...we suggest that the original role [of HE] still exists in elite HEIs, and that expansion of HE now simply masks this, whilst producing a more confident and content mass who remain a willing workforce.

(ibid, p. 286)

Their assertion is that HE has become marketised and that,

...we suspect that our consumer society would never knowingly pay for a system that effectively encouraged its deconstruction/reconstruction.

(ibid, p. 285)

This is further confirmed by Bridger et al (2007), who referred to the post-92 HEIs as 'recruiting' institutions whereas the old HEIs are regarded as 'selecting'.

What is good in terms of HE is synonymous with 'exclusive' or difficult to access, arguably perpetuating the deficit model of widening participation.

(ibid, p. 19)

Penkith and Goddard (2008) see it as such and that,

...the benefit[s] of ...lifelong learning is a false political doctrine, designed to serve the economic competitiveness of the country and prop up an impoverished higher education sector and patch up the problem of vocational insecurity.

(ibid, p. 316)

They identify how universities still regard mature female students as abnormal and have to adapt their systems to accommodate them; they are still the 'Other'. Gibbs (2002) clearly identified FD students as HE for the

masses whilst reserving elite provision for ‘...those who have an approved and distinctive way of relating to the world’ (ibid, p. 202).

A critical exposition of widening participation in relation to HE and HE in FE in this section has challenged the rhetoric of policies that seek to deny the forces of social and economic factors that have maintained the position of the majority of individuals to education and career opportunities that have been concomitant with their status as determined by their social position. As Heckhausen (2002) observed, individuals can be supported or constrained by the vocational education system, but that,

...segregation in education and vocational training transmits social inequality across generations and may under unfavourable economic conditions expose whole sections of a generation to poverty and hopelessness.

(Heckhausen, 2002, p. 176)

Further, the offer to students of access to a form of HE that is portrayed as equivalent to HE elsewhere in the system and only being different in its responsiveness to employer needs, disguises the maintenance of the socio-economic divide, rather than the revelation of any real challenge to the status quo.

Human agency works upon and re-arranges that which is presented as a rational, objective process and outcome. The assumption made by government and policy, however, is that economic objectives take priority and over-ride other aspects of social and personal development. The curriculum options that confront students also assume that choices are rational and well-informed and that by improving and providing further

information on courses, their decision-making will lead to students making better choices. However, as Bloomer stated,

The choice-making process itself, rather than providing opportunities for them to break from the restraints of class, serves for many students simply to reproduce class differences in their learning, career and social trajectories.

(Bloomer, 1996, p. 148)

A different take on human agency is presented by Morgan (2006) in his research of three young people and their disposition towards their work and the choices that they can make. They have,

...the permanent ability of human beings to transcend the given conditions of their social existence either through elementary acts of refusal, or through the active imagination of alternatives.

(Morgan, 2006, p.142)

This offers an insight into the alternatives presented to students; they can form options that they consider more suitable for themselves. Their agency, despite the restrictions of structure, which forms barriers to accessing educational opportunities, can also provide opportunities that release them from previous social constraints. The relevance of these arguments to this study is clear; in making decisions about whether to enter HE in FE in the first instance, students are not merely 'dupes' despite the limitations of social conditions.

7. The student profile: Foundation degree students and their programmes

As there is a particular focus in this research on FD students, it is appropriate to consider this particular student profile. FDs were announced by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett in 2000 at the University of Greenwich and the first degrees were offered on a pilot

basis in 2001 (DfEE, 2000). They were designed to promote vocational, intermediate and employer-focussed qualifications (see Webb et al, 2006).

Firstly, I examine the numbers of FD students and their profiles in relationship to institutional base. The latest figures showing distribution across different institutions is for 2006-07 (HEFCE, 2010a) which shows that 67 per cent of all full-time students are registered or registered and taught in a FEC through direct-funding or through a partnership (39 per cent); and a total of 49 per cent are part-time in FECs (29 per cent in partnerships). FD students, however, have a similar profile to that of HND students and first degree students in terms of their profile against mode of study, with 63 per cent of FD students studying full time (HEFCE, 2010a). This compares to all HE students of whom 57 per cent are full-time (Jamieson et al, 2009). The increasing number of full-time FD students may be an indication of a trend, particularly where students find it increasingly difficult to access HE as a result of restrictions on HEFCE-funded places.

It is to be noted that this is the first time that government has collected and collated statistics for all prescribed HE students in FE, requiring the amalgamation of statistics from HESA and the LSC. Presently, student numbers are collected according to their funding basis; HEFCE indirectly funded HE courses in FE have their student numbers collected by HESA whereas the LSC collects those student numbers that are directly funded by HEFCE. This disparity has made the collation and analysis of HE in FE student numbers difficult (LSC, 2008). The move to coordinate the collection

and analysis of data between the two systems by HEFCE is an indication of its commitment to the furtherance of HE in FE.

Further analysis of national statistics for FD students in both HEIs and FECs for 2009-10 (HEFCE, 2010a), show there were 99,475 such students (showing that the 2010 target of 100,000 will be achieved) and of these 60 per cent were studying full-time, up from a percentage of 51 over the period 2002-2009 (FDF, 2009). The majority of FD students who are studying on a full time basis are located in FECs (67 per cent) and the vast majority of FD *courses* are delivered in FECs (2,147 in FECS compared to 500 in HEIs in 2005-06 (FDF, 2006) and 75 per cent of all providers by 2009 (HEFCE, 2010a)). In terms of the age profile, 51 per cent of full-time students were over 21 years whereas 55 per cent of part-time students were over 30 years of age (ibid).

There is a dualism emerging in the profile of FD students (Nelson, 2006). On the one hand, there is the under-25 male, full time student who entered the FD course with Advanced level GCSE or VCE qualifications from school/college, and who is more likely to be studying Engineering and Science-related subjects; on the other, there is the over-25, female, part time student who entered with employment experience and vocational qualifications, including accreditation of prior learning, and who is more likely to be studying Education, Health and Medicine-related and Business Studies (HEFCE, 2010a). If this is the case, it could be argued that FDs are supporting the entry of certain sections of society who have previously found entry into HE problematic for social, economic and geographical reasons;

obversely, it could also be argued that the characteristics of FD students and their mode of study and uptake of subjects serve to confirm present divisions in society and, rather than extending scope and presenting opportunities through education to break down barriers, it will underline what may be perceived by some to be naturally-determined structural and gender-based differences (Brown et al, 2003). In other words, the system may be regarded as reproducing present inequalities and divisions. The dualism of FD students will be explored in the empirical study. Further work through empirical studies on the outcomes of undertaking FDs is now starting to emerge and I will relate my work to this. Watts (2006) identified that where there have been developments of new FDs, particularly in the public sector services (education and social work), there has been an increase in the number of women participating in HE. However,

...both 'education' and 'employment' are subjectively constructed and contested and reproduce classed, raced and genderised divisions of labour.

(ibid, p. 564)

These authors express doubt as to whether entering the world of HE via FDs will bring the kinds of rewards that they may anticipate and that government rhetoric claims. Work undertaken by Dunne et al (2008) on teaching assistants studying at FD level shows how female students considered the negative effects of studying where 50 per cent complained that it had a damaging effect on their health, where a third had experienced no change in their work position and where younger students (26-40 years) were more likely to receive a pay increase after achieving the FD compared to older students. This contradicts government assertions and,

Whilst the rhetoric of 'widening access' implies only positive benefits, our findings indicate the potential negative impact on lives, relationships and individual well-being... To fail or withdraw could be crushing to a person's growing self-esteem.

(ibid, p. 55)

Similarly, Woolhouse et al (2009) provide empirical data that also challenge such policy rhetoric. They found that, of the students undertaking a teaching assistants' FD, only one third experienced an improvement in pay or position; one third an increase in responsibility with no recognition of their improved qualification or pay increase, and a third with no change experienced. At the same time, the students found considerable hardship in maintaining their roles as mothers whilst developing their role and identity as students. This experience was confirmed in Edmond et al's report (2009) in which students expressed doubt that they had received any tangible return to their achievement of a FD and a tension between learner and worker identities.

FD students are more likely to withdraw from their studies (full time figure of 21 per cent and part time 29 per cent) when compared to other undergraduate students undertaking HE (14.1 per cent) (QAA, 2005). This suggests that FD students reflect similar retention rates as those students from lower social-economic sections of society and who have been identified as more 'at risk' (Laing and Robinson, 2003). There is the claim in the literature (see McGivney, 1996) that what is more important than age as a factor in retention is the non-traditional entry qualification of the student (ibid, p. 73). The vast majority of FD students fall into this category; the majority have undertaken their studies with qualifications other than traditional Advanced levels (66 per cent of full time students and 90 per cent of part

time students) (QAA, 2005). However, other literature reviewed suggests that it is not possible to identify high-risk students and that statistical links that have been identified are not an indication of a causal link (Kember, 1995, quoted in McGivney, 1996); Bowl (2003). An indication of drop-out rates for FD students from Leathwood and O'Connell's work (2003) also reveals a 36 per cent non-completion of students. However, work by Bingham and O'Hara (2007) identified how FD students were just as successful as their equivalent traditional entry students. The differentiating factor is that of effective support,

With the right support and guidance they are capable of achieving results as least as good as those achieved by students enrolling on the university's early years degrees through traditional entry.
(ibid, p. 319)

Work by Hockings et al (2010) demonstrate that the crucial element in learning for students are those,

... pedagogies that are student-centred, inclusive of individual differences...
(p. 108)

It is suggested (Nelson, 2006) that further work needs to be undertaken on retention in order to compare FD students against comparable students and courses revealing the differentiated nature of the HE framework. Students' socio-economic origins are further underlined in a study undertaken in the North East on familial experience of HE; the students are likely to be the first member of their family to enter HE (Dodgson and Whitham, 2005). Their post-qualification destinations sustain claims that their degree supports employment-based and work-based qualifications in that after qualifying, 35 per cent go onto work only, 27 per cent undertake study and work and 32 per cent undertake study only (HESA Press Release, 2009). As identified earlier

(Molesworth et al, 2009) FD students can be regarded to be in a similar position as other HE in FE students within an expanding HE market. Gibbs (2002) clearly identified FD students as HE for the masses whilst reserving elite provision for ‘...those who have an approved and distinctive way of relating to the world’ (ibid, p. 202).

Ethnicity statistics for FD students were not disaggregated until recently and reveal that more than 80 per cent of all FD students are white (HEFCE, 2010a).

8. A new HE student?

So, are the FD students the ‘new’ HE students that represent what may become regarded as the norm for all HE students? In some respects, according to the literature, these students are no more ‘new’ than ones who entered universities in the 1960s (Maton, 2005) with the introduction of the student grant, or the female student of the 1930s who tended to both live at home and attend a local university. According to Dyhouse (2006),

...it should be noted that a very large proportion of those studying at provincial universities in the 1930s ‘got by’ ...by attending their local university and living at home. ...In Great Britain as a whole, 42.7 per cent of female undergraduates chose to live at and study from home.

(ibid, p. 12)

The introduction of grants did not result in the anticipated increase in students from lower social classes as was projected in 1962 when grants were introduced (DoE, 1962). Nor does it seem that the introduction of fee loans has brought about a drop in total student numbers, but neither has it encouraged the take up by those students from lower social classes.

Nonetheless, given the proportion of part-time FD students, who may receive

some support from their employers, and that the initial indications are that the socio-economic profile of these students do represent a widening of participation, the FD might be seen as 'breaking through' the barriers to entry to HE in the HE in FE model. However, if the FD becomes regarded as a second rate degree, particularly with its potential validation by FE colleges, it could be asserted that the theme of second class education and training for second class citizens continues. Doyle (2003) in discussing FDs links the government's prioritisation of human capital and individual agency over all other considerations to promote the dominant objective of economic improvements, rather than individual educational benefits. Individuals are seen to be held responsible for their own improvement and that this becomes an obligation in terms of Third Way politics, where,

Emphases are on social integration and cultural change for the excluded rather than traditional leftist remedies of redistribution, with the consequence that employment and skills are the routes to inclusion and empowerment.

(ibid, p. 282)

The emphasis and shift towards work-based, skills-based HE through the model of FDs, is signalled in the DfEE (2000) consultation document and foresees FDs as a threat to the autonomy of HE, but that,

...the Foundation Degree provides an opportunity for higher education to ensure that the emphasis on modes of learning and knowledge that it validates retains and develops reflexivity and a critical perspective, and that the needs of the learner are met within wider, competing and more dominant discourses.

(ibid, p. 286)

This presents HEIs in partnerships with FECs as not only establishing standards but also patrolling standards of that which is considered to be HE;

the HEI is the senior partner. Future policy is heralded however, in the assertion that the model of FDs is to become the norm for all HE.

9. Conclusions

This chapter on the student in HE and particularly the FD student has focused on the potential of HE in FE for widening participation. The attempts to increase the number of HE students from lower income and under-represented groups has been an intractable problem for many years, and contrasts with the increase in the participation rates of those children from the higher social classes. The statistics are an indicator of the value that such classes place on HE. The details (Beck et al, 2006) demonstrate the reception of ethnic minorities to those benefits. In contrast to the official focus by government on the importance of progression to HE, alternative perceptions of education which are valued have been expounded. Informal adult education and vocational education are presented as valid alternatives to progression to HE both in terms of their worth to the individual both for personal development (Cullen et al, 2000) and for the value perceived in vocational qualifications as a preferred choice to that of HE (Watts, 2006).

HE might be regarded as complicit in its endeavour to entice those sections of the community who might not hold HE in the same esteem and with the same aspirations as others, but yet, in doing so, incorporate them into a framework that models the reproduction of the economic and cultural relationships in the globalised society (Althusser, 1971; Maton, 2005); yet, this does not necessarily offer them the same opportunities for 'empowerment' and individual fulfilment. There is the possibility that the FD

may contain those students into a similar relationship and position in society and economy, but with the addition of further qualifications that may be perceived to be of less value than their equivalent for those who have achieved a degree from a traditional university. This will be explored in the empirical study of FD students.

Both widening participation students and FD students are analysed in terms of the available statistical information. The majority of FD students study in FECs; a majority are 25 years and over and female; full-time FD students tend to be younger and male. It seems that already a pattern of social/age/gender division is emerging where the FD student is representative of a 'new' kind of student, as I have identified in an earlier study (Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher, 2006). There is evidence in the literature of similar profiles of students within the traditional universities in the 1960s and indeed before the Second World War, but their numbers were certainly much less in both absolute and relative terms. The position of students is central to the role of partnerships. Partnerships may be accused of maintaining social and economic inequalities through a hierarchical differentiated HE structure, whereby a meritocracy supports enhanced opportunities for the middle classes. Furthermore, the claim can be made that they have exacerbated the academic/vocational divide and debased vocational routes. These are issues to be addressed in the empirical work.

Chapter 6

Research Methods

In order to ensure that the aims of the research and the research questions can be addressed most effectively, research methods need to be carefully considered. This facilitates the relevant data to be collected that will then permit analysis in relation to those research questions.

The methods used for this study included the following:

1. Focus groups of FD students; with separate focus groups of teachers and managers
2. Semi-structured interviews with FD teachers; individual students; and managers with a responsibility for HE in FE partnerships.
3. Analysis of government papers and other secondary reports that commented on the policy of HE in FE and partnerships

I did consider a questionnaire for graduates but considered that a satisfactory rate of return would be difficult to achieve, given problems with accessing FD graduates (as opposed to students). Questionnaires can be a cost-effective way of collecting data if the two main issues of maximising response returns and maintaining high validity in the questions can be overcome. My intention in considering a questionnaire was to:

1. Provide additional data that could not be collected from focus groups or interviews from a larger group of former students who were now in a position to provide both reflections on their

experience as a student and data on matters such as promotion and salary increases and the relationship to their FD experience.

2. Access graduates through electronic communication as an efficient and low-cost means of collecting data on factual matters. The problem of collecting questionnaire responses and questionnaire overload was recognised with low returns often experienced (Fontana and Frey, 2003, p. 64) and the same being true for emailed questionnaires (James, 2007) and became an insurmountable hurdle.

Further research on FD graduates and their experiences is an option for the future if a suitable method of accessing such students could be found.

Callender (2010) is carrying this out at the time of writing.

1. Research methods used

In determining the research methods used I considered a number of questions or issues: what would be the best way to surface and explore the perceptions of the various 'players' in FE/HE partnerships alongside government policy; how should I identify and access suitable participants (assuming that I limited my study to those involved in partnerships as opposed to others outside partnerships); how would I ensure confidentiality and anonymity for the participants; how would the responses to the above affect the rigour and trustworthiness of the study? In addressing the last point account was taken of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) and their approach to alternative approaches to validation and reliability found in positivist methodology. Trustworthiness is composed of the following criteria: credibility (that is, whether the reporting of the study is

done in such a manner as to be believable by other researchers); transferability (whether elements within this set of findings might be used or provide knowledge for other researchers working in similar contexts); dependability and confirmability (acting as a parallel to reliability and facilitating the possible 'auditing' or checking by other researchers of the outcomes of the study, including the acting in good faith by the researcher) [Bryman, 2008; Goldbart and Hustler, 2005]. The initial stages of the research design involved a consideration of what would be feasible in my context and given perceived difficulties in accessing a range of FD students. Whilst at the start of the study I was directly involved in the teaching of FD students, I had concerns about the ethical position of a teacher undertaking interviews and focus groups with their own students; would students have been in a position, for example, to withdraw from the study or would they have felt compelled or at least pressurised to contribute? The introduction as teacher as researcher could have been incorporated into the class if I had had access over a longer period; but on a 'blended learning' basis where face-to-face contact with students is very limited (in this case, no more than four sessions) undertaking research on an action research or emancipatory basis would have been extremely difficult. Thus, there were certain ethical and logistical difficulties that meant that I had to look outside the institution, although including students from other FD classes was acceptable. I overcame this problem through my role in a very large partnership (some 28 colleges) that allowed me to access a number of tutors, managers as well as students (see discussion around the problems associated with this and the effect on matters of rigour and trustworthiness p. 196 onwards). The credibility of this study is based on the care taken over the implementation of

the interviewing and the steps taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity as well as the reporting of the data and its interpretation that is open to scrutiny. I considered confidentiality and anonymity to be crucial in terms of ethical considerations in protecting the participants; however, this acted as a limitation on respondent validation as no further communication could be made with the participants, or, indeed, in fulfilling any emancipatory objective. I could not envisage a situation (within the confines of an individual's thesis) that would permit tutors or students to participate in a study, during employment or course hours, which had the potential to challenge aspects of the provision and partnerships. The internal and inter-institutional relationships of partnerships are difficult to build but easily damaged. With these caveats, I decided to undertake interviews and focus groups; these were acceptable in terms of accessing a suitable range of participants and would achieve my objective of engaging with the relevant individuals in a FE/HE partnership to address the research questions.

1. Focus Groups

Whilst focus groups have become popular within government's approach to policy formation, these are not to be confused with the application of focus groups in a research setting (Barbour and Schostak, 2005; Cunningham-Burley, Kerr and Pavis, 1999). Punch (2005) sees focus groups as,

...inexpensive, data-rich, flexible, stimulating, recall-aiding, cumulative and elaborating.

(ibid, p. 171)

Focus groups have become more prevalent in research methods over the last 20 years; prior to this they were associated with marketing and political data gathering (Farnsworth and Boon, 2010). Focus groups can be seen as

either an extension of the interview (that is, as a group interview) or as an opportunity to explore issues or use processes that are not easily realised through individual interviews. They are not the same as discussion groups and are problematised because of issues to do with power relations within and between the participants (including the researcher) (Lapadat, 2009). Interpreting the meaning of the word within the focus group, with multiple perspectives, and complex dynamics, illustrates that the successful conduct of a focus group can be difficult (Cunningham-Burley et al, 1999).

Focus groups can be used within both positivist and interpretivist paradigms; I have taken an interpretivist approach. They can be used to inform quantitative approaches as well as form the basis of data collection within a qualitative method (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 194). From the positivist perspective they can be seen to be accessing 'objective facts' and reveal opinions and understanding, and where,

Participants in focus groups are constructed as passive subjects, who hold opinions and preferences on a range of matters important within the market place.

(Cunningham-Burley et al, 1999, p. 188)

The façade of consultation via focus groups can, in the opinion of Cunningham-Burley et al, lead researchers to collude with the prevailing powers rather than impact on the topic in question - treating the participants as mere funnels of information to guide producers in their search for the next product or service, or to inform governments for their next policy but not to empower citizens.

...research may just play into the hands of planners and managers who, while commissioning such research, do not necessarily act on its result.

(ibid, p. 192)

The same authors reflect on how, in their experience, the use of focus groups in healthcare and particularly with disadvantaged communities has only marginal effect on policy makers and resource allocation. However, whilst raising the prospect of using focus groups as 'social agents' rather than passive consumers, they identify how, through the holding of public meetings, '...significant shifts in power and the creation of many more democratic fora' (ibid, p. 198) might be possible.

Madriz (2003) refers to the feminist standpoint and how focus groups can '...recover the voices of members of marginalized groups', (p. 367) and '...uncover women's daily experience through collective stories and resistance narratives...' (p. 369). Madriz raises the potential that focus groups offer,

...subjects not only as providers of information but as human agents with potential to exert social change... the focus group [can be]... a consciousness-raising process...

(Madriz, p. 369)

From a critical perspective, this offers the prospect of progressive social change.

Whilst Madriz offers a feminist perspective, the concern with using the focus group as a vehicle to explore the relationship between the subject and structure or 'the way in which participants' social, cultural and economic location relates to the accounts which they provide' (Cunningham-Burley et

al, 1999, p. 198) is one that relates to this study. A focus group can contribute to raising consciousness in subjects that '...their problems are not just individual but structural' (Madriz, p. 375). The use of focus groups in helping to explore the issues of individuals and their position in the social location and the promotion of educational opportunities presented through FDs was one that was incorporated. A debateable issue within the context of this study is the role of focus group as a means of promoting and realising social change. As the focus groups conducted were limited to a one-off event and were not revisited as part of an iterative process, there was no way of studying any impact on the participants' consciousness or awareness of their individual agency and structured position (Cunningham-Burley et al, 1999, p. 198).

For the purpose of this research, focus groups served the following functions: that they:

- Reveal the various perspectives both within and across different groups of FD students and other participants
- Cross corroborate with the data from semi-structured individual interviews
- Identify additional questions and additional data to be collected from the other research methods being employed.

A further subsidiary and incidental purpose was to offer an opportunity for participants to explore their perceptions and inter-relationships as actors in a FE/HE partnership. Whilst this may be regarded as a potential contributory

factor in the individuals' understanding of the emancipatory possibilities, the time frame and opportunities did not permit this.

The focus groups undertaken were defined in terms of their suitability in providing information in relation to the research. I was limited in my access to focus groups and interviewees through the gatekeepers that would allow contact with groups of students and/or individual students and teachers. As Reeves (2010) as identified, gatekeepers are essential to supporting or hindering the research process and the collection of data.

These gatekeepers were two stages removed from me: firstly, I had to contact the 28 centre managers that are networked to the HE in FE partnership in which I work with the relevant information and, secondly: I had to request for their help in identifying and gaining access to the relevant teachers and students. This meant that I was dependent on the first line of gatekeepers (the centre managers) who could not only determine whom I accessed but who,

...could also restrict or skew the information that I was able to access.

(Reeves, 2010, p. 325)

The participants were: FD students based in both HE and FE and HE in FE managers. Whilst the focus groups with students were sometimes difficult to organise in terms of logistics and gaining permission from the teachers and college managers, they were extremely useful. The HE in FE managers' group was one of an opportunistic nature, being a regular meeting that I was allowed to use for the purpose of the focus group. However, the discussion topic was highly relevant and they welcomed the opportunity to participate.

This focus group differed in its constitution in that this was a group of individuals who had a specific responsibility for HE in FE within their colleges and who were considered to be experts in this field. This group comprised individuals with policy-making and implementing influence at a mid to higher level of management across a particular geographical region and, therefore, gave an insight into the perspectives of FE colleges involved in HE in FE partnerships and delivering FDs.

The majority of the focus groups of FD students were pre-existing learning groups and the discussion was normally conducted within the class environment. The FD student groups offered to me had been negotiated and agreed between my contact at the particular college and the FD tutors. Such tutors who had agreed to provide access to their students were, presumably, either interested in the research as explained to them (I had asked my contacts to explain and make available the notes and statements that I provided for all participants [see Appendices eight and nine]) or had felt some obligation to the centre manager. I could not stipulate subject, age range or attendance mode as this would have limited my access even further. This left me in the hands of the gatekeepers, their understanding of the research and inclination in supporting the research. In one exceptional case, I was given access to a group of FD students who covered a range of subjects but who were all full time and at the younger end of the age spectrum. These had been invited to attend a lunch time session with the availability of a free lunch, which, I am assuming provided an incentive for their attendance. There were both advantages and disadvantages in having a majority of pre-existing classes as focus groups. The use of these pre-existing groups

helped to set the scene for the discussion and the interaction was with a group of individuals who had regular contact over a period of time both before and beyond my intervention with them as a focus group. This raises an interesting question as to whether these could be included within the definition of a focus group. For Farnsworth and Boon (2010) the definitions can include those individuals who are brought together specifically for the purpose of providing opportunities for data gathering for the researcher. As the focus groups I had accessed were, on the contrary, groups who were from ‘... an existing social or occupational group...’ (ibid, p. 609) they can be classified as groups who have an existence and identity beyond the focus group itself. Many of the student focus groups were closely aligned to a vocation with the common practices and understandings that are developed by such associations.

However, what may have been hidden from my perspective as a researcher or as the facilitator of the discussion was that there may have been underlying group interpersonal tensions that were an element of the focus group questions. This presents an ethical dilemma in terms of the interaction of the individuals within the group. Participants may have revealed thoughts and opinions that were previously undisclosed to the group (for example, reflections on why they joined the class and their thoughts about their plans for the future) (Lapadat, 2009) and may have been a matter of regret after the group had finished and they returned to their normal relationship as classmates. In some respects, this brings together aspects of both protection of the individual and confidentiality. Whilst I made the environment as accepting and open as possible to allow individuals to speak, I could not control what other individuals, once outside the focus group or interview

position, might reveal to others. Ethical issues around students participating on a voluntary basis concerned me and that they had been instructed to attend as part of their class time rather than being involved on a voluntary basis. I ensured that the statements explaining the research, aspects of confidentiality and use of the data were presented (Appendices eight and nine) and discussed, before asking for their signatures to give their permission for me to use the data (Appendix seven). This inevitably reduced the amount of time left for discussion within the given class time and I was aware of this pressure. Although I was able to cover the questions to *my* satisfaction and was always able to ask if any individuals wanted to ask any questions of me or to make any further comments I cannot state that all individuals felt that they had contributed to *their* satisfaction.

Transcribing data gathered from focus groups can be a problem and this was true in this case. Issues from my study included:

- Individuals speaking at a distance from the microphone were sometimes difficult to hear
- Individuals speaking at the same time
- Not all individuals spoke, despite encouragement from the facilitator (although the majority did contribute)
- Identification of the different individuals had to be made clear after the transcription of the tape as the transcriber found this difficult to achieve, not having witnessed the speakers directly

(adapted from Bryman, 2008, p. 476)

Furthermore, the tendency of groups to veer towards conformity and express opinions that are culturally expected is a possibility that may then produce data that result in domination by the ideas and expressions of a minority, or simply a reproduction of societal norms (ibid, p.489). Whether or not this was the case with the focus groups I conducted, was difficult for me to identify. The size of the focus groups varied from 8 to 15, being a reflection of the size of the FD classes and the HE Managers' group size. Although the usual recommended group size is around six to ten (Bryman, 2008; Sarantakos, 2005), the size of these groups did not present the problem of reluctance to contribute that might be found with larger groups.

The focus group questions (see Appendices one and two and see discussion below regarding the construction of the questions) were formulated in conjunction with the questions used for the semi-structured interviews. These were piloted with an initial group (who were former FD students) and some slight amendments made. One substantial amendment that was suggested and agreed was the removal of data collection on total household income and their self-perception of their social class; I had intended to attempt to classify participant students on their socio-economic classifications using these two categories on information. Objections and concerns were raised by the former students as to the ethics of asking such questions; some students might feel very uncomfortable or even give false information. On this basis I decided to omit these questions. This, however, presented me with the added difficulty of identifying the social classifications of the students as I had no alternative method to ascertain such information. On the grounds

of data protection I could not access their personal details. There would have been further ethical considerations with such access to personal data. Data on the perceived age and gender of the interviewees and the student focus group participants were also recorded. These were the characteristics that were open to data collection; details such as class (whether determined by occupation or self-perception) or previous qualifications were not available to me. This undoubtedly limited the extent to which I could reach any conclusions about social class and its relationship to government policy on 'widening participation'.

2. Interviews

Interviews lend themselves to the exploration of the perceptions by the respondents of a certain situation or experience, generating data that will reflect the social construction by the respondent of their world as seen through their eyes.

The interview questions (see Appendix four [managers in FECs]; five [tutors] and six [managers in HEIs]) were formulated on a range of issues considered to be appropriate in drawing on the perceptions of staff and I divided the interview into three main sections. The first section of questions focused on their perception of the role of HE in FE and partnerships; why they thought HE was undertaken in FECs; how well they thought the partnerships were working; and why they thought the government was promoting FE awarding powers. The second section then moved to their individual role including; their position and how they entered HE teaching; the support they received; the difference in teaching FE and HE; research and scholarly activity and how they thought the HEI within the partnership regarded them. There were

some additional questions that applied to managers as hirers of HE teachers and the attributes and requirements they sought in such teachers. Lastly, questions were asked on how they perceived the FD students in terms of their profile; their comparison of such students against FE students; and how the FD students accessed their FD course at the college.

There were no post-interview discussions with participants to corroborate the findings or analyses; this reveals a potential limitation to the notion of authenticity (as expounded by Lincoln and Guba (1985)) and an accurate and faithful representation in checking the interview representations and using the study as an element in work that was committed to a transformative and emancipatory stance that involved the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 2003, p. 257). It is also open to criticism on the basis of credibility; a lack of respondent validation reduces this element of trustworthiness. However, corroboration also assumes that individuals have an absolute recall of the interview and fixity of perception of the topic. This could be regarded as a pragmatic approach to the implementation given my lack of direct and regular access to a range of groups of students.

The interview is a much used method in the social sciences as, in terms of collecting data for qualitative research, society,

...seem[s] to believe that interviews generate useful information about lived experience and its meanings.

(Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 47)

For the social scientist, the interview conveys something more than the general understanding of an interview as a conversation. For Kvale (2007),

It is a professional interaction, which goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. The qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge.

(ibid, p. 7)

The position taken for this study is one that falls within the critical hermeneutic paradigm; it is not a question of 'finding' the truth, but one of learning about the world through conscious understanding and, through interaction with the world, changing it. Au (2007), writing about Freire's conception of knowledge says,

For Freire, to be human is to be able to both understand the world and take action to change that world. It is in taking that action, in the movement from being object to subject, where we become full human beings.

(ibid, page unnumbered)

This reflects an aspect of the study; do the students experience an education that will move them from being object to subject, that will put them in a position where they perceive themselves to have greater autonomy as an independent agent (as opposed to independent in an economic sense), or does the education process merely result in an extension of credentialism to a higher point in the qualifications structure? Such questions, posed through critical hermeneutics can be addressed through a critical analysis of the data collected from the interviews undertaken with students and tutors.

In relation to the study, the interview was regarded as an appropriate method to engage and extract individuals' understandings and perceptions of their position and experience of HE in FE partnerships, whether they were students, teachers or managers. Interviewees were accessed through a call

out to the partnership of which I am a member and therefore, determined by their willingness to participate. This implies that the participants were pre-disposed to having an interest in partnerships and likely to provide an atypical response. Yet to interview all tutors would have proved impossible, given the number of partner colleges (some 28). Access to the students was provided through the relevant 'gatekeepers' of partner managers and tutors. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews with teachers was to seek explanation rather than description and to probe their perception and experience of working within a partnership. A limited number of managers were included. The emphasis was to be on their understanding of the part that partnerships played in the accessing of students to HE in FE provision as well as the support given to tutors; this data would supplement that provided by the tutors.

I felt a concern that, given my position as a 'researcher' some student respondents may have perceived my position as one of greater status. Also some of the managers may have been inclined to confirm the rhetoric of the institution, particularly in a focus group environment.

Although not strictly speaking a critical theorist in the sense employed in the study, Bourdieu and Waquant (1999) offer an insight into the role of the researcher in relationship to the interviewee.

Their argument is that there can be no such thing as a researcher/interviewee relationship that is not affected by various factors, including the influence of the researcher over the interviewee. This might arise simply from the social position of the researcher compared to that of the interviewee. The researcher may be invested with cultural and sometimes economic capital and consequently the researcher, in the eyes of the

interviewee, is attributed a superior position resulting in a reluctance to discuss issues openly.

I was very much aware of my position as an interviewer in the face of two different sets of contexts and interviewees; on the one hand the tutor or student who might consciously or sub consciously 'submit' to questions with answers that were perceived to be correct. Alternatively, the manager is normally well-versed in avoiding a question and in responding with official rhetoric. Openly challenging such an interviewee could lead to better responses as the manager begins to genuinely engage with the interviewer.

I attempted to reduce any perceived or anticipated cultural influence exerted over interviewees where this may have been experienced (for example, as identified above) by following questions with silence, seeking clarification and probing for meaning; this is not the formula necessarily followed by Bourdieu who challenged and offered contradictory assertions to his interviewees in order to generate a discussion. This approach was not considered to be appropriate for most of interviewees within this research; if perceptions are being sought they might be easily influenced by the interviewer in their reporting and the data generated would be more the interviewer's than that of the interviewee; this reflects a critical hermeneutic approach. A further ethical consideration arose in the middle of an interview with a teacher who was known to me as a member of the partnership and in my role as a manager within that partnership but who also worked with another partnership. The individual had volunteered to be interviewed and understood that I was to be the interviewer. At a particular point in the

interview, there was a criticism of the partnership for which we both worked and one that I found enlightening from a number of perspectives. However, the individual became uncomfortable with the position she had taken and hesitated in her criticism. Whether she would have offered further information is difficult to say; her discomfort may have prevented her from saying anything further.

The tension that exists between the pre-knowledge of the topic that the researcher brings to the interview and having alertness and a genuine curiosity to seek the interviewee's perceptions, is also a factor in preparing an interview schedule. If the interviewer is to be sensitive to the topic they will need a certain amount of knowledge about the topic; however, if they consider that they already 'know' the answers to the questions they will have difficulty in their analysis of the data. The interviewer is still left in a privileged position; to take or reject meanings and to make meaning in the first place. The interviewee may be aware of this power and may consciously withhold information, or may even distort information or subconsciously provide the kind of data that the interviewee believes the interviewer is seeking (Kvale, 2007, p. 14; Shah, 2004).

The conduct of the interviewing and of the focus groups, where some of the participants were known to me, presented some interesting conundrums. In the first instance, where the participants were known to me, an explanation of the purpose of the research and clarification of the maintenance of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed and emphasised. A consent form was signed by interviewees (see Appendix seven). In all cases of either focus

groups or interviews with students, and where I was not known to the participants, my position was given and, again, agreement forms were signed and issues of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed. I followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) guidelines at all times. The aspects of ethical concerns at the outset of the research were to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, offer transparency about the research to avoid deception and to ensure that participants were participating on a voluntary basis (Bryman, 2008). This latter point caused me some concern with regard to those students who were participating within their normal class time and, as indicated earlier, I ensured that the background, purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation was explained before they were given the consent form to sign. Whilst I did not experience any withdrawal from the interviews and focus groups, I cannot say with absolute confidence that participation was wholly voluntary.

As a process, my intention was not to continue the discussion and interaction and to participate in any action with the students or teachers beyond the interview; however, interviews can help to,

...provide the opportunity for research participants reflexively to explore their understandings in new ways.
(Fisher and Goodley, 2007, p. 69)

How individuals constructed, reflected and acted upon the experience of the interview after the event was not known to me. Involvement of the participants beyond these initial interviews and focus groups would have presented a number of problems. Firstly, the logistics of accessing the participants would have been impossible in some cases and very difficult in others; students moved on and I did not have access to their home contact

details; on the same basis, some staff would have been difficult to access if they had moved to another college or, if in the same institution, would have found a common time for a further interview difficult. Furthermore, there would have been ethical concerns if I had forwarded their transcripts or even a report to them either via email (if I had this) or by post. Neither is such communication considered to be safe within the context of organisational procedures and there was a risk that the details of their data might have been intercepted and revealed to third parties. This was particularly the case for those staff that participated in interviews and, in some cases, revealed overtly critical perceptions about their college management and the position of the college with regard to HE in FE. However, I consider that the issues that have been surfaced and analysed can provide a basis for further work and can be used to inform possible participative research with staff or students in the future.

The ethical dimension of my introduction to the participants was considered. As a manager of a HE in FE partnership participants' trust of me might have been diminished in terms of their perception of me as primarily as a manager rather than a researcher. When introducing myself to the participants I indicated that I worked in partnership as well as being a researcher of such partnerships; I did not necessarily describe myself as a manager. The question as to whether I was deceiving the participants (Bryman, 2008, p. 118; Christians, 2003, p. 217) in not giving my full title and role. I considered informing participants but decided against this for two reasons: one, the majority of students and even staff did not know me as a member of the partnership and as such my position was of no consequence to them and two, where I was known to the staff, I emphasised anonymity and checked

that they had agreed to undertake the interview on a voluntary basis. Further protection against the revealing of identity and positions in the colleges will be ensured when reporting or producing journal articles.

2. Collecting and analysing the data

The data derived from focus groups and interviews were transcribed and initial analysis was based on a number of readings of the text. I maintained anonymity for individuals by not naming them in full and in any references to their comments, they were referred to simply as full time or part time (in the case of students) and by number if a member of staff.

An initial analysis on the identification of issues that arose was made and these were annotated directly onto the scripts. This initial stage was essentially based on a) issues that were related to individual questions; b) the frequency of such issues being noted by the participants thus acting as an indicator of concerns and issues uppermost in individuals' perceptions; c) similarities and differences in expressions of those individuals' perceptions and d) any missing data that I might have expected from participants when answering a question. This led to, for example, the coding of whether the students were full time or part time, and whether they were mature or younger. According to LeCompte (2000) the initial stages of data analysis are made up of the identification of the issues that then form the basis of the units and the clusters that form the sets of units that then ultimately contribute to theme formation. Disassembling or breaking the data down into units and then categorising these units is described by Denscombe (1998) as analytic coding (p. 210). Bryman (2008, p. 552) states that the management of the data into these first stages of identification of coding and the act of

coding is not analysis but progresses from this interpretation which is essentially, the significance of the of the material as coded, forging the connections across the data and reflecting on these interconnections in relationship to the topic and the research questions themselves. Appendix 10 lists the units that were formed from this initial stage of the data analysis. An on-going process of note taking and initial thoughts were made during the collection and from the reading of the transcriptions (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 69; Grbich, 2007, p. 25; Sarantakos, 2005, p. 345). Further reading of the annotations and the clusters of units led to the confirmation of those that were relevant to the research questions. In moving to the interpretation and 'making meaning' I grouped these clusters or themes, into the three main sections for the final analysis; students, staff and partnerships. Drawing on the units as identified in Appendix 10, the section on students drew from: progression routes, perception of FD students; the section on staff: power positions, staff perception of positions and research and scholarly activity; whilst the last section on partnerships drew from: development and support role, partnership variations, power positions, FDAP powers for FE colleges and capacity of FECs to manage HE. As can be noted, some units informed more than one section.

Annotations on scripts, diagrams and the use of colour to visually represent connections more easily were made and are an example of methods used to facilitate data analysis and to help to identify interconnecting themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). A diagram of a circle, representing the hermeneutic circle of the component elements of the issue under investigation was made; this included students, teachers/lecturers, managers and policy. This diagram represented the 'whole'. From the individual elements, a spider

gram was developed with, for example, the issues arising from the focus groups and interviews and specific features of the particular elements. One such feature which became evident was the pattern of responses emerging from part time, mature students as opposed to the full time, younger students. Connections could then be seen visually and helped to inform the analysis and interpretation. The analysis was developed through an iterative process, moving between the different transcriptions and developing a clustering of units to form themes as identified above. The coding of emerging issues was made and identified on the transcripts (see example in Appendix 11). This allowed the themes to emerge as raised by the tutors, managers and students rather than the imposition of a predetermined set of categories (Prosser, 2000). The groupings of texts from different respondents were then brought together for further interpretation. These clusters were used for the reporting in the data analysis and interpretation (see chapter seven) resulting in the following sub-headings: Clusters were then analysed and are presented from the perspective of all respondents and related to the main research questions. The terms from the main themes and clusters were used to initiate the conclusions later in the thesis. The range of questions can be seen in the copy of the questionnaire in Appendices one to six.

Sarantakos (2005, p. 314) details the hermeneutic spiral; for my purposes this was useful and helped me to forge the link between the different actors and highlighted the relationship between the respondents' data, policy, rhetoric and hidden assumptions. A crucial feature of a critical hermeneutic approach is to ensure that meaning is surfaced and examined. This ensures that assumptions are revealed and challenged. The approach must facilitate

the examination of the relationship between the elements and the insight into power relations between individuals as agent, the structure within which they find themselves and emancipatory possibilities.

1. Staff positions in the study

The staff who were interviewed or who participated in focus groups were all directly involved in HE in FE partnerships either as tutors on HE courses or as managers. 24 were employed in FE colleges and two by HEIs. The reason why I concentrated on FE staff rather than HE was that I was interested in the impact of partnerships on the those who were at the forefront of the management, delivery and the changes that were brought about in FE colleges as a result of expanding or introducing HE, rather than those in HE who were involved in terms of general management of moderation and other quality assurance processes. Furthermore, the HE in FE managers from the FE colleges had substantial experience of managing HE and some of these had been employed in HEIs. The two HE people interviewed had management responsibilities for HE in FE partnerships in universities that had substantial partnership commitments; one with HEFCE indirect funding for their FE partner colleges and the other with validation and general support systems (but no provision of HEFCE numbers). The HE in FE tutors had a range of experience of delivering HE in FE; from a number of years (ten or more) to only recently being appointed and having only 18 to 24 months' experience.

The data originated from two focus groups: one with HE in FE managers (seven) and one with HE in FE tutors (eight); and 11 individual interviews

(seven tutors and four managers). In all, a total of 26 individuals participated in these staff interviews and the focus groups.

2. Students in the study

53 FD students were involved in interviews and focus groups in this study. The majority participated in focus groups (50 students distributed across six focus groups). The size of the focus groups ranged from four to ten. The majority were studying part-time and were over 25 years of age. Two of the focus groups were comprised of full-time students with one mixed group and the rest being part-time; this gave me a sample that ranged across full-time, part-time as well as a number of subjects and age profiles. The logistics of arranging the focus groups and interviews were such that this was the only means of obtaining access to such students.

As stated earlier, I asked all students to read the statement about the study and the statement explaining confidentiality and anonymity. They were also asked to give a confirmatory signature that they had read and understood these statements.

An ethical issue I identified when dealing with students when posing questions and acknowledging their responses. A consideration was taken into account as to how the younger students might feel in discussing their experience and understanding of the FD with a stranger and whether they would they feel more comfortable on the understanding that it was to be within a confidential environment. On the other hand, mature students might be more skilled at presenting the socially 'correct' answer.

3. Final thoughts

Whilst working within a critical perspective and acknowledging that this does not seek to eliminate but rather recognises the role of values within research and data analysis, I still needed to demonstrate that I had undertaken the study using criteria and approaches that would exhibit attention to the *processes* of research. This did not mean that I was restricted to compliance with an approach to research that promoted the illusion that,

...good research should maximise objectivity and minimise researcher subjectivity. [And that] Its purpose is to discover value-neutral findings/facts, which can then be safely used to improve policy and practice.

(Hodkinson, 2004, p. 10)

This is, as Hodkinson reflects is,

... the 'new orthodoxy' of the technically rational aspects of positivism and empiricism (Habermas, 1972), where research is seen as primarily concerned with the prediction and control of educational practices...

(ibid, p. 10)

My journey through this study is, in itself, an exploration of some of the issues I have had to face concerning the dominance of 'evidence-based' studies and the expectations of funders and government agencies that research methodologies, reports and findings are linked to 'hard' evidence. Having the freedom to explore an approach that gave me the opportunity to consider the implications of an emancipatory framework as well as my role as researcher, gave rise to both questioning and confirmation of my own agency within the structure of FE and HE. I was able to examine the effect that my history had had on my work and, indeed, on this particular study.

Chapter 7

Analysis and interpretation of data

This section of data analysis is divided into two main sub-sections: one on the issues around FD students and staff with the data being drawn from both staff and students: the second sub-section will examine the role of partnerships drawing on the perceptions of both staff and students in the context of New Labour's widening participation and HE agenda. The basis of the critical hermeneutic spiral is that the parts within the whole form an interplay that renders interpretation of both the individual elements and the whole or the phenomenon. In this case, the elements are the different actors, government policy, partnerships and social structure; all interrelate to provide knowledge about the research questions.

When reporting student responses I decided to identify them as either full-time or part-time. This is because the method of data collection enabled me to identify the students on this basis rather than any other information (other than gender and age range); other details were not available to me and collection of information such as social class, curriculum area, household income, specific age were not accessible or provided. The issue of the collection of such details had been discussed during the pilot of the focus group questions with a small number of FD graduates, who expressed objections and concerns about students revealing data on income and social class. This meant that the data and therefore, the analysis that informed the subsequent interpretation was limited by this lack of information.

1. The position of foundation degree students and staff

The context of a globalised economy and a dominant neo-liberal philosophy that has commanded the attention and acceptance of the vast majority of governments of various persuasions forms the backdrop for the FD students and their tutors. Throughout the various definitions of globalisation (see Apple et al, 2005; Ugglä, 2008), there are implications for education, not least of which can be seen in the expansion of HE, including HE in FE. The other aims of education across the western nations at least, according to Grubb and Lazerson (2006), are being distorted or excluded as,

The development of utilitarian approaches threatens to overwhelm the many other purposes of education that have been articulated... civic and moral purposes, purely intellectual goals, nation-building...

(p. 301)

Within and across the interconnected, electronically-mediated knowledge-based economies is the essential understanding that manifests itself in different governments; the zeitgeist that individuals must contribute not only to their own economic status but also their nation's wealth by developing and maintaining high-level skills. Here is an example of Reich's (1991) supposed relationship between high skills and high wages; his message is that in becoming educated, individuals will have access to high-skilled and high-waged positions. According to Reich, the global economy requires increasing numbers of 'symbolic analysts', leaving those who do not avail themselves of educational opportunities to fall into the low-skilled and low-waged sectors of the economy (Brown and Lauder, 2006). The expectation, on the part of government, that citizens will follow this sentiment is clear; become well-qualified and join the ranks of those who will do better for themselves and for the economy; a clear instrumental philosophy is

conveyed. The assumption is made by government that there is an unproblematic and straightforward relationship between qualification accumulation, increased income-generation and greater productivity (Brown and Tannock, 2009). Government now expects individuals to contribute to this through not only investing their time in study, but through direct contributions to tuition fees, with those who are part-time and who are required to pay their fees 'up front' with no access to loans being disadvantaged. This model can also be viewed from the perspective of the lower income and under-represented groups; such are expected to participate in this agenda and it is those who are presently excluded who are to be exhorted through government policies such as widening participation strategies. The majority of FD students in this study were part-time (and mature) and, therefore, very much aware of this aspect of the contribution they were making to their education.

This section will consider, firstly, the responses of the students and staff to a range of questions (see Appendices one to six) related to the students' ambitions in studying for a FD: the staff and students' perception of FD students as opposed to other HE students: and the experience of students on the courses.

The second section will go on to examine staff perceptions of their role within the HE in FE nexus and how their position contributes to the overall location of HE in FE and the HE structure. The interpretation of their perception was made on the basis of their responses to grouped themes;

these were formed from a number of similar questions relating to the grouped themes. The themes are;

1. Why join a FD course? Were the students attracted to the FD course on the same rational yet instrumentalist basis as proposed in government policy (DfEE, 2000); or were they drawn by an attraction to individual fulfilment through education, or indeed, both?
2. How did they access the course? This theme highlighted routes into HE and whether they had used the processes that are used by traditional students or had they accessed on the basis of support from a FE college where, perhaps they had undertaken vocational level three courses or attended an Access course:
3. What had been their experience on the course?: this section drew on the students' and tutors' experiences and perceptions of the students' development on the course including whether the experience had been transformational or merely instrumental: had they been able to cope with the demands of level four/five course;
4. Were they a new kind of HE student? This explores the perception of the students and the tutors, of how these students comply with the standard perceptions of students in terms of their attitude to academic work, their absorption of the rhetoric of vocational HE and their accommodation of agency versus structure;
5. Had they experienced transformational education? This last theme on students considers whether their experience has led to an appreciation of the potential liberating effects of education and the development of individual agency.

1. Why join a FD course?

The first issue to be addressed is that of the perceptions of tutors, managers and students as to the role of a FD course and, in the case of the students, why were they attracted to joining such a course, as opposed to any other or, indeed, any course at all? According to government policy (DfES, 2003) and promoted by government agencies and stakeholders such as HEFCE (HEFCE, 2009), the two fundamentals are that of widening participation and developing the workforce to meet the needs of the UK economy, if it is to maintain its economic position globally. Some government agencies focus more on the employer and economic aspects of policy rather than social justice and equity (e.g. FDF 2010), revealing an instrumental approach.

Tutors and managers were asked about how they viewed partnerships for the purpose of HE in FE. Although this will be considered in more detail in the sub-section on partnerships, the responses of the staff are pertinent to a consideration of FD students and their attraction to the studying of a FD. There was an acceptance of their role in providing the initial stages of the ladder for student progression,

...we look towards more FE colleges providing progression routes into HE... a total pathway of progression.
(HE in FE managers' focus group)

Tutors also mentioned progression,

...to bring more people into HE.
(HE in FE tutor 1)

...another form of progression for the students...it is more of a stepping stone rather than going directly to the university because in some cases, some students find that it is a full-on qualification [and] quite hard...

(HE in FE tutor 2)

...to enable local students to access them [programmes].

(HE in FE tutor 10)

Rather than a first and direct response in relationship to widening participation, which might have been expected, given the clear steer in government policy, it was perhaps surprising that progression was raised as the immediate thought, rather than widening participation. Indeed, the term 'widening participation' was mentioned only once by one tutor in the focus group. No manager mentioned widening participation. References to associated terms such as 'access point, an open gate' (HE in FE tutor 3) and 'second chance' (HE in FE manager 2) were made, however. Such references were given mainly by tutors rather than managers. One response indirectly referred to a form of widening participation in terms of meeting the aspirations of individuals within the community and the perception of the difference between an FE college as opposed to a university,

...to meet the needs of the community and the students...many people aspire to HE and to progress [and] would feel comfortable about doing that in a FE scenario whereas they wouldn't feel comfortable about approaching a university.

(HE in FE manager 1)

This latter quotation presents a parochial assumption and, given the position of HE in FE managers in their institution and their role in negotiating progression routes, may account for their lack of attention to the feature of widening participation. Tutors confront the issues of widening participation

on a daily basis through student interaction and such factors are an element of their tacit understanding. It is possible that both managers and tutors are permeated by the underpinning culture of widening participation that they considered this to be superfluous to a direct reference or articulation of the term within an interview. FE colleges tend to be located in the centres or communities that are close to 'widening participation' (which can be a euphemism used by government for deprived) communities where access to the college or its out centres is facilitated. A lack of a specific reference does not indicate any neglect to widening participation in such communities. Nonetheless, reference to one of the criteria of widening participation for statistical purposes by HEFCE was made: that of family history of HE experience. For many of the tutors this was a factor with regard to the role of HE in FE,

Accessibility...A lot of ours have not got a family history of higher education and they need the support and small groups that may be a university lecture theatre wouldn't give them.

(HE in FE tutor 3)

No mention was made of the other criterion of widening participation used by HEFCE: that of post code (low participation neighbourhoods (LPN)). It is more than likely that the tutors would not have access to such details about their students.

Whilst there is no indication of an aversion or avoidance of widening participation, the relatively low acknowledgement of such a high profile government policy may indicate a lack of absorption of this particular message. The evasion is not overt, but demonstrates that the imposition of policies, even where professionally or socially approved, may be sub-consciously resisted. Many managers were more concerned with an

emphasis on the vocational role of FE colleges above all else. They saw students as,

... being able to follow that pathway through onto a higher level [...] technical skills based provision I think is a fairly natural domain for colleges really. [...] it's a natural territory that we can provide well for and therefore I feel that's a particular niche really.
(HE in FE manager 2)

...on the whole they tend to be vocational HE.
(HE manager 1)

This confirms the claim that FE colleges offer a particular type of HE that is vocationally-focussed; this has a history laid down since the Second World War (Parry and Thompson, 2002). This is also borne out in the AoC latest statement and proposals to the Independent Review of Higher Education funding and student finance (AoC, 2010a) that HE students in FE colleges are looking for vocational courses that will improve their access to better opportunities for employment rather than an academic career. Whilst traditional HE students may also seek vocational career opportunities as a result of their HE qualifications, Hoelscher et al (2008) has argued that they are also intent on maintaining their cultural capital and their social position. Yet the vocational aspect of HE that has morphed into employability (Wagner, 2001) can be seen to be increasingly moving to the landscape of HE in FE and regarded so by the respondents.

The perception of the students was crucial to this understanding of HE in FE. What was their main objective in undertaking a FD? Did the FD students in the study regard the courses merely from an instrumentalist point of view that would give them access to a better career and no more, albeit at

a lower level than a full honours degree at a traditional university (see Redmond, 2007); or did they aspire to a transformational experience that could be offered through education or both? Whilst these questions are applicable to all HE students, I wanted to test whether the assertion, as made by Redmond (2007) and Hoelscher et al (2008), that 'widening participation' students take a more instrumental approach to their studies also related to these students.

There emerged a difference between the younger (mainly full time) students and the older (mainly part-time) students and confirms Nelson's (2006) analysis of the growing evidence of a duality in the profile of FD students. This was evident in their responses to the questions around motivation and purpose in undertaking the FD. The vast majority of all students valued the course and appreciated its significance in relation to their work or potential work. This was unanimous in the younger, full time students,

Well, certain jobs require [like] foundation degree to get your job,
so...
(FT student)

Higher paid job...
(FT student)

Some certainly regard it as an 'insurance' against the uncertainties and vagaries of the jobs market now and in the future,

I don't 100% need it, but you don't know what the future holds.
(FT student)

The perception of the FD qualification by such students was a confirmation of the recognised need to obtain a HE level qualification for the jobs market.

As such, students reveal and acknowledge the need for them to develop the 'optimising and enterprising individual' (Skeggs, 2004) that is demanded for them to fulfil the rhetoric of the state and their role as a full citizen.

Such a concern was not necessarily at the forefront of responses from the mature students, other than as a criticism, with a note of scepticism and a perception of credentialism,

...you're going to need the honours in another few years. Then after that they'll introduce something else, no doubt.

(PT student)

This student did not view her experience as one of emancipation and transformative learning; the requirement to undertake a FD was an imposition that related to an invasion of her lifeworld. Nevertheless, the older, part time students also appreciated the opportunities that the FD offered to fulfil their ambitions of moving beyond their present work situations and the perceived limitations of the role of motherhood (in the case of some of the women students),

To better our career, to get a career.

(PT student)

...it's certainly what we need in the workplace.

(PT student)

For some it provides a clear pathway to a long-held ambition; for example, those undertaking the FD in Learning Support and who were teaching assistants, were all intending to progress to a teaching qualification. These may be regarded as fulfilling some long standing ambitions, whether it was in terms of a specific career or that of achieving a degree,

It's because I want a degree...if you think it's something you never thought you would have then it's very important.

(PT student)

The older students regarded the FD as an opportunity for them to re-enter education and to make up for previous lost opportunities. One student reported explaining to her son that she needed to complete and achieve a degree, despite all the hours of study, as she wanted to demonstrate her ability,

I got a D at school and it bugged me for 20 odd years.

(PT student)

Other mature students on a full-time course expressed the same sentiment,

...it's how people view you...you've got that piece of paper...

For a group of mature female students, it was also a confirmation of their status as intelligent women,

... we are intelligent women and we can do this, ...if you'd asked me a year ago there was absolutely no way I would have touched a degree, part time or anything....

(PT student)

Here the mature students are demonstrating their commitment to the notion of education as expansive and providing opportunities that they considered to be outside their previous expectations. They were optimistic about the future and the acknowledgement of their skills and knowledge they would achieve through the FD. It is to be noted that at this stage of their studies, these particular students were not in a position to report on any positive or negative impact on their lives and employment positions as a result of undertaking the FD. I cannot, therefore, confirm Dunne et al's (2008) and Woolhouse et al's (2009) findings of teaching assistant's reporting of lack of job progression

and few improvements in salary after having achieved the FD. Redmond (2007) also highlights the outcomes of his work with 'widening participation' graduates and how the majority failed to achieve graduate level occupations. The question of a return to the investment of a degree is also raised by Mason (2002) who queries whether the returns of the increased numbers in HE will be acceptable both to graduates themselves and to employers.

For the mature students there was a tension between the recognition of the technical requirements of achieving a qualification for their work role and their acknowledged personal accomplishments; the scepticism was reflected that this was, at least partially, merely a requirement that had been introduced as part of a general campaign to up-skill the workforce rather than one of substance was apparent. They demonstrated awareness that they were acknowledged as 'associate professionals' in their work relationships but yet were equivocal about the values of the FD; this confirms Edmond's (2010) as well as Dunne et al's (2008) work on learning assistants on FDs. In displaying this awareness, there is evidence of the self-regulated citizen who, through compliance in striving for individual success, confirms the social boundaries and constraints that will continue to maintain social immobility (Smith, 2009).

The students in my study were divided in terms of their aspirations and their perception of the FD from a utilitarian perspective. The younger students tended to regard the qualification as just that; a qualification that was needed that would give them access to a better range of jobs. The older students were more aware of the value of higher level qualifications; they were a

necessity in a credentialised system but the HE experience was valuable in itself for their own individual development. Here was an expression of a stronger notion of education as expansive and seemingly upheld by the mature students who considered that this was their second-chance at education previously denied them.

Despite the younger students' lack of awareness of the credentialised system, they demonstrated their understanding of HE as a stratified sector. They (and some of the tutors) expressed the belief that the FD was regarded as 'second-best',

I applied for an apprenticeship... but was unsuccessful.
(FT student)

... I went to x University to study agriculture for a full degree but I found it too difficult so I came here.
(FT student)

This contradicts Longhurst's (2005) claim that the design of FDs will provide a different but valued and genuinely improved provision for students and employers. Whilst the qualification may indeed offer opportunities for students, they are aware of the hierarchy of HE and that they are not included in the higher echelons of that hierarchy. Nevertheless, students also clearly identified that they were determined to obtain a degree, no matter where they studied it. When asked if they would have gone anywhere to study the FD, a group of full-time younger students gave a resounding 'Yes'. Such students are clearly aware of the compulsion in government policy to comply with the demands of the market which is driven by an increase in the bar not only in access to elite universities (Morrison, 2009) but also in accessing a job. Just as Wolf argued in 2002 that working-class families

were likely to assess the risk of HE against vocational course and find the latter less risky, today the opposite may be increasingly the case; no degree becomes a higher risk than seeking a job that traditionally and historically gave access to a secure career structure.

Furthermore, the younger students in this study were aware of the problems that could confront them if they did not obtain a degree, even if this is a FD. The danger of the FD route becoming perceived as a 'failed course' as a concern projected by Derek Longhurst, the Director of the Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) (cited in Bowers-Brown, 2006) seems to be indicated here, and conveyed more in the comments from the younger students. The question is raised by some tutors that the students are not quite sure what they have entered,

I think the students are so confused...they just see the word degree and they want to continue the qualification and then they'll stay.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

The students are portrayed as being pawns as well as beneficiaries in the skills game; they want to continue their vocational qualifications and prefer the convenience of their local institution, where they are familiar with the staff and the surroundings, but are not quite sure to what they are dedicating the next two or three years. As argued by Ball et al (2002) and Redmond (2006), the criterion for such students is about *whether or not* to attend (only) their local HE institution as opposed to *making a choice* as to where to go for their HE experience. Nevertheless, it is suggested, some students perceive a difference between the FD and the full degree,

They do come with preconceived ideas that they're not doing a degree ...unless you top it up.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

Perhaps this reveals a clearer understanding, on the part of the student, of the qualifications landscape; that the FD is a degree in name only and the 'real' degree is one that is taken after the FD. Both FD students and their tutors demonstrated a perceptive understanding of the position of the FD in the wider differentiated HE framework and the resulting limitations from the employer perspective. Other research has highlighted the limitations on HE vocational students who, having overcome the socio-economic and institutional barriers, and poorer application success rates in accessing HE, find that there are further impediments in the form of higher drop-out rates (Ertl et al, 2010). Drawing on the evidence from the data, it does appear that, given the already perceived disadvantaged position of vocational students, the undertaking of a FD becomes a further confirmation of their position in the HE hierarchy and potentially, their position in society, rather than a transition into HE and the wider opportunities that can be offered that can support social mobility as well as career prospects.

2. Accessing the course

The question on access to the course and initial information on the course was asked to identify if these particular FD students had progressed onto the course as a result of their experience in the same or similar FE environment, or if they had been recruited through the 'traditional' undergraduate route into HE through Advanced level qualifications at 18 years of age. A similar pattern that differentiated the mature, mainly part time students from the younger full time students emerged. Many of the mature students had progressed through the same college onto the FD,

Through the college...going through their normal booklet for x
University...

(PT student)

For those mature students who had no previous contact with their present institution (as in the groups of students who were based at a university) their initial information came mainly from external sources but not through careers advice or by considering the University Central Admissions Service (UCAS),

I saw an advert [in the local paper] and I thought, 'Right, I'll have a go'.

(PT university)

...university web site... I knew I wanted to do something.

(PT university)

I was passed some information about the foundation degree and so I researched [it].

(PT university)

Information and guidance for the younger students came from their last institution of mainly sixth form colleges (no one referred to a school sixth form) or UCAS, with follow-ups on the web sites. One had been working and, through awareness of the course through friends, decided to look up the information,

I was working full time; I just looked on the web site. I knew people on the course so I thought...

(FT student)

Other full time students at a college revealed a similar pre-disposition to be prepared to progress onto the FD if there was a familiar base or a personal or trusted recommendation,

...the college [tutors] told us about the course...

(FT student)

When I finished my BTEC, I went on all the college web sites and didn't want to travel too far from home.

(FT student)

There were no references to parents, even for the younger students, of discussions and guidance. This reflects the literature (see for example, Reay et al, 2001 and 2010) that has demonstrated the position of working-class students (and here I am assuming that the majority, if not all, of the students in the study were from a similar social background) and the perceived limitations of their agency that is confirmed or unchallenged through a lack of information and guidance from familiar or trusted adults (see also Yair, 2009). Recent research by Fuller and Heath (2010), however, points to the role of social networks for mature students and their potential to influence both positively and negatively, the potential benefits of undertaking HE. What this demonstrates is the diversity of access routes, few of which were of the traditional (that is Advanced level qualifications) pathways, even with the younger full time students. This exposes one of the divisions between vocational students and their access to HE and those students who enter through the traditional 'A' level school route. Their position in the hierarchy of education, including HE, is confirmed at their access to educational opportunities. Although I did not ask the students or tutors to give information about their applications and their tariff points, it is likely that their tariff scores were low, resulting in them being unable to apply to selective or elite universities. Their position in the HE hierarchy has been recognised by the last government through the widening participation strategies for HEIs, including the elite universities. In order to reduce the tendency of such universities to preserve their boundaries (Osborne, 2003), the Office for Fair

Access (OFFA) was introduced in 2004 to promote and monitor widening participation. Yet, a report from the Director of OFFA, Martin Harris, 2010, has identified that the widening participation rates at highly selective universities have remained fairly flat over recent years (p. 48), despite numerous projects and initiatives to increase the number of applicants from disadvantaged areas and individuals classified as 'disadvantaged'. Whilst such initiatives claim the attention and resources of the selective universities, FE colleges and post-'92 universities continue to recruit such students in the main (Bridger et al, 2007; Greenbank, 2007), including the FD students that participated in this study. For the elite universities, such students are the 'other' (Gibbs, 2002) and, given the portending cuts in HE funding are likely to receive less attention, unless compelled to do so by government. This is not to say that widening participation students are not able to enter elite universities and develop an academic identity. Yet they may struggle with an emerging social identity (Reay et al, 2009); they are not within their 'natural' home culturally and in socio-economic terms.

3. Experience on the course

This section considers the question of how the students had found their experience to date on their FD course. From the data collected from the tutors (all HE in FE tutors) who taught such students, there was an expression of the perceived academic limitations and barriers that the students presented to them as tutors,

Our students aren't typical university type students.
(HE in FE tutor focus group)

...they're not as independent as what they like to think they are.
(HE in FE tutor 9)

This comparison continues into comments on the standards of the work that the students undertake and their lack of independence,

The quality of their writing is usually very poor...they often have a fairly low self-esteem academically...
(HE in FE tutor 4)

In a university system...students are encouraged to be very independent.
(HE in FE tutor 9)

There are, in contrast, the part-time mature students, undertaking qualifications for the purposes of accessing a career or advancement in their careers and who have been attracted to FE courses,

... employed who can carry on in employment...employed in a professional capacity...I would hope they're more motivated ...they are different to eighteen year olds who are going to pub and club...
(HE in FE tutor 5)

One tutor has an observation of the perceived limitations and nature of vocational education which is further enforced by the prescriptions of funding,

...vocational education probably isn't that 'emancipatory' sort of thing that we should be striving for, but that's where the funding is and that's not going to change; if anything we'll see much more direct drive towards vocational stuff...
(HE in FE tutor 4)

Despite the recognition on the part of the staff that their students struggle and are not the supposed traditional university students (as perceived by the staff), few voice a concern with this in terms of the position of their students in the landscape of HE, other than a minority and including this particular tutor. This suggests that tutors and managers, as cited in this study, may

have been absorbed into the culture of the neo-liberal demands of a managerialist, self surveillance culture (Avis, 1996, 2002; Ball, 2003; Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; and Ozga, 2000) and manipulated into an acceptance of the resulting structural changes that have evolved through government policy, as well as the role of partnership as legitimisation of central state directives (Cardini, 2006). As Marcuse (1964) identified, survival is won by those who comply with the means, as opposed to challenging the unquestioned end. Additionally, this may be evidence of Bathmaker's (2006) professional framework of teachers in FE; some engage at a level of critical professionalism and seek to understand the social context of their position and that of the students, whilst others may be operating with a corporate, personal or collaborative approach. From a critical hermeneutic perspective, this presents itself as a potential point of development in professional identity and awareness in relationship to the broader social issues that confront tutors in their position. In a conflictual state of being, with expectations of 'producing' successful students, yet acknowledging the limitations of such students, tutors manage to balance the demands of their professional judgements with the contradictions and vagaries of policies and strategies with which they must comply.

However, the students' perceptions, in many cases, belie this. Many of the mature students did admit to initial concerns and difficulties,

When we first started... I think we were a bit daunted.
(PT student university)

I think you do have that comfort zone of thinking at least you're doing what you're familiar with. I wouldn't have done a full-time degree...

(PT student)

But some on the full-time course admitted to feeling under pressure but also recognised that they were receiving support,

I'm struggling at the moment...

(FT mature student)

...with us being at college (because I went to university [before]) I feel like I'm getting more help, a lot more. We're a smaller class [compared to university classes].

(FT mature college student)

Younger students recognised the value of greater access to tutors via personal or electronic means and smaller classes,

...it's a smaller group...you can get hold of your lecturers quite easily... for a quick chat...

(FT college student)

Those students based in the post-92 university expressed surprise at the amount of support they were receiving from their tutors,

...I didn't realise how much support I would actually get from the tutors. You get immediate and positive feedback.

(PT university mature student)

It is difficult to identify whether this is because their expectations were around what they understood to be a typical university experience of more independent studying, or whether they are surprised at receiving support at HE level itself, be it in college or in a university. Certainly students in Bowl's (2003) study of 'non-traditional' students in HE revealed some frustration on their part as they struggled to come to terms with the different culture and tutor hegemony that did not provide the initial support that they had received

on 'Access' courses in community centres. At the same time, Reay et al's (2009) students' experience in a post-92 university identified a lack of support as a result of under-resourcing compared to elite universities. However, the students in my study were either at FE colleges (the majority in this study) or in one particular HE institution, and reported high levels of tutor support.

Students recognised that they are working at a different level to that which they have previously experienced and that they need to work on a more independent basis,

I find this harder [compared to BTEC courses] because I'm having to do it in a more academic way.

(PT mature student)

...you're directed but you have to be self-directed as well. As [tutor's name] says, she's not going to spoon feed us...

(PT mature student)

You have to do more work and research for yourself...It is different, the fact that you have to read so many different books...

(PT mature student)

Younger students also recognise that they are working at a different level and some are finding this difficult,

...I feel completely lost, I don't know what's going on half the time. Using all the posh terms [is difficult].

(FT student)

I'm struggling this year to get my head around things...

(FT student)

...it's very difficult to cope because it allows you to procrastinate a lot.

(FT student)

...you're [like] developing your own skills more than being taught someone else's.

(FT student)

The perception of these students is that the FD work is perhaps harder than they expected, yet they are committed to the forging of their new improved self, through the 'incessant exhortation' (Bradford and Hey, 2007, p. 596) of government policies, educational establishments and societal pressures. Despite not achieving the traditional route through to HE, these students (and particularly the younger full-time students), are aware of the pressures on them to continue and achieve. They have taken a step to their success by choosing a FE college or a post-1992 university where they understand they will be in their comfort zone (Reay, 2001) and are likely to experience the model of teaching and support they have come to expect. This is further endorsed by a group of younger full-time students when offering their perception of teaching and learning through a complaint they made at the lack of support they had received in the previous year. They felt strongly that any tutor should have a teaching qualification,

...the tutors didn't even have qualifications to teach...

(FT student)

After complaining, the tutors were changed and there was a perceived improvement in teaching and greater focus on practical aspects of the course. The students reflected on the teaching skills as a priority,

... [now] they're doing it properly...they'll take us step by step rather than just, 'Do this'.

(FT student)

This approach, displayed by the younger students in particular, reveals a perception of teaching from a didactic perspective and an expectation of

support that is more akin to their previous experiences in education. The dependency on greater support is confirmed in their recognition that, for some, should they decide to study a full degree, they will need to do this over a longer time period,

...if I went and did my third year, I'm not strong enough academic-wise and I would fail...so I would rather take a break from it, learn more and then go back and try again.

(FT student)

This is an indication of a perceived limitation but one that incorporates a strategic approach for completion. In addition, as vocational students, these interviewees are displaying what Ertl et al (2010) identified as vocational students' need for greater individualised support and advice (p.87).

There is, again, a distinct difference between the full-time younger students and those mature students studying on a part-time basis. Whilst the mature students indicate that they are both working in a more independent way and beginning to cope, the younger students are more concerned about being 'taught' and perhaps in ways that they have experienced either in a FE college or 6th form college. Mature students reflected on their recognition of a shift in their self-perception and their improving confidence as students, which are generally not reflected in the younger students' comments. As one mature student put it,

... we are intelligent women and we can do this. ... I'm out and I'm learning

(PT student)

There is also recognition that, without the FD, they would not have had the confidence to apply to do a full degree, even if offered on a part-time basis,

...there is no way I would have touched a [full] degree part time.
(PT student)

...it's given me a lot of confidence in my own abilities.
(PT student)

This resonates with Dunne et al's (2008) work with teaching assistants who were all female with a number of mature students and who reported self-worth and confidence both personal and professional. Although some in my study revealed on-going doubts,

No, [I am] still a housewife.
(PT student)

I'm in my 50's and I'm old and I class myself as the old school and I don't like change very much.
(PT student)

The younger, full time students, despite expressing concern over their ability to cope and indicating a preference for didactic teaching methods, were clear about the benefits that a higher education offered,

...it's about developing you as a person (FT student)
...you come somewhere like this and you appreciate other people's ideas.
(FT student)

Whereas younger students appear to regard the career path as a natural progression route, older students are more conscious of the barriers they have had to overcome (see Bowl, 2003). The scepticism about the need for a FD was voiced by mature students rather than the younger ones. A further difference is evident in the detail that mature students could give about how they used and recognised the knowledge and skills they were acquiring and how theory and practical work were inter-related,

...it gives you a good grounding for what it's going to be like to go on to do the full degree.

(PT student)

...at times I have thought, 'Oh, yes, it makes sense now.'

(PT student)

I can back it up [challenging decisions] better now.

(PT student)

Students reflect the tensions and problematics of resolving their progress on the FD in terms of their previous experiences. For the younger students this can amount to an expectation of didactic teaching and reliance on tutor support; with the mature students it is the 'release' from their restricted opportunities and perceived lack of independence in both mind and material factors imposed upon them by social position. Both groups look to using education as a tool to provide an avenue that will offer confirmation of opportunities to overcome their previously stifled ambitions.

4. A new kind of HE student?

Drawing on responses from both interviews and focus groups, I now move to analyse if the FD students could be regarded as a new kind of student. This is pertinent in view of the claims that the decline of higher national certificates and diplomas and their replacement with the FDs represents a shift to a clearer focus on employer requirements and the skills needs of the economy. Do such students exhibit a profile and needs, in the perception of the tutors and managers that is similar to those students in certain parts of the already differentiated HE sector? The potential for further differentiation and stratification is considered.

For the most part, tutors and managers divided their responses in terms of the age range of the FD students, their mode of study and their vocational profile. The majority of FD students in colleges (as opposed to universities) tend to have the following profile, according to the tutors,

mature students...

(HE in FE tutor 10)

... predominantly part timers wanting to change their career direction.

(HE manager 1)

Mature students...they're much older and they're more advanced in their careers...

(HE in FE tutor 4)

The 'dualism' that is said to be emerging (Nelson, 2006) in student profiles was evident in the data drawn from the tutors and managers.

Tutors and managers considered how students perceived a major difference between HE and FE; that of the relative ease of access to FE as opposed to HE. Sometimes this was seen in relationship to the environment itself,

...they wouldn't feel comfortable about approaching a university...

(HE in FE manager 1)

...it's accessible, they're not daunted...

(HE in FE tutor 3)

Yet one tutor raised ease of access as a potential problem or even a barrier to successful operation at HE level,

...students sometimes sort of lose track of the fact that it is a university course ['cos] they're so relaxed by it being in an FE situation...

(HE in FE tutor 6)

This reveals an acceptance of the tensions that tutors experience in their professional role; facilitating students who are not necessarily (in their terms) ready for HE. This is further underlined by some tutors in identifying the initial advantage of students entering or continuing with their studies on a FD at their local college, becoming transformed from a potential path to a satisfying vocation with better opportunities, into a comfortable route that fits their lower aspirations,

...they like the nurture and they have no ambitions to actually go and study elsewhere.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

People don't value it [the foundation degree] as much...'I couldn't do a degree when I was younger so I'll make do with this now'...there is the perception that that it's not quite the same as a university degree...

(HE in FE tutor 5)

And, from one tutor, a perception that the concept of education is one that provides a route to a higher level of income but with no apparent transformation that education might offer,

Are we educating them just to be better educated 'prols'...I think the answer is probably, yes...Why do we seek them to be educated...usually because they increase their salaries...

(HE in FE tutor 4)

This tutor is clear that his conception of the FD students is that they are very much on the lower end on the HE hierarchy of provision. This raises the dichotomy of comparisons across different student cohorts and institutions and the resulting conclusion that the HE in FE experience, although different, not being equivalent to that in a traditional university. The challenge to HE in FE tutors is the expectation of compliance with the maintenance of their HE students in their 'comfort zones' as opposed to challenging and stretching the

students (Molesworth, 2009). This is also demonstrated in Crozier et al's work (2009) of working-class students' experiences across a range of universities. In some cases, development of agency was limited in their attendance at post-92 universities in that the support offered developed dependency and,

... a supportive approach in many ways has been seen to compound students' lack of cultural capital and confusion. [...] This renders them dependent learners, craving tutor contact and the desire to be told what to do. [...] loose framing (usually associated with creative possibilities) rather than liberating student learning would seem to have the opposite effect.

(Crozier et al, p. 73)

Although I cannot confirm or identify these student's as working-class, the HE in FE tutors' perception in this study reflects the tutors' experience and perceptions of their own students. For FE tutors, the culture of FE demands expanding courses, students and levels with the requirements to maintain retention and success rates.

Bennett (2004) found that the 'non-traditional' students on a degree course at a university with a high dropout rate, perceived HE as relatively easy. Some of the FD students in this study, however, considered that they were undertaking something difficult,

It's a lot harder to find the information out when trying to do it ourselves.

(FT student)

But that they understand other people's perceptions of a FD student as an easy option,

I don't think people take us seriously because they think we are taking the easy way out... [the foundation degree] is regarded as the easy way out.

(FT student)

Another student reported that friends questioned the value of the FD based at a college,

I don't why, but it's just walking to college and when I talk to a few friends ... and when I said, 'Oh yeah, I've started going to x College,' everyone said, 'Oh, you are still at college,' and I was like 'But it's a degree', they all went 'Oh well'. So there was a little bit of a stigma attached; but to be honest I don't let it get me down that much, but I still say I'm going to uni.

(FT student)

Other students expressed similar sentiments,

I think if I was going to a university ...there'd probably be more status... If I did say X University or a university somewhere, I'd feel a lot higher.

(FT student)

The 'stigma' associated with the lower-valued FD, particularly if undertaken at a college, is almost palpable in these texts. Nonetheless, again, hints of resistance can be seen in the challenge to the relegated status of studying at a college,

... it's validated by a university; it's a university degree so I do say that I'm a uni. student and that I'm at university.

(FT student)

Here is evidence of Leathwood and O'Connell's (2003) pathologised, homogenised 'Other' and students' resistance to this. This is an example of Billett's (2010) enterprising self; if there is subjugation it is self-subjugation. Such students are entangled within social structures, yet they play '...an active role in that entanglement and their disentanglement' (Billett, p. 11). The 'stigma' of attending a lower status institution (mainly FE colleges but, as recorded by Reay et al (2009), lower status is also reflected in a post-1992 university) is accepted by many of the students with some resignation, yet surrendering to these limitations is not necessarily accepted by all students.

The despondency that some students articulated resonates with the work that Brooks and Everett (2008) undertook with widening participation graduates who, having realised the need to achieve a post-graduate qualification for the job market, reported feeling under-valued and apprehensive about having a degree from a post-92 university. Brooks and Everett conclude that '...the process of social alienation is not confined to the compulsory stages of schooling' (p. 251).

Some students (and cited more by the mature students), although not yet graduates, also reveal a recognition of the structural forces that defined their position,

You had the really clever ones who went up to university and it was if their lives were mapped. I was the middle ground; 'OK, did alright but get a working class job'. Then there was the not so fortunate who would go straight onto the dole.

(PT student)

These are not the expressions of an individual who is unaware of the consequences of structural constraints and impositions and, unlike the Third Way exponents (Giddens, 2000), considers that they are a free agent able to express choice from a range of options; rather this individual displays a lived experience that reveals an understanding of her dilemma of being trapped in the confines of a system that has seemingly now offered a lifeline to a conceptualised better world.

5. Emancipatory education?

Widening participation students are sometimes referred to as undertaking HE for instrumental reasons (Hoelscher et al, 2008) as opposed to those

students attending elite universities and who are predominantly from higher social class families with aspirations to benefit from an education that will maintain their cultural capital as well as give them the access to higher level professional vocations. Did the participating students in this study, express and reflect an understanding that their experience was one that would fulfil a wider, deeper and personal comprehension that could act as a liberating force and take them beyond an instrumental approach? This was indeed evident in many of the responses of the mature, part-time students,

I think you think about things differently and I think you have different priorities ...it's stressful... [but] this is what I want to do for myself. I did an Access course with a 79 year old man... he got a lot of satisfaction out of doing really well...

(PT student)

Other mature students expressed an appreciation of the development of their academic skills and incisive approach to issues,

I think it opens your eyes a little bit more and you look into things which you wouldn't have looked into before...

...you're able to put your opinions forward ...you're more articulate aren't you?

(PT students)

This approach was reflected in a good number of comments from other part-time mature students. They also reflect on their newly-found powers,

I start on one bit and then I think, 'That looks interesting', and I'm amazed at what you can find out... and you can actually understand what it's about.

(PT student)

The barriers that previously prevented such students from experiencing the transformational opportunities of education have now been reduced; this has exposed a contrast between their present and previous state of being. As

Dunne and Gazeley (2008) have argued, the under-achievement and treatment of many working-class pupils in the English education system has been normalised, while their middle-class counterparts have been encouraged to achieve. Their teachers' assumptions, pre-conceptions and practices have reinforced the positioning and confinement of the working-class. The surprise, as expressed by this student, it might be argued, is expressed on behalf of those individuals who have been previously ascribed stereo-typed profiles within the school system as children and who then are 'redeemed' through second-chance and Access course provision.

The acknowledgement of an understanding of their regard of learning for the sake of learning, as opposed to an instrumental approach, was given,

I actually like learning...I'm really enjoying learning and researching...

(PT student)

But I also enjoy, I discovered I did enjoy, I do enjoy the courses...

(PT student)

Elements of this data resonate with Warmington's work on Access course students (2003) and their aspirations to move into a higher social class in order '...to escape social marginalisation and welfare dependence' (p. 95); a faith in their own agency is expressed, as with these students. The data on the mature students also reflects Redmond's (2006) work with graduates from 'non-traditional' background and their perception of their agency in the process of 'becoming' a HE student and graduate. Yet structural limitations are acknowledged; there is, in Warmington's words, 'neither passivity nor hegemonic agreement' (ibid, p. 101). Rather these students reflect an understanding of their place in the social and HE hierarchy. This does not

detract from their enjoyment of learning itself. Furthermore, this reflects the shift in the erosion of the previously privileged position of the higher social classes and can, in part, explain why the competition for places for their children in high-ranking universities is so great; a distance must be kept, in the eyes of the middle classes, from those from the lower socio-economic classes.

Some of the full-time younger students also revealed an appreciation of the possibilities of education beyond their immediate instrumentalist objectives,

...the job might not need a degree but your approach to life and the person it makes you benefits by the end of the degree...you appreciate other people's ideas and you are more open-minded and a better person.

(FT student, focus group).

Although there is a formulation of a liberal approach ('you are more open-minded'), the notion of equivalence between the achievement of a degree and being a 'better' person is to be noted. The accomplishment of a degree becomes equated with values and moral position; the 'better' person is one who undertakes a degree. Another student reveals a similar approach,

... [doing a degree] makes you feel much prouder about yourself and it makes you feel you're doing something worthwhile.

(FT student)

These two students (both full-time) demonstrate an assimilation (if unacknowledged and unrecognised) of perceived values that are ascribed to HE. As Connor (1993) states,

We live, breathe and excrete values. No aspect of human life is unrelated to value, valuations and validations. Value orientations and value relations saturate our experiences and life practices...the history of cultures and social formations is unintelligible except in relation to a history of value orientations and their objectivisations, interplay and transformations.

(Connor, cited in Skeggs, 2004, p. 13)

This reflects tensions as expressed by the FD students in this study; aware of the aspiration of the accomplishment of a HE qualification yet, for some, sensing a conflict with their pre-existing notions of what it is to be successful and what is accepted as the norm,

I feel like all my friends outside of this course have jobs sorted...
and I have to go out there and get a job so I have some income.

(FT student)

This is an example of how the vagaries of life and the economic position of the students impose a pre-disposition to prioritise the 'job' (as opposed to the conception and expectation of the 'career' (Redmond, 2006, p. 130) which does not necessarily have the same predominance in the minds of the 'traditional' HE student. For them the experience of HE is,

... a multi-dimensional social and cultural experience, one in which academic success assumed an important but not all-consuming role.

(Redmond, 2006, p. 128)

One mature student offers a further critique that distracts from the positive message of increasing autonomy and self-improvement and reveals a critique of the negative impact of credentialism.

It's bureaucracy gone mad. I mean all these qualifications they're wanting ... they push people out and eventually there'll be that much paperwork to do they won't enjoy being with the kids anymore ... I find most of my time spent at the desk doing paperwork...

(PT student)

There is a sense of challenge in this sentiment to the established and increasingly normalised routine of the technical rationalisation of work and its extension to study and the all-embracing qualifications framework that is now needed to support this. This approach is confirmed by Baker (2009) who argues that the role of education as emancipation and fulfilment of human capacity is being belittled by an increasingly technical rationalist approach. In critiquing Dore's seminal work, 'The Diploma Disease' (1976) he cites Dore and claims that education is becoming,

... a ritualised process of qualification earning [...] destructive of curiosity and imagination; in short, anti-educational.
(Dore, 1976, p. ix, cited in Baker, p. 163)

Some of the mature students in this study recognised how they, too,

...operate under general bureaucratic and highly rationalised means-goals procedures...
(ibid, p. 173)

Yet, this distorts work itself and has led at least some of the FD students who are employed and can relate their studies to their work context, to question the value of the degree. In the critical hermeneutic circle, these particular students display an understanding of their individual limitations based upon their social horizons and structural limitations. The students have located themselves in a society that turns itself towards the reason of technical rationalisation; a reason that will continue the Enlightenment's supposed progress with an inevitability that cannot be overcome by individual or nation state. That technical rationalisation dominates and distorts our actions was recognised by Marcuse. How (2003) commenting on Marcuse's (1994, [1964]) work on reason and its development in 'One Dimensional

Man', identifies how reason had become a distorted concept and had become associated with its very opposite, unfreedom,

The task reason had set itself was to become an instrument for manipulating facts, a facility for measuring only what was technically feasible...The application of this technical, one-dimensional reason enabled industrial – capitalist societies to produce and consume goods at ever higher levels, though the price was in correspondingly ever higher levels of conformity, assimilation and unfreedom.

(How, 2003, p. 7)

As Marcuse himself states at the opening of his seminal work,

A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilisation, a token of technical progress. Indeed, what could be more rational than the suppression of individuality in the mechanisation of socially necessary but painful performances; the concentration of individual enterprises in more effective, more productive corporations...

(Marcuse, 1994, p. 1)

Marcuse berated the loss of the potential of technical developments to release humans from the everyday burdens and allow them the true freedom to 'exert autonomy over a life that would be his own' (p. 2). Whilst this argument may be criticised in terms of its apparent simplicity, it still has value in terms of providing an insight into the extension of the state's and society's armoury of control into the individual's lifeworld. And it is within this framework of 'more productive corporations' that the students often find themselves.

Within a critical hermeneutic paradigm, the position of the students as agents within a neo-liberal framework is crucial; as subjects they play their part in the on-going struggle in which capital wrestles to maintain its supremacy, with education as a constituent used by the New Labour

government to achieve its modernisation of the UK into a true market-determined state. For some there seems to be an understanding of the forces and structures with acknowledgment of the limits that these impose upon them; yet, they express their agency and identity through their personal achievements and increased knowledge of their subject/vocation. Staff regarded the FD students as having a different profile and academic level (and this implied a lower level) compared to university 'traditional' degree students. Despite recognising the difficulties that the students have and seeing low aspirations (particularly of the younger students), the majority of staff do not challenge the value of the FD; rather they see it as a further development in the vocational ladder which is a necessity in achieving access to certain jobs and a wide range of other vocationally-related opportunities. It is regarded as a necessity in the credentially-determined employment landscape rather than a pathway to education for personal, as well as job, fulfilment. This reflects the position of tutors responding pragmatically to both expand the provision for such students, whilst, in some cases, holding low expectations of these students. This is reinforced through government strategies such as additional funding through postal code identification that is based on a similar anticipation of 'non-traditional' students needing additional support to combat their assumed limitations (see Parry, 2010, p. 37). Widening participation students attract additional funding on the assumption that they have a 'deficit'; that 'deficit' in most cases being that, as under-represented groups, they require additional support.

Some tutors and students (more so the mature students) consider FDs to be more aligned with employer rather than student needs. Given the clear remit

of FDs to respond to employer needs this is to be expected. However, the demands and pressures of a neo-liberal and globalised economy are revealed and, although accepted in the main by the younger students, are challenged by some mature students. Some of the latter recognised the structural limitations that were imposed upon them in their school education and, whilst they value the educational opportunities to participate in emancipatory education, are somewhat sceptical of the justification for FDs in some cases.

Whilst those students perceived to be 'widening participation' are accepted into post-'92 universities and FE colleges, OFFA itself has acknowledged that the elite universities have maintained a flat profile of 'widening participation' students, despite the level of policy focus and financial support. The offer of additional funds does not attract such universities; for them, the compliance element of the government strategies is the determining factor, yet even this has not sufficiently improved the number of students classified as widening participation and further strategies are being considered. Whether this continues with the new Coalition government is not yet clear. In the meantime, students in the typical HE in FE partnership, are restricted to the range of local and vocational HE course offered via post-92 institutions or their neighbourhood FE college. HE in FE partnerships, whilst increasing the range of courses on offer in a geographical location, may be at a point where there may be some reduction in that offer, as some HEIs may be withdrawing from partnerships, faced with the prospects of deep cuts and an increase in demand from their traditional cohort of 18 year old students. The attraction of

widening participation students, including their additional funds, fades in the face of the alternative.

There is a clear difference between the younger full-time students and the mature, mainly part-time students. The latter are more open to the opportunities that education can give to them as fulfilling long-standing ambitions and accessing transformational learning. They show awareness of the technical rationalisation of work and its impact on the qualifications framework and the increasing dependency of employers on credentialism. Some students offer resistance to the dominant discourse of the rhetoric of the technicist-rational basis of the expectation to achieve higher levels of qualifications. Whilst resistance is not absolute, there does seem to be some greater awareness and resistance to state direction offered by mature students. However, despite any realisation of their position and conflict with government rationale, they find themselves unable to resist the demands of hegemony of the economy as represented through employers and school expectations. From a critical hermeneutic standpoint, students are placed at the centre of the discourse; they are the ones who are to be 'persuaded', if not directed, onto the path of compliance to the neo-liberal state and its needs for a flexible workforce; these are flexible to economic needs rather than their own. If students as individual agents in this discourse can at least 'name' (Freire, 1972) their world they stand a better chance to understand, comprehend and change it. As an element in emancipatory process, some students did display understanding of their position.

2. HE in FE staff: equal yet different?

Two main issues informed the basis for the collection of the data for this analysis:

1. What was the position of FE staff teaching HE in a FE/HE partnership relationship;
2. What were the research and scholarly activity support and opportunities for the HE in FE tutors?

The data analysis on staff perceptions of HE in FE partnerships and FDs is set against the backdrop of the physical space and culture of FE. As noted in chapter four, the FE sector has been the site of an increasingly authoritarian and controlling managerialist culture, which has become all-pervasive particularly since the incorporation of colleges in 1993 (Avis, 1996, 2002; Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; Steer et al, 2007). Many FE tutors who have been employed over this period to the present day will have seen evidence of the rise of this culture and the performative practices (Ball, 2003) that have been imposed either directly through government diktats, their agencies or through the local surveillance (Ozga, 2000) that has resulted through the de-centralisation of responsibilities to FE college managers post-incorporation. Tutors may enact a combination of a range of identity formation: corporate (compliant), personal (commitment to students), collaborative (a strategic compliant approach) or critical (exercising opposition to management and seeking opportunities for human agency) (Bathmaker, 2006, p. 132) and corroboration of these alternative approaches can be found in these data. Whilst this study is not specifically concerned with FE professionalism, the positioning of tutors in their work with students and in the power relationships

within the HE in FE partnerships will enlighten and reflect some aspects of the professionalism debate. Where are tutors placed in their role as promulgators and interpreters of government policy on widening participation? How do they position themselves as individuals in the dichotomy of supporting students while being seen to enact and fulfil college regulations and targets? The interplay of tutors' perceptions and their position is critiqued from a critical hermeneutic perspective, helping to reveal structural and social dynamics.

1. Positioning HE in FE staff

Staff perceptions of their position within the partnership were examined. There was considerable pessimism expressed about their position as an individual tutor and of the general relationship between the institutions. As HE in FE tutors are delivering HE, and sometimes the same course as the university, the relationship between staff of the partnership institutions might be regarded as crucial to the effective running of the course. However, a number of tutors expressed positional negativity in their relationship with certain university partnership staff,

..I feel quite, well, belittled really...I feel as if we're second rate citizens...and we're just FE lecturers...

(HE in FE tutor 6)

I don't think they would consider us on the same levels as them [university lecturers] at all, [but] we are well respected for what we do and they understand the pressure we have...but that is not to say I would be classed as a university lecturer.

(HE in FE tutor 8)

There's a culture of divide between HE staff and FE staff...divide between we're FE and you're HE and the superiority of HE for FE.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

These comments reveal and confirm earlier research undertaken by Young (2002) and Feather (2010) on the perception of the inferior relationship that FE staff consider themselves to be placed within a HE in FE partnership. This is an example of where critical hermeneutics can reveal power relationships and how this then affects the status of the individual, both perceived and actual (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003). The hermeneutic circle of interpretation of the cultural, social and power dynamics through the words of the individual actors supports the immanent critiquing and revelation of such dynamics.

Their perception of their position within their own institutions revealed the considerable constraints under which the FE teacher normally operates. Support from college management was perceived to be, at best, limited to some tuition fee payments for further qualifications in extending their development in HE teaching. The demands of a full teaching timetable impinged on the tutors' availability to undertake sufficient preparation for HE work,

...if you're teaching 27 hours per week, you don't have time to do any real prep.

(HE in FE tutor 4)

This sentiment was also found in Feather's (2010) study on HE in FE tutors and their position in terms of conditions of service contrasted to those in HE. The range of both level and student age-range in FE means that their work suffers,

We're being stretched further in both directions. We're being stretched lower down into 14 to 16s and we're being stretched at the HE end as well and it's very difficult to be expert in all of them.
(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

...you're expected to go into an HE class and put your mortar board on...it's very, very stressful... to swap from one to the other and in lots of cases the difference is huge; it's the swapping and changing that's the hard bit.
(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

Yet, the amount of time to prepare for HE teaching is normally not recognised in FE colleges,

The comment is often bandied around that teaching HE is no different and no harder and doesn't take any longer than teaching FE.
(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

Some tutors did report time allocation for preparation,

...there is time for us to enhance our performance; you get 20 minutes prep time for HE for every hour you teach.
(HE in FE tutor 8)

Their responses to the questions seemed to make an assumption, or projected an image, of a 'traditional' HE tutor who is allocated considerable time to undertake research and seems to be, therefore, under less work pressure compared to the FE tutor. Whilst this may be true of those based in the elite universities, this cannot necessarily be said of those in post-92 universities with increasing teaching loads as well as demands in some cases for research publications.

The above quotations from the interviews and focus groups with tutors revealed the overwhelming demands placed on the tutors; this extended to the hours of teaching; the range of teaching and the lack of allocated scholarly activity time (which will be re-visited). However, these are promoted by the AoC (2010a) as *positive* features of HE in FE; in their

submission to the 'Independent Review of Higher Education' they claim that their greater staffing flexibility is a sign of greater efficiency, as opposed to universities who employ postgraduate students or casual staff to teach and claim that,

It is better to have efficiency at the heart of an institution not at its corners.

(p. 9)

The lived experience of the tutors in this study belies this assertion; their reports of work-intensification and extension, underlines the position of the FE teacher and confirms a range of literature that highlights the shift in their position in terms of proletarianisation and de-professionalisation (Avis, 2009, ch. 5; Gleeson et al, 2005; Robson, 1998; Simmons, 2006; Wahlberg and Gleeson, 2003). However, tutors claimed an area of considered expertise compared to their university counterparts in their teaching skills,

...I don't believe you learn to teach when you teach in HE, you learn to teach when you teach in FE because you have to be more switched on...and you will get challenged ...

(HE in FE tutor 4)

If the tutors consider they are presented with an almost impossible task as identified above and a positioning of an inferior partner in a partnership, they can claim that they have one area of expertise and this is their 'refuge'. Again, the comparisons may be being made to tutors in the 'traditional' sections of HE, rather than those focused more closely on teaching. As tutors with demands that may overwhelm their personal capacity (in time and stamina) they can take some comfort in their *perceived* superiority in teaching skills over their HE colleagues. This too chimes with the demands

of the students for support and also earlier comments about the lack of academic skills of the FD students.

And, it was teaching in some cases that received support from FE managers rather than support for scholarly activity. One tutor reported that she had a problem with her teaching and had received a low grade on observation, after which,

...I got more support and enhanced training. I was on my own a bit initially but now there's nothing wrong with the way I deliver my teaching.

(HE in FE tutor 8)

Here is an example of the power relationship between the manager and the professional. The requirement to comply with government policies on the elimination of failing and the 'coasting' colleges (DfES, 2006a) and to act as the surveillance guardian of other government regulations, has situated the line manager not only in an authoritative position as a *manager* but, ascribes to the manager (whatever their previous background) the position of determining appropriate support strategies for the *professional teacher* (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). This places the teacher as the dupe, succumbing to management or the devil to be controlled (Bathmaker, 2001).

Proximity to the workforce and employers was also another feature of perceived FE expertise,

I think we're nearer the pulse than a lot of universities for things like employer engagement ...

(HE in FE tutor 4)

This supports claims by both government and college management organisations (such as the AoC) that FE colleges offer something that most universities cannot; employer engagement and closer access to those communities deemed to be ‘non-traditional’ and open to greater take-up of HE. Given the policy expectations of employability across both HE and FE (DfES, 2003; HEFCE, 2006c) this should place HE in FE in an advantageous position and is recognised as such by tutors and managers. The perception of the possibility of improving employer engagement through partnerships, incorporating the skills and expertise of both HE and FE, was not raised; perhaps this is evidence of a ‘silo’ mentality that has come about as a result of the perceived inferior role of FE tutors and their search for some element of self-esteem and professional recognition.

Expectations placed on HE in FE tutors revealed the demands imposed upon them; a masters degree is not necessarily a requirement but is often looked upon as an advantage,

... one member of the team has got a Masters Degree
(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

... and a higher degree, like a Masters Degree.
(HE in FE tutor11)

There is a certain amount of ambiguity as revealed by the tutors’ comments that although a masters qualification may be desirable, other relevant experience should be paramount.

I don’t think anyone should be teaching HE if they haven’t got a masters or some really significant industrial experience...
(HE in FE tutor 4)

This is also confirmed by managers,

...we would be looking for example, a professional background in the areas they propose to teach.

(HE in FE manager 2)

Managers asserted that they are looking for tutors who, ideally, would achieve qualifications at post-graduate level,

If someone is going to be delivering at level 6 we would be expecting them to hold a Masters qualification.

(HE in FE manager 2)

It may be obvious but they [tutors] should be qualified to a level above that which they're going to teach.

(HE in FE manager, focus group)

A further requirement might be considered to be pertinent for all tutors,

I would like people who are innovative and ready to take on new challenges...and be willing to engage in the development of the curriculum...

(HE in FE manager, focus group)

Yet, with partnership curriculum, development may be limited to university staff with FE tutors having a 'consultation' role, revealing the hegemonic position and assumption of that hegemonic position between staff. Demands made on HE in FE tutors are wide-ranging: higher level academic qualifications; higher level vocational or professional qualifications and experience; a readiness to operate flexibly across the full range of teaching in FE as well as HE and; preparedness to develop further skills in developing curriculum at HE level. The tutor is placed in the midst of Ball's (2003) 'policy technology' for HE in FE; through material and symbolic rewards and sanctions the tutor becomes the crux of the development and delivery of HE in FE. There is however, little in the sense of rewards; no or little time

allocated for scholarly activity, often little time for the study of a masters level qualification, no additional salary and no increase in status within the organisation. Again, this confirms the literature on the position of the FE teacher (e.g. Gleeson et al, 2005) as well as the experiences of HE in FE teachers as reported by Harwood and Harwood (2004).

Some tutors attempted to reject an instrumental approach to their development. In response to an assertion at an appraisal meeting with a manager of the extensive staff development undertaken by the tutor, one HE in FE tutor retorts,

That's not staff development ...that means I know how to operate
the college's systems...it's functional training not education...
(HE in FE tutor 4)

HE in FE tutors, just as in some parts of HE, are caught in a combination of the requirement of extensive flexibility across the FE curriculum; the demands of the target-driven culture of the FE college; and the expectation of the prioritisation of teaching skills as opposed to the demands of the HE curriculum with its anticipation of scholarly activity if not research activity. This is evident in the next section of the perceptions and experiences of HE in FE tutors on research and scholarly activity.

FE tutors in the study have revealed their understanding of their role in a partnership of HE in FE. Their comparison is to an imagined notion of a typical university tutor who has far fewer demands and who, therefore, can have the 'luxury' of undertaking research as well as having a superior status. The demands made upon them are, nevertheless, extensive and

expectations of a shift from FE to HE teaching has been normalised in the FE institutions in this study.

2. Research versus scholarly activity: a continuum or a different place?

...I've been told by various heads of departments that scholarly activity is preparing your work...is discussing what's going on in your particular course with other members of the staff...curriculum development... but never, ever, has it included research.

(HE in FE tutor 5)

This quotation reflects Widdowson's (2003), a principal at a college with considerable number of HE in FE courses, approach to research and scholarly activity in FE colleges and as identified by Harwood and Harwood (2004): that research does not belong to the lot of the FE teacher who undertakes, 'interpretation and modification of information rather than originating research as is the case with most academic staff' (Young, 2002). This may also reflect some university HE tutors' perception of their role, depending on which element of the HE sector is being compared. The range of definitions and conceptions of research and scholarly activity (which was often used interchangeably) was wide, from general pedagogical development to an understanding of what was regarded as 'real' research,

I think there's a difference between scholarly activity and professional development. I would always see scholarly activity as being additional academic qualifications such as PGCE, Masters, MPhils, PhDs...

(HE in FE tutor 9)

The focus group of HE in FE tutors provided fruitful data on this topic.

...the idea is to keep us up to date with modern teaching.

People really doing proper research...

...it can be anything from studying a Masters degree upwards.

Yet, there was an understanding that staff teaching HE *should* be able to participate in research,

You need to be on the ball; you need to have your research behind you.

The allocation of time limited such participation,

The preparation should be a lot longer because if you're keeping up to date and you're keeping it as current as it should be, you should be doing more research...

There was a considered comment that HE staff did not appreciate the position under which FE staff were working,

They [HE staff] still can't quite get their heads round the fact that we should be doing more research, etc, but we haven't got the time... they haven't worked in this environment...they don't fully understand...

(HE in FE tutor focus group)

This revealed their perception of HE teachers and their working conditions and research activity. Again, this reveals a notion of a 'traditional' HE academic culture with time allocated for research; yet this does not reflect the experience of all university tutors and will depend on the position of the university in the HEI hierarchy and within the internal university structure itself. Furthermore, the response of this person indicated that the university lecturers in one particular partnership reflected a lack of understanding of the

lot of the FE tutor and underlined and confirmed the FE tutor's perception of a gulf between the HE in FE tutor and their counterpart in the HEI.

FE tutors looked to a collaborative and supportive relationship with the university to support developments through research and scholarly activity that then enhances the student experience. Widdowson (2003) complained that staff development support is not usually offered through formal partnership agreements. FE tutors, through the data, articulated not only their frustration at the competing demands of the curriculum and time, but also the gap in the understanding of HE staff of the environment in FE. Recent research by Feather (2010) has also identified this.

FE managers varied in their empathy with tutors' perceptions. One FE manager with responsibility for HE stated,

The research element ...is not always something that takes place in FE, has high priority in FE or is seen as part of a FE lecturer's role.

(HE in FE manager 1)

This same manager reiterated some aspects of the concerns expressed by the HE in FE tutors but with some emphasis on the differences between partnership institutions and their consequential varying environments and working conditions,

...we're talking about two differently funded organisations; two different contracts, two ways of working and I'm convinced that the state of play is that the FE lecturers still miss out. There is not that research culture; there is not an understanding of the requirement of scholarly activity...scholarly activity would be seen as extraneous to their needs... So there's a gulf ... I'm not sure how it can be met...

(HE in FE manager 1)

Awareness of the realities of partnerships is revealed,

On one level the HE institutions could apply more pressure, but at what cost? If there isn't going to be an agreement, an understanding, a recognition on the part of the FE institutions, then there will be disruption and programmes may not happen; the partnership may dissolve. ...we'll just have to muddle and make do because it doesn't work properly.

(HE in FE manager 1)

Here there is a clear identification of the reality versus the rhetoric of the position of staff in partnerships and the implementation of HE in FE and a reflection of the true additional costs to the FE teacher delivering HE in the FE environment.

This is in contrast to another HE in FE manager from a large college which may decide to apply for FD awarding powers (FDAP). This manager details the range of facilities that are open to HE teachers at the college and states that scholarly activity,

...can be anything that could be classed as professional development in its widest sense... it could be work shadowing...looking at a particular processing industry...

(HE in FE manager 2)

Nonetheless, this has a definite predisposition towards vocational or professional development, which, whilst an important element of scholarly activity for any teacher of vocational or professional HE courses, does indicate a potential limitation of the acceptability of scholarly activity outside this remit. Further to these comments, the HE in FE manager, when describing how individual teachers apply for support for masters or doctorate qualifications, revealed that applications are scrutinised and scored against the college development plan and the HE strategic objectives. Whilst this may be perceived to be a pragmatic position to hold in the face of limited

funds, the question remains that the freedom to undertake activities that lie beyond the strategic objectives of a particular institution may delineate the scope of scholarly activity for an individual. For some in HE, this would be anathema to the underpinning philosophy of individual academic freedom; another identity differentiation for those teaching HE in FE. The perception of the manager also contrasts starkly with the perception of support for scholarly activity (Harwood and Harwood, 2004) from a number of HE in FE tutors in the same college (focus group and individual interviews). This contrast was expressed succinctly by this tutor,

There is support for scholarly activity but I don't have the time.
(HE in FE tutors focus group)

This difference in perception or experience across the same college may account for the disparities between some of the accounts of time for preparation (or scholarly activity) expressed by two individual tutors as seen below,

...we don't get any research time allowed...I don't get any time to do any sort of higher qualification...Scholarly activity, I would love to have time to sit down and do some research...
(HE in FE tutor 6)

Scholarly activity is built into your college duties; for every three hours of teaching, you have an hour of preparation.
(HE in FE tutor 5)

Other tutors expressed similar experiences of lack of support for scholarly activity,

I don't have time at all to be doing my own research never mind in a scholarly fashion ... I was a senior researcher [in a previous post outside the college] and I do feel my research skills are becoming de-skilled and I'm sort of losing touch.
(HE in FE tutor 7)

Some tutors reported that, although there was some support to undertake professional development, it was offered on the same basis as those teaching FE.

There is place [for support for staff development] in college, not just specific to HE... financial support and time to do them.
(HE in FE tutor 10)

The present position of the staff is recognised by a number of tutors and the acknowledgment that they need to gain masters qualifications as a minimum and perhaps progress onto PhDs before they can engage with research or more extensive scholarly activity is recognised,

... we are a FE college...as more and more staff start to have an input into HE they need to know more about research... they will be doing some form of research whether it's a simple case study or whether they want to go onto do something for publication. ...there's no expectation for research to go on, but there are a number of members of staff who are becoming more and more research orientated...

(HE in FE tutor 5)

This revealed recognition of the present low profile of research within FE colleges both as an activity *for* FE teachers to undertake and *on* FE teachers as a subject or object of study (Page, 1997). However, there is an anticipation articulated by some tutors that research and scholarly activity will become more prominent and perhaps eventually an expectation of tutors teaching HE. Turner et al (2009) have reported on the work undertaken in the partnership in the South West of England and the positive impact on the motivation of the HE in FE staff in undertaking research. This may be a repeat of the division of FE into Advanced and Non-Advanced by Crowther post-1960 (see Richardson, 2007, p. 389) and the propulsion of the Advanced elements of FE into CATs, regional colleges and ultimately

polytechnics. A further rung in the ladder of stratification is likely to occur and one that reinforces social, economic divisions and as evidenced here, professional divisions.

FE tutors are placed at the centre of the expansion of vocational HE and, in providing courses that appeal to the 'widening participation' student, will allow the policy claims of the last government in achieving social justice, at the same time as maintaining the foundations of education and training for competition in the globalised economy. David (2010) reminds us that, under New Labour, the profile of widening participation was not regarded as a peripheral activity but an essential arm of government strategy,

Access, diversity and equity are key concepts in relation to expansion of higher education nationally and internationally and changing contexts especially labour markets and economic globalisation.

(p.5)

Whether the Coalition government's position will reflect this approach has yet to be fully revealed. Nonetheless, some, arguing from a different standpoint, claim that governments need to position their nation's economy advantageously in the global competition for knowledge workers and that the magnet economy that draws in talented and creative graduates requires the compliant, centrally controlled and self-surveilling worker to make this happen. The assumption that the proclaimed benefits of the knowledge economy feed through to the 'widening participation' students such as those in my study, are called in to question, as suggested in the interpretation of some students and staff of the location in the newly-formed HE landscape . Furthermore, Brown and Lauder (2006) have challenged the relationship

between the magnet economy and the high-skilled /high-waged workforce that this will supposedly engender; their research demonstrated that earnings are still more closely related to social, gender and racial positions rather than a meritocratic association between qualifications and earnings. The tutors in this study have revealed that they are often aware, even if not able to articulate this position directly, of the distance between the reality of the students' position and that presented through the rhetoric of widening participation and the claims of the benefits of FDs in particular.

This section has substantial significance when examining the relationship between FE and HE staff and the opportunities for HE development for those tutors in FE who are delivering HE. I identify the complications below:

1. Tutors' understandings of scholarly activity and research varies and tends to fluctuate from a definition that incorporates *any* continuing professional development (CPD) to one that regards research as something that is undertaken in *all* universities (no matter what their position in the HE stratified setting) but rarely in colleges. One influencing factor may be the definition of CPD offered by the professional institute for FE tutors, the Institute for Learning (IfL). This provides the following definition of the compulsory CPD that must be undertaken by FE tutors,

... maintaining, improving and broadening relevant knowledge and skills in your subject specialism and your teaching and training, so that it has a positive impact on practice and the learner experience.

(IfL, 2009)

This requirement is one that is emerging in the consciousness of the FE tutor and, as reflected in Cunningham and Doncaster's work (2002), there is

a growing recognition of the need for CPD and that this is extending to scholarly activity (if not research) with the increase and higher profile of HE in FE. The IfL have determined a 30 hour minimum of CPD for FE teachers; compliance is required in order to maintain job security. However, through the exhortations from human resource teams and the capacity of the IfL to monitor at the individual level, individual tutors may be succumbing to the Foucauldian (1975) notion of self-imposed discipline; in this case their fulfilment of a minimum of 30 hours of CPD. Although the IfL requirement was not cited by any tutor, the perceptions of scholarly activity came very close to the definition of CPD offered by the IfL.

2. The perceptions of managers revealed an awareness of the differentiation of a range of issues between FE and HE (and their perception of a traditional HE is highlighted here); they consider the gap between HE and FE either as a chasm or a path to pursue. One manager recognised the gap and revealed frustration (similar to that of the tutors) of the difficulties of bridging this gap; the other does not deny the gap but sees a route to improvements and a continual process of pragmatic responses to a balance between the demands from both HE and FE development needs and the limited budget.

3. There is an early indication that, although there is confusion and certainly a lack of clarity of research and scholarly activity, some colleges and individual tutors have an awareness of the need to build the capacity of those teaching HE to participate in scholarly activity and progress towards research activities.

4. The differentiation of research from scholarly activity may well further reinforce the differentiated HE landscape. As the HEA regards research as

an integral feature of teaching (Jenkins et al, 2007) and if HE in FE becomes disassociated from research, the gap between HE and HE in FE will widen.

Whilst some tutors in certain sections of HE might complain of the demands of their work in terms of teaching and research expectations, teachers in no other sector are expected to be able to teach across such a wide range of students and levels as those in FE. This was also recognised by at least one manager who expressed concern about the lack of support for HE in FE tutors but who also reflected on the reality of the relationships in a partnership; that a requirement on the part of the university to improve the position of the HE in FE tutor and allocate greater resources might result in the demise of the partnership.

The power position of the HE in FE tutors is revealed through the analysis of the data, as one that is perceived by many of the interviewees, to be one of subordination within a partnership. Within their own institutions, there is a perception of a further level of exploitation (beyond that of the FE tutor per se) in that there is an expectation of meeting the demands of HE teaching yet little support for scholarly activity, with research not recognised as being within their purview. The rhetoric of support from management and the perception of a lower position vis-à-vis HE counterparts, places the HE in FE tutor in an invidious position of maintaining the standards of HE teaching (as required through university quality and college systems) with little or no reward or recognition.

Some respondents revealed an awareness of the tensions inherent in their role as tutors in vocational education and training; they were in a position of educating students to comply with the 'skills agenda' and to facilitate access to improved job prospects, as well as incorporating what they understood to be an important aspect of education: as an emancipatory or transformational tool in a democratic society. This is an example of Marcuse's (1994) repressive tolerance; the offer of HE education with its promise of a better life, that the rhetoric promotes, becomes no more than an instrumental approach to compliance within the neo-liberal state in its pursuit to maintain the global position of the UK. Some tutors have been, seemingly, absorbed into the ideology of the globalised neo-liberal state and the position of education, whilst a few attempt to challenge where they can (for example, in determining their own professional development). HE in FE tutors may be regarded as the fulcrum of Ball's (2003) 'policy technology' exemplifying all that is typical of the FE tutor's lot of work-intensification with a lack of resources and lack of development opportunities or only those which are hard-fought.

Tutors demonstrated their appreciation that research and scholarly activity, in most cases, should be incorporated into their standard work schedule. Some offered a critique of this, whilst managers presented an acknowledged pragmatic approach ('we'll just have to muddle and make-do' (HE in FE manager)) as opposed to a rationalised approach that presented a picture of progression towards improved support for HE in FE tutors which, whilst this may be true, did not reflect the difficulties or dichotomies that tutors expressed in the focus groups and interviews. There was a disconnection

between the realities of the 'lived experience' of the tutors and their aspirations to participate in research and scholarly activity. Some tutors, however, valued the research, scholarly activity and other development opportunities, which were, in some cases, offered through the partnership. This is further developed in the next section on partnerships.

From the data and its analysis, the perspective of staff in FE colleges of their positionality in partnerships leaves a lot to be desired, both in terms of their place in the hierarchy of the academy in the partnership, and in terms of the lack of support from their own employers and recognition of the demands of HE level work. Despite these negative connotations, the majority of the staff appeared to be committed to their HE work, perhaps driven by intrinsic rewards of the work rather than an anticipation of any other kind of reward.

3. Partnerships analysis

1. Introduction

Partnerships (along with other policy tools), within the context of the last Labour government (1997-2010) were promoted as an operational means through which to achieve social integration and extend opportunities to wider communities, albeit within a restrained free market philosophy and model (Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Powell and Exworthy, 2002). This paradigm incorporated education and the post-Dearing (1997) strategies of widening participation in HE. The challenge to this approach is that it, in accepting and endorsing the free market but within a social market framework (Clegg and McNulty, 2002) government is extending policy enforcement and

compliance into many more aspects of society (Clarke and Glendinning, 2002) and, at the same time, replacing government responsibility with the self-surveillance of the individual (Cardini, 2006). Furthermore, partnerships as prime locations for the expansion of widening participation, is contested; it is, rather, a seat for the incorporation of the lower social classes given access to claimed 'social mobility' opportunities, into the agenda of the neo-market philosophy and practices of the New Labour government. It is likely that such a philosophy (if not the same agenda) will continue with the Coalition government.

This section of the analysis explores the translation of such policies that incorporated this philosophy and how it relates to the reality as perceived by the staff and students in HE in FE partnerships. The staff (both tutors and managers) were asked a range of questions about how they perceived partnerships operating in relation to the value to students, the college and to themselves.

In this section, the data is analysed in line with a critical hermeneutic approach; the relationship and interplay between the analysis of the staff and student data, and policy and structure became the basis through which answers to the research questions were developed.

The themes that initiated analysis were:

a) The role of the partnership

This theme raised the purpose of the partnership in which the tutors were involved; why were their colleges involved in partnerships? What were the objectives of partnerships? By drawing on the responses to such questions,

the policy stance of the New Labour government was tested in terms of the perception of tutors at the forefront of the implementation of the gamut of widening participation and social justice strategies and the proclaimed aim of improving HE access for 'non-traditional' individuals. Such data reveals the perception of how partnerships of HE in FE contribute to this.

b) Partnership variations: structural and cultural

The questions surrounding this theme were designed to develop data on the perception of the staff on their experience with different kinds of partnerships (where this was applicable) and differences in the modus operandi of different partnerships. This was intended to identify any differences in the way different partnerships operated in their effect on support for the tutors, how the courses were run and the relationship across the partnership in terms of regard for FE tutors.

c) Power positions

Whilst the issue of power relationships between staff in HE and those teaching HE in FE was examined in the last section, this theme considered the relationship between the university and the FE colleges party to the partnership. Essentially the question at the heart of this was that of the perceived relationship between academic and vocational programmes. Despite teaching the HE course validated by the university or, indeed, in some cases, also taught by the university, did the FE college perceive itself to be in an inferior position?

d) Capacity of FE colleges to manage HE and develop the capacity towards awarding powers.

This became a crucial element in the study that was not anticipated at the outset. It considers staff perspectives on the legislation (FE and Training Act, 2007) that now permits colleges to apply for FDAP and the emerging policy to allocate more responsibility to colleges for both awarding of higher education qualifications and, perhaps, more directly funded HE courses, as opposed to indirect funding through partnerships. FE colleges have moved towards a more independent stance since the Dearing Report in 1997; they have been acknowledged as a legitimate location for HE and they have greater confidence in their own aspirations to become responsible for HE. The focus has tended to move away from partnerships onto the capacity and the disposition of the FE colleges to awarding their own HE qualifications and moving away from dependency on universities of the provision of HE. How might the realisation of such ambitions affect the implementation of policy objectives of social justice within the context of greater autonomy of FE colleges in both teaching and awarding HE qualifications?

2. The role of the partnership

In response to the question of the role of partnerships, managers and tutors from both HE and FE alike and as identified earlier, regarded vocational progression routes for students as a major feature of partnerships. In one of the focus groups the first response to the question of the role of HE in FE partnerships was,

...we look towards more FE colleges providing progression routes into HE... a total pathway of progression.

(HE in FE managers' focus group)

Tutors also mentioned progression but this was often at a later point in the interview,

...to bring more people into HE...

(HE in FE tutor 1)

...another form of progression for the students...it is more of a stepping stone rather than going directly to the university because in some cases, some students find that it is a full-on qualification [and] quite hard...

(HE in FE tutor 2)

...to enable local students to access them [programmes].

(HE in FE tutor 10)

This was also confirmed by a HE in HE manager,

...is about progression...

(HE manager 2)

Consequently, a partnership's main advantage and role is seen in the progression opportunities afforded to students, giving access to a named university award, which, according to one tutor, was valued by students,

...the reputation of a university qualification or a university given award is very important to our students.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

This is in line with Trim's enhanced prestige attributed to a FE college from association with an HEI (2001a). One university manager also pointed to an associated prestige for the college and students, of achieving a university award. He referred to a conversation with one FE principal who stated that,

'... being associated with a university gives us more prestige than doing it ourselves'. ... she saw added value being working with the universities.

(HE manager 2)

Nonetheless, for some HE in FE tutors, there was a distinct difference in their own emphasis and understanding of this same issue. These respondents often perceived instrumental reasons that belied and underpinned the progression factors,

...it's all part of the agenda to bring more people into HE, and the money, and there's the money there, it's as simple as that ...for HE students which make up for the reduced funding for FE basically; it's a way of balancing the books.

(HE in FE tutor 4)

I think it's all down to money really...

(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

This perception reveals how some staff, as individuals, challenge the veneer of the dominant consensus of HE in FE; that it is undertaken mainly to facilitate widening participation. Such individuals are, in effect, resisting the invasion of the lifeworld of the prevailing paradigm of the expansion of HE through FE colleges and the 'commonsense' of assuming that the proclaimed statements by government, their agencies and the colleges are not rhetorical, as opposed to acting as a disguise for Habermas's (1987) erosion of the private sphere by the economic system. Some tutors (and, indeed, some of the students), through the interviews and focus groups sought an avenue to demonstrate their awareness of the underlying philosophies and paradigms that were different, and perhaps oppositional, to the ones that had been proclaimed by government. By recognising the underpinning stratagems, by 'naming' their world, they were in a better position to manoeuvre, formulate and deliver a differing position to the one imposed. Expressions of acknowledgement of 'cheaper' HE in FE were also in this vein.

Funding is an issue for all FE managers, yet this was never mentioned by any HE in FE manager, either in a focus group or within the confidentiality of a one-to-one interview. Given the overwhelming focus on funding, this was an interesting omission in both the managers' focus groups and interviews. This omission may reveal more than it conceals in that it exposes a subconscious recognition of the political difficulties of partnership funding and a rationalisation of the vocational market position of the FE colleges' policies and strategies for HE in FE. Nevertheless, this was certainly raised by one HE in HE manager. He was asked about the facility for FE colleges to award their own FDs; he was unequivocal in his judgement,

When the government idea came up it didn't surprise me; I thought I saw that as being a cheaper way of delivering HE in FE. [...] I think the government might see them as cheap labour...

(HE manager 2)

As Parry (2005) identified, many colleges did not welcome the government's shift, post-Dearing, towards structured partnerships and indirect HEFCE funding and Weil (1999) critiqued Dearing in terms of perpetuating universities' iconic position and maintaining social exclusion patterns. Here is perceptible evidence of Trim's (2001a) assertion that power will remain with the HE institution and that FE colleges may struggle to free themselves from this; additional resources would allow the FE college to lay claim to an independent position. The belief that FE colleges can fulfil a self-determining place on the new HE landscape is becoming more dominant, as is manifest in the AoC's (2010a) and 157 Group's (2010) position and their call to government to free them from their present constraints.

Another HE in FE tutor went further and identified a political agenda that would extend government control over HE.

...I've got a dreadful conspiracy theory...the government are trying to beat HE up, like they did FE and they couldn't do it through the front door so they're doing it in the back door. ...HE's been made available in FE so the government can exert some control over the universities.

(HE in FE tutor 5)

Whether this is credible or not is not germane to this particular question; the perception of this tutor is that of the extension of government technocratic power in a way that has been integrated into FE systems since FE colleges' incorporation (DES, 1992). As FE staff have succumbed to or fought a managerialist culture (Ball, 2003), this tutor projects the possibility that this is now extended to the HE that is delivered in FE. The culture of FE colleges, as cited in Beale (2004), Cope et al (2003), Goddard and Whitehead (2000) and McDonald and Lucas (2001), of performativity and managerialism is seen to be permeating HE institutions through HE in FE systems. Whilst this section revealed tutors committed to the notion of progression for students via their partnerships with universities, there was a definite undercurrent of a recognition of an instrumental approach by FE colleges in their promotion of HE for status but, more often than not, for budgetary purposes. This was supplemented by a suggestion of a neo-liberal extension of control over HE by the state that has been accomplished over FE. Such data reveal that FE tutors do not automatically and necessarily succumb to the rhetoric of government policies (Bathmaker, 2001); they interpret the policy in terms of their own experience (progression routes for students) and undertake a critical interpretation in relation to FE position with the state, and survival practices (such as the search for funding). Nevertheless, through the 'terror

of performativity' (Ball, 2003) individual tutors will find a constant strain between the requirements of the system and their own internal tensions; the 'inner conflict, in authenticity and resistance' (ibid, p. 215) that struggles to speak but normally remains hidden.

The notion that HEIs have 'allowed' FD students (through franchising and partnerships) into FECs is apparent in this tutor's comments,

They can get onto a foundation degree with a lower qualification and for a lot of students ... that's good, particularly if they're coming in to a vocational programme....we accept probably lower levels of academically qualified students...so maybe the HEIs see them as students they wouldn't have taken on in the first place.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

The partnerships, it is insinuated, are based on a perception by the HEI that the FECs can accommodate a lower-qualified student whom the HEI would probably reject. Here there are further perceptions of the notion of a lower status, of and for, vocational students and programmes. The observation may be made that this is a continuation of the approach of the polytechnics and their practices in the 1990s whereby institutions sought to expand their student numbers without the expense of capital expenditure through franchising their courses to FE colleges (Parry 2005). Further expansion of the demand from students (and their parents) for access to HE in their search for a route to improved job opportunities (Wolf, 2002) has also fuelled this growth.

3. Partnership variations: structural and cultural

There have been discourses around the type of HE in FE partnerships in terms of their structures. HEFCE (2000) made recommendations that favoured open and democratic arrangements in FE/HE partnerships but

these exhortations have been somewhat weakened with recent policy debates and proposals around University Challenge (HEFCE, 2007/07) and FDAP (DfES, 2007), which indicate a shift to greater independence for FE colleges. Partnership structures have been examined by Parry and Thompson (2007); they found that the majority of FE colleges favoured consortia arrangements, where agreements were transparent and trust was engendered. Work that I undertook in 2006 (Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher) revealed an awareness of enhanced communication systems in consortia that led to a basis of trust and improved relationships. Whilst questions referred to partnerships per se and did not specify specific forms of partnerships, there was little evidence of awareness of difference in structures but certainly evidence of awareness of differences in the *culture* of the support and the relationship with their partner universities. When questioned about the benefits of HE in FE partnerships, beyond those already cited, a strong focus was on staff development,

Staff development opportunities tend to be very good.
(HE in FE managers, focus group)

Other comments were made about the acknowledgement of the need of tutors to achieve a masters' level qualification and that some partnerships recognised this through tuition fee support,

... it's a tremendous support for developing skills and expertise and having just last year completed my MA supported by university A, I can speak from experience.
(HE in FE manager 1)

And

...development days are good because first of all the colleges, the partners are recognised and they're valued.
(HE in FE tutor 3)

Other development aspects were stated,

...it's also got something to do with excellence ... and reaching standards.

(HE in FE manager 1)

Clearly, as discussed in the earlier section on staff, FE tutors place great value on the support they received through the partnership. Partnerships can provide this much appreciated support as work by Turner et al (2009) has shown. This strengthens staff commitment and helps to support trust and improved relationships in a partnership; this may be an important factor in the future if partnerships are challenged and are seen to be superfluous to colleges seeking FDAP. Partnerships may find that if they do not explicitly identify staff support and demonstrate this through agreements, as Widdowson (2003) has called for, they may find that partnership agreements either are formed with those universities who guarantee support or colleges find the route to FDAP more attractive.

For those who had experience of two or more HE partnerships there was a differentiation between those partnerships that offered both expansive learning opportunities, as well as direct and indirect support for the operational aspects of the partnership itself. There was an appreciation, for some tutors, of the difference between certain partnerships and partnership models, and the impact that this seems to have on support for the FE partner,

University B is less well support[ing]; we seem to be left to our own devices a lot; yes, there are joint boards of study; yes, there are exam boards, but it's not as well support[ing] as university A ...I don't know if that's because one's validated, one's franchised.

(HE in FE tutor 6)

Support for operational aspects of a partnership, however, was sometimes perceived to be the equivalent to development and important to the functioning of the partnership,

...there's formal support for the moderation, sending up the study guides, assessments...they're always there, they're either at the end of an email or the end of a phone...

(HE in FE tutor 7)

The perception that the tutors are expected to operate more independently as far as development is concerned is evident here; support is limited to operational aspects rather than support for research and scholarly activity. Not surprisingly, tutor evaluation of such support was perceived to vary not only between different partnerships, but between university departments and often dependent on an individual.

I've found it's not so much the university, it's the person and once that person moves on then you have to start again to build up the relationship...

(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

In one case, tutors were concerned about a move to another partnership that did not allow tutors to contact the specific subject university department,

...it's really nice to have a person to speak to...'cos that's one thing that worries me about this move, not being able to ring someone up and say, 'What was that marking scheme again?'... I think the personal contact is really important.

(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

Interviews with two managers also raised the differences of working with various universities and, indeed, a different partnership format; one that included extensive support and the other that focussed on validation with some general networking opportunities,

...it's a tremendous network for sharing good practice, it's a tremendous support network for developing curriculum, it's a tremendous support for developing skills and expertise...
(HE in FE manager 1)

The emphasis of the HE manager from the partnership that concentrated on validation-only demonstrated the value of potential networking,

...it's not just about validation; it's about other opportunities available
(HE manager 1)

An important perspective was the reasoning behind the partnership with a particular university; other universities had refused to validate programmes,

[university x] were very clear they would only validate programmes which were areas that they already had expertise in...HEIs are very clearly divided into two halves; those that will validate outside their existing provision and those who won't.
(HE manager 1)

This presents both universities and FE colleges with an interesting dimension in terms of both present and future relationships within a partnership. For those FE colleges with potential prospects for FDAP, a validation-only route may be considered as preferential to one that is perceived to restrain and limit a FE college in its HE development; its ability to present itself to the various stakeholders of its capacity and experience in managing all aspects of HE provision may be otherwise limited. If there is little in terms of additional support, the desirability and perceived advantages of a route independent of a university become even more attractive. From a university perspective, a clear understanding of the implications for its strategic position in the future HE landscape in either partnership model needs to be considered; this will be further drawn out in the conclusions.

There was no reference to different partnership models cited in the HE in FE manager focus group, nor from the HE managers. Patterson's models of partnership arrangements now appear defunct; potential independence for FE colleges and proposals for university centres (HEFCE 2007/07) present an appealing alternative, particularly for the larger colleges. The perception of some college managers may now be more clearly centred on a disconnection from university partnership rather than the model of any partnership. For these, the prospect to extend their institutional prestige and gain a favoured place before government is opportune and, given the culture of many FE colleges, defines further inroads into FE tutors' professional independence and profile.

The tension between those FE colleges that prefer the development opportunities of a partnership can be contrasted against those who seek an independent route in order to end the partnership with FDAP. This was also evident in the data and its analysis in the next section.

4. Power positions

If partnerships are to operate in the spirit of 'participatory democracy and equality between partners' (Balloch and Taylor, 2001, p. 2), the relationship between staff and the positioning of the FE college and the university is a sensitive and fundamental one if a partnership is to flourish or even survive. FE/HE partnerships have developed, for the most part, as a result of informal or indirect policy, such as Dearing's (1997) recommendations that HE in FE should be undertaken in partnership with universities and with indirect funding from HEFCE. There have been no direct requirements for FE

colleges to partner with universities; the facilitating factor for those FE colleges who were eager to expand HE, was the access to funding through universities. The bonds of funding may, however, be broken if the FE colleges do not consider that they are being treated as equal partners and alternative arrangements are offered, as may be the case with the new Coalition government. The data gave mixed messages. Some tutors and managers were relatively sceptical about the value of the university in terms of the partnership,

...they are here to make sure that you are keeping on top of things; that you have the right marks for moderation... [otherwise] they don't get involved.

(HE in FE tutor 8)

There is some confirmation of this in an HE manager's assertion that,

I think there are more problems for the quality assurance issue of some form with passing everything across, a validation-type model and I think the university is very careful and always has been, from what I can tell, about this quality assurance and being cautious about its quality assurance.

(HE manager 2)

This reflects Smith and Betts (2003) commentary on quality arrangements in a partnership and how, ultimately, the university is responsible to the QAA for the quality assurance arrangements, including monitoring of these. Yet, the perception of robust quality procedures at universities is challenged by one tutor, who had some difficult experiences with the standards of the university,

I've read [that] the course that was validated by one of our HEIs four years ago and it was absolutely dreadful. I can't understand why it even got through the validation process in the first place and I think there's other people that would agree to that and I think there has been [an approach of]...' we are the HEI, we will validate you; you pay us the money and the students get the qualification, the kudos of a certain award'.

(HE in FE tutor 9)

Here is a clear criticism of the model of validation with little support resulting in a perception of a cynical use of both FE colleges' and students' desire to achieve HE awards. Another tutor compared the relationship between two university partnerships very differently. With one of the university partnerships, this tutor considers there to be paternalistic stance on the part of the university,

...the issue with university x is that it's very x led. Now I see that as a paternal relationship, so x say, 'We've got the knowledge and we'll share it with you.' I would like to see much more of how do we generate it together....so, if it's a true partnership then we would be proposing and be able to go to an HEI and say, 'We've got this idea, can we work with you on it?...if x agrees all the material [developed by the FE colleges], 'Oh, lucky us, we can take it and use it.' ... when you talk about partnership I think it's about opportunities to learn from both but I think in some cases HE don't view that they have anything to learn from FE.

(HE in FE tutor 3)

This same tutor was confident in her own ability as an HE tutor and regarded the role of FE in a partnership as much more than a passive recipient of the curriculum of the university,

I also think that part of our role is to challenge ivory towerism of the universities in some cases.

(ibid)

Her experience with another partnership is a very different model,

...we are developing the assessment together so there is a professional discussion and dialogue...developing course material together...

(ibid)

Yet, another tutor, making reference to the same university x, reported that,

...we don't feel like junior partners, we don't have the feeling of 'Oh, we're only FE' and 'these nice HE people are going to look after us', it's very much an equal partnership, for most of the time.

(HE in FE tutor 5)

There was, however, no further reference to the 'most of the time' and the implications of this.

There seemed to be a divide between those tutors (such as tutor 3) who were keen to participate in curriculum development activities and who wanted to be treated as an equal and take an active, perhaps lead part, in developments; and those who were content to be the recipients of a curriculum and who perceived the respective roles of the university and the FE partner as complementing each other. Yet the citations above do reveal a disparity between the claims of some partnerships and the perception of some of the tutors. When do support, resources and staff development move from being regarded as a benefit, to a negative power relationship with the FE college as the passive and grateful recipient from their HE benefactors? This could be construed as Marcuse's (1994, [1964]) repressive tolerance; a subliminal secondary and inferior position for FE is concealed within the proclamations of transparency and support.

The above analysis of the power interactions between the FE and HE players in partnerships reveals a pattern of relationships that can be found elsewhere in the constructs of esteem and status between academic and vocational educational provision,

... the academic path is the 'royal road' into higher education
against which all other pathways are compared.

(David, 2010, p. 175)

Grubb and Lazerson, (2006) reflect a North American perspective but which applies well to the UK system; the hierarchical relationship between academic and vocational that is evident in the compulsory sector has been

enforced through various attempts to establish parity of esteem in the tertiary sector. This seems to be contained in the expressions of frustration evident in some of the tutors' comments of power relationships with the HEI. There is a portrayal from some FE tutors that the programmes they teach, the positions they hold and the contributions they can make are, tacitly if not explicitly, not of the same value as those based in the university. This is perceived and highlighted by those tutors who have had previous HE experience or experiences with a range of partnership where there has been a genuine collaborative arrangement. In some cases, Vangen and Huxham's (2003) proviso of '...shared power is maximised' (p.18) in their models of trust in partnerships has not been fulfilled. Trow's (2001a) assertion that power will tend to rest with the university emerges from this data. There is the possibility that where partnerships are not operating in terms of equitable trust and power relationships, there a basis for believing that some, if not all, FE colleges will break from a partnership dependency and develop their capacity to offer and award their own HE qualifications. The next question examines this.

5. Capacity of FE colleges to manage HE and develop the capacity towards awarding powers

FE colleges have had some considerable experience in delivering HE and their response to the Dearing report in 1997 was to express disquiet at the limitations of indirect funding through partnerships (Parry, 2005). Concerns about quality in FE franchises (Hilborne, 1996) were to be allayed through incentives to form consortia and partnership arrangements and, since 2007, the IQER (QAA, 2006) of HE provision in FE colleges have been scrutinised

by the QAA themselves. What did the staff think about the partnerships in which they were involved in light of the possibility of their college becoming independent of the university?

Some managers voiced a concern about expectations of some tutors and their perception of the FE college's capacity to cope with HE systems. One manager in a large college with substantial HE commented on this and how the college recognised that the effective management of the operational aspects were important, particularly at the outset of a partnership, and that it was an aspect that needed to be managed by the university itself.

...what people tend to think is that they want is a very minimal intervention model and believe that they have the knowledge, the skill, the systems and procedures and all that goes with it to manage those operations well and sometimes that's not true. Sometimes their own assessment of themselves is over-generous and they need more support, in the interest only of making sure students get a fair crack ... it's never good to promise all kinds of freedoms of opportunities if in fact that are not available or are not going to be in the interests of the learner.

(HE in FE manager 2)

The manager, within the confidential environment of an interview, was prepared to reveal a concern about the capacity of the FE college to manage HE and assert that the interests of the learner should be recognised and prioritised above the perceived esteem for the FE college in delivering HE.

Another manager based in FE commented on the lack of resources,

...the extent that we are resourced to deliver effectively HE work is questionable...

(HE in FE manager 1)

Tutors varied in their thoughts on FE and its capacity to cope with HE provision outside a partnership.

I think our first partnership was pretty easy for us because we just got on with it because I don't think the people concerned really knew much about foundation degrees, which was great, so we certainly had flexibility to design our courses entirely around employers. ...there's been a bit of an issue with the new partners because we have less flexibility and I enjoyed the flexibility because I think we know our market better than maybe the universities do.

(HE in FE tutor, focus group)

Here was a clear expression of the value of the FE role in a partnership; that they have subject expertise and relationships with employers that universities do not always have. Interestingly, this was rejected by one of the HE managers; he identified, however, that his experience may be exceptional because of the work undertaken by the University Business School,

Maybe it's because we're in business, the Business School; maybe it's different from that point of view.

(HE manager 2)

If FE colleges perceive an advantage over universities in their relationships with employers and a shift in government policy towards favouring employer-determined courses, this could be another factor in weighing the benefits and costs of applying for FDAP.

A further concern was expressed about the tensions that may appear between the HE and FE elements within a college in relation to both operational and cultural factors,

...a lot of change needs to take place in both culture and structure and functions in order to accommodate HE operations...because a lot of colleges have big FE operations and a bit of HE here.

(HE in FE manager 2)

This was reflected by Bathmaker (2010) who found that in dual sector institutions (that is, institutions with both HE and FE), the boundaries between HE and FE were maintained in some structures,

Both spatial and knowledge boundaries [...] may be as strongly maintained in a dual sector setting as they are in separate institutions.

(Bathmaker, 2010, p. 94)

This raised the issue of the problem of the possible institutional and cultural separation of HE and FE as perceived by tutors; should HE be treated differently to reproduce the facilities, conditions and services offered in HEIs, or should there be a structure and culture of merging of the two with the perceived benefits, as identified in Bathmaker's work? This was also reflected in other comments made by tutors when addressing the question of staff support within FE colleges. This question laid the foundation for a later question on FDAP. If tutors and HE managers considered that there were issues of concern in the capacity of FE to manage HE, then this will impact directly on FDAP and the expansion of HE provision in FE. Introduced through the FE and Training Act (2007), the initial stages of FE colleges laying claim to their own awarding powers for FDs have been slow to date. A limited number of large FE colleges with extensive HE provision (classified as 'mixed economy' colleges) have applied and are progressing through the QAA procedures. The hesitation that can be evidenced at a national level was reflected in responses from FE staff. Some FE tutors expressed concern and doubt about their college undertaking the FDAP route,

...I don't believe that the institution in which I work has either the credibility as a brand, or more importantly, the rigour of process really to take an objective external perspective of its own delivery...[it's] so financially driven...

(HE in FE tutor 4)

At the moment I don't think [that] FE colleges have the necessary expertise to go on their own because we haven't got the breadth and depth of knowledge that university staff have [and who have] been doing these course for decades...the government [is] trying to make it cheaper but ... we're not ready yet.

(HE in FE tutor 6)

It is to be noted that this college where both tutors work, is considering applying for such powers. For some tutors, a more pragmatic approach was taken,

I think initially it does sound like risky business...However, it may actually lead to the professionalisation of HE in colleges... I do think there's a transition period and that risk period...

(HE in FE tutor 7)

This was exemplified in the HE in FE managers' focus group, which considered the size of the college as a determining factor,

...we're too small...

...I think for some of the bigger colleges it's a really sensible thing to do.

(HE in FE managers' focus group)

There was the expression of the realisation of the demands on FDAP,

There's no great experience of curriculum development...taking other people away from teaching ... [staff] haven't taught at that level ...and need to work through all the processes...

(HE in FE managers' focus group)

Quality systems were perceived to be a drawback for one tutor,

From a college perspective I should see it as a good thing because obviously they'll have independence; but, personally I have reservations as to the quality of the programmes being maintained, the standards being maintained...you've got to be careful [that] it is not diluted in colleges.

(HE in FE tutor 10)

This indicates a *present* concern about the quality systems of the college and calls into question the ethical position of the college which seems to be prepared to seek a perceived benefit in its independent status, yet doubt is cast on its ability to achieve the resulting role in maintaining standards. If FE colleges are to stake a claim in the territory of HE validation and awarding powers they will need to convince their own staff as well as the QAA that they have the capacity and the track record to undertake this.

The first element of the question on partnerships highlights the purpose of FE/HE partnerships in the policy context of the last government. The position of such partnerships has shifted not only over the term of the New Labour government but a distinct movement is already perceptible in the new Coalition government. Just as partnerships seemed to acquire a heightened profile in the widening participation agenda at the beginning of the last decade, so they have now apparently regressed in policy profile to a potential backwater; some FE colleges (particularly the larger colleges) are beginning to position themselves as contenders for greater independence from universities (AoC, 2010a; Parry, 2010). From the analysis in this section, the germs of this shift are already apparent. Nonetheless, FE colleges do not seem to have convinced all of their staff of their readiness for this move. There was a perception on the part of some of the tutors that there is a pre-disposition of colleges to prioritise financial matters to the detriment of quality and standards. Furthermore, there was a questioning by some of FE potential and capacity to operate FDAP, although some tutors considered that in the long run FE colleges would be able to demonstrate their capacity, particularly if they were larger colleges. Other tutors and managers had

experience of a range of curriculum development within partnerships where the HEI took a validation-only strategy, or who had no experience of the particular curriculum. The college, therefore, undertook the responsibility for the curriculum development with little or no support from the university. The partnership arrangements in these cases were limited and on occasions, challenged by tutors as to their value. This identifies a potential variation in strategic approaches for colleges towards the provision of HE on an independent basis as opposed to a partnership arrangement; a developmental route with support from the HEI with the potential for an elimination of the partnership at a later date; or a speedier, more direct but riskier route to FDAP.

A concern with an instrumental approach of FECs was expressed and this led tutors to a concern over the future possibility of FDAP as a viable project in FE colleges. As anticipated from a critical hermeneutical perspective, some of the individual tutors and managers drew on their often similar experiences and contexts but interpreted these differently. For example, some tutors considered the progression to FDAP as realistic and achievable in the medium term, whereas others viewed this as another aspect of colleges' instrumental and marketised approach to the provision of education and training. This revealed an understanding on the part of some tutors of the tension and contradictions between the proposed objectives, the rhetoric that often surrounds these and their lived realities in terms of their perception of their experience. Such staff struggle with their acceptance of a notion and practices that they recognise are not about the ends of education, but more about the means; this places them in a potentially difficult position where they

may be subjected to 'the manipulative compulsions of technical-operational administration' (Habermas, 1970, p. 107). The perception of some tutors is that the managerial culture that predominates in many FE colleges has absorbed the neo-liberal approach to education and some tutors believe this is now extending to HE, be that HE in FE or even HE itself.

The tensions of the potential of FECs moving away from partnerships as they aspire to independent HE provision, initially with FDAP, is revealed in the data on support for development within a partnership. Although some individuals recognised and valued the development opportunities they personally received within a partnership, there was a perception that the relationship was (for some) patronising rather than liberating but that ultimately, the opportunities for development, whether on operational or curriculum matters could lay the basis for an independent status, free from the ties of a partnership. Some tutors expressed concern about the cultural differences emerging between HE in FE tutors and those teaching only FE, within a dual institution, and whether this offers an improved service to students. This reflects Bathmaker's (2010) findings in dual institutions.

Quality assurance systems and monitoring of standards were seen by some as a way of compensating for FECs' overriding obsession with funding and that the FECs were not to be trusted without some kind of external check or at least an external reference point. There is an acceptance that one factor in the pressure for FE colleges to attain awarding powers is the cheaper provision that would be expected from HE in FE, which has been acknowledged by HEFCE (2003; 2007/07) and, more recently, by Willetts

(2010) in a shift to a consideration of externally-awarded degrees by FE in the model of external London University degrees. This latest proposal may be akin to offering FECs the opportunity to access prestigious universities on a distance learning basis if they wanted to offer traditional degrees for those students who could not afford the higher tuition fees and the living costs,

Elite universities [... who] lent their names to correspondence programs promoted as a chance for the average person to get an elite education.

(Etherington, 2008, p.46)

The move to change the HE landscape could have a fundamental effect on HE in FE partnerships and this will be considered further in the concluding chapter. There are indications that partnerships are extending government policy and encapsulating both FE and HE into the marketised model of education. The paradigm of the market economy has metamorphosed into the culture and the lifeworld of the participants in education (Apple, 2005) such that, although some individuals recognised and were prepared to discuss their concerns within the confines of the interviews, little is played out at a formal level or in any engagement with government agencies or managers. This reflects the culture of managerialism as identified in chapter four as well as the hegemony of the discourse of neo-liberalism which seems set to continue with the Coalition government.

Partnerships have played a role, in effect, of preparing FE colleges for a transition into a further differentiated HE sector with the opportunity to apply for the awarding of FD powers and, ultimately, other undergraduate awards. The differentiated HE sector could become further stratified; this will be modelled in the concluding chapter. This differentiated sector has embedded

within it the structural limitations for 'non-traditional' students that have been identified in the literature and endorsed in the data analysis of staff and students' perceptions of their experience of HE in FE partnerships (see for example, David, 2010).

In upholding a differentiated HE system, partnerships have maintained individuals be they staff or students and suggest that the confines of the present mode of alignment of social class to certain types of HE.

Proclamations have been made in the policy rhetoric of government that HE in FE, including those partnerships that support HE in FE, operate to improve social justice by facilitating access to HE for those who have previously been excluded and who, at the same time, will provide the intermediate skill level that is said to be needed by employers. The analysis in this study has demonstrated that, although many of the students recognise the benefits of achieving a FD in terms of potential job applications and at a personal, even transformational level, they also acknowledged the limitations of a FD compared to a 'traditional' academic degree; it can be regarded as a 'brand' of HE that signals that they have not been successful in accessing HE through the normal channels and a degree that is associated with a vocational, subordinate route mainly for 'non-traditional' students. Consequently, partnerships of HE in FE unwittingly help to further construct and maintain a subordinate route for vocational education and the students who follow this route. The role of partnerships as a factor in improving social justice through improved access to HE is further analysed in the concluding chapter.

Despite the expansion of educational opportunities and some diversification in the student profile in HE generally (mainly through the increase in the proportion of females and certain ethnic-minority students (Parry, 2010, p. 32), there is a recognition that,

...these policies have not led to fair or equal access to equal types of higher education that may lead to equal benefits in the graduate or professional labour markets.

(David, 2010, p. 163)

This is a damning indictment of the attempts of government to widen participation on the grounds of social justice as well as economic imperatives and which results in neither objective being achieved.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

HE in FE partnerships: the potential for emancipatory change?

In drawing together the analyses of the data, this last chapter presents the conclusions of whether HE in FE partnerships are a 'force for good' in promoting genuine opportunities for those students previously denied access to HE through structural barriers, or, even if indirectly, they underline and reinforce the emerging stratification of the new HE landscape.

Models of the emerging HE landscape are produced and the placement of partnerships is identified. The role of the New Labour government is highlighted and how its policy of widening participation is impacting on the HE and FE sectors. The value of using critical hermeneutics is investigated. Finally, a projection is made around the position of the new Coalition government and a reflection on future possibilities is made.

1. Role of Partnerships

Partnerships of HE in FE are assumed to play a part in the extension of opportunities for those students previously denied access through the structural limitations and, thereby, to contribute to widening participation policies and practices. This study has shown that the claims of the role of partnerships between FE and HE are not what they seem. The initial developments of HE in FE partnerships were, in the main, focused on extending and enhancing progression for mainly local students who were pursuing specific professional or vocational routes, with the addition of a widening participation remit in more recent years. The widening participation

paradigm has, rather, been imposed by a government (that is, the New Labour government (1997-2010)), that has proclaimed the objective of social justice and enhanced social mobility via education, whilst disguising its main objective of the establishment of a neo-liberal, market society as a central feature and cornerstone of the 'modernised' Britain. The field of FE/HE partnerships over the last decade or so has been located within a high profile of government policy and strategy for the delivery of a neo-liberal framework with a veneer of social justice that conveys support for and from a wider range of the population. This latter objective is, according to Hall (2005), the price that New Labour had to pay in order to achieve its primary target of a fundamental conversion to a market economy and society. It is this that underpins the focus of policy on HE in FE partnerships and related widening participation strategies. As Parry (2010) points out,

Government policies to reduce the disparities in participation between social groups in English higher education are emphatic, ambitious and contentious.

(p. 31)

Whilst partnerships were not initially established solely, or even mainly, to achieve widening participation (Parry and Thompson, 2002), the intensity of the New Labour government's (1997-2010) focus on social justice and improved national economic standing through an assumed relationship between qualifications, skills and social mobility, shifted the focus of policies towards structures that were assumed to support such policy objectives. Yet, voices from FE itself and some observers (such as Parry) expressed concern that FE colleges were not to be allowed autonomy in regard to HE provision; these were ignored and the hegemonic relationship of university over FE

was presumed. Whilst HEFCE (2000) developed codes of practice and guidelines for partnership structures that would engender open, equitable and transparent *modus operandi*, the experiences of many of the FE tutors in partnerships in this study, revealed that, despite what might have been well-meaning intentions, FE was held in an assumed subsidiary position. Such experiences of the permutations of dealing with the vagaries of differing cultures and the negative aspects of power relationships in some partnerships, have, no doubt, supported demands to government, particularly by the AoC and the 157 Group, to free colleges from the restraints of university-led partnerships and to give them awarding powers. In addition, some FE colleges have developed a confidence in their (institutional) ability to develop, teach, administer and award their own HE qualifications. The seeds of the decline, if not destruction of partnerships, at least in their present forms, can be identified here.

If partnerships are under threat from FDAP if and when these become increasingly accredited in the larger FE colleges and replace the validation element of a partnership relationship, it is not evident that FE colleges will be able to demonstrate the range of skills, knowledge, resources and systems that will allow them to operate a fully fledged HE provision. Nonetheless, many of the present FE partners are developing these attributes under the partnership system. As a consequence, partnerships may be in a position of developing those very skills and experience that FE colleges need to break from their perceived paternal masters and establish rival provision to the post-92 universities who tend to attract the 'non-traditional' students and resulting in further fragmentation of the sector and consolidating the

hierarchy of HE provision. Whether this will be to the loss of the students is a moot point; students may be able to take their FD and even a full honours degree at their local FE college but they may find that their future prospects are limited by their association with an HE brand at the lower echelons of the HE hierarchy. Alternatively, the boundaries between post-92 universities and FE colleges may be reduced and such universities may find a further extension of Ainley's FE in HE syndrome (2000; 2005), with a greater emphasis on outcomes, employability skill development and teaching-only as opposed to research institutions. The social position of students is unlikely to be changed; social mobility may be accessible to a limited few, but the majority are being steered towards a channel of progression and experience that was initiated at a very early age in their life-experience and is endemic in the English system. Although further opportunities for students may be endorsed as appropriate, the present development of HE in FE and partnerships seem to confirm the present trend of further differentiating the hierarchical nature of HE provision. Just as Ainley (1998) identified the position of polytechnics and Crosland's (the Minister of Education in 1965) objective, as generating and sustaining,

... a simplified opposition between academicism and vocationalism, education and training, cultural knowledge and occupational competence.

(ibid, p. 145)

rather than providing a 'higher education for all' (ibid, p. 145), perhaps the same criticism can be made of HE in FE partnerships. Partnerships can be seen to be contributing to the maintenance and deepening of a stratified HE sector. In this, students demonstrate an understanding of their position within this structure and their personal situation vis-a-vis

both personal intellectual development and their place in career opportunities. Nonetheless, the existence of partnerships themselves does not necessarily determine either the HE structure or the learners' positions within this. Indeed, most students are not aware of the partnership; rather, partnerships *underline* the developing structuration and stratification of the emerging HE landscape. If partnerships did not exist (and the possibility of their decline or at least a reformation around smaller FE colleges with no direct HEFCE numbers is in view) changes in the HE sector are still likely to emerge under the Coalition government. The indications of further direct HE funding to a cheaper model of short-term and mainly vocational courses in FE is emerging.

For those in HE who are committed to partnerships, concern has been expressed that universities that may be in a difficult funding position and constrained in terms of their allocation of HEFCE numbers and may decide to withdraw from partnership provision (Tunbridge, 2009). Alternatively, they might accept that the configuration and landscape of HE is changing radically and their objective is to find their 'niche' and structure their provision accordingly. This shift in the HE landscape may result in the profile of the remaining partnerships changing; smaller FE colleges, unable to attain FDAP and wishing to offer HE, may opt to maintain the status and prestige of being attached to a university, rather than a FE college. Nevertheless, their position will not be enhanced in terms of the hegemony of the university. Theirs will be a clearly subsidiary position; unable to obtain FDAP and dependent on the university for their awarding powers.

As a consequence of the shifting of policy, economic and structural factors, the models of partnerships themselves may be in the process of changing. Present models vary from a ‘hands-off’ validation-only model to one of nurturing FE staff in their scholarly activities and close monitoring of quality. Models may include one or more of the following features (see below). This table attempts to draw out the range of models in partnerships along with some of their distinguishing features.

Table 2. Model of Partnerships.

Relationship	Validation-only with university devised curriculum	London University External Awards	Validation with ‘layers’ of networking offered	Consortia	Validation with college-only curriculum development
Features	Hands-off approach. Essential monitoring as required for QA. University devises the curriculum	Curriculum devised and awarded by London University. QA controlled by London University. Delivery and support by Affiliate institutions.	Limited networking opportunities provided through the partnership. May be shared curriculum development across the university and the colleges	QA and curriculum controlled through university but consultation across partnership + some shared developments. Resources controlled by consortium. Scholarly and professional development opportunities	Validated by university but development undertaken by the FE college. Networking may be available but left to the colleges (or may be only single colleges)

One feature does not automatically subsume another. For example, it is possible for a partnership to be based on a group of colleges developing a curriculum with no support from the university, with validation services from the university and no or little networking opportunities provided by the university. Within this model there is a tension between those partnerships that are very much ‘hands-off’, whereby the university merely validates and takes a ‘light-touch’ approach, and those that provide genuine collaboration and networking opportunities. As the data from the FE tutors suggests, true

and authentic partnerships provide open and supportive dialogue across the partnership (as opposed to a stance of dominance on the part of the HEI) but this does not seem to be the norm. Universities tend to maintain their power position, resulting in a confirmation, as perceived by the FE agents, of their inferior role both as a sector and as teachers of HE in FE.

Despite the recognition of the power relationship in HE in FE partnerships and the attempt by HEFCE (2000) to shift the balance towards FE through recommendations of consortia as an approved form of partnership structure, very few partnerships have actually adopted this. Partnerships that ensure transparency and maintain trust between partners have been recognised as being successful and the preferred model for FE partners; this was endorsed by Parry and Thompson (2007) and in the studies that I undertook in 2004 (Robinson and Burrows) and 2006 (Robinson and Hammersley-Fletcher). With the policy shift to University Centres (HEFCE, 2007/07) and, with the new government indicating that FE colleges will be given greater freedom to award their own HE qualifications, a change is likely to emerge. This shift of focus to the duality of provision in institutions and, in particular, of the FE sector in providing both FE and HE provision will impact on the further differentiation and stratification of HE provision nationally. Furthermore, as colleges with FDAP powers can make awards to other FE colleges, the move to a HE in FE partnership, led by a large 'mixed economy' FE college, becomes both conceivable and achievable. These would then form a further competitor for those universities involved in partnerships.

Additionally, the present minister for HE, David Willetts, has proposed that FE colleges may want to consider offering a range of degrees on the model of the London University External system. Willetts has stated,

This could, for example, help FE colleges looking to improve their higher education range and their progression routes. It's how they could continue to offer degrees should university partners move their provision back on campus. And, just as I previously worked on supply-side reform for schools, I am keen to see new higher education institutions: the experience of other countries suggests that non-traditional higher education institutions can widen participation, reduce costs and raise standards.

(Willetts, 2010)

This presses the development of the field of HE further and could result in a further change to the HE landscape and is modelled below.

1. The HE landscape and partnerships.

Given moves to greater independence for FE colleges from universities and potential validation powers, the growth of HEFCE numbers in FE, and the interest in vocational provision at HE level in a constrained economic environment, the future landscape of HE may look something akin to the following:

Table 3. The HE landscape

Russell group (elite universities)	Other HEIs claiming high-status in league tables particularly those associated with research profiles and income e.g. 1994 Group	Other Post-92 HEIs	Recently accredited universities (e.g. Winchester, Chester, York St John, Bolton Institute)	FE University Centres within large FE colleges (e.g. Newcastle, Blackburn, Blackpool, Bradford, Grimsby Institute, Hull, Worcester, Manchester) including dual institutions	HE in FE partnerships (across the range) particularly for those small colleges who do not have the infrastructure or expertise to develop HE qualifications	External University Awards Delivered by the FE colleges but validated directly by a university (but not on a partnership basis). See Willett, 2010
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Although there are further ‘fine-grained ... nuances between and within institutions of higher education...’ (David, 2010, p. 9), these categories identify patterns and can help to analyse the increasingly differentiated sector and how partnerships contribute to this phenomenon. Colleges are now, as Parry (2005) has identified, ‘lay[ing] claim to a specific level or type of undergraduate education and mak[ing] that their own’ (p.1). More recently, Parry has highlighted that FE colleges,

Despite [their] elevation to high policy, ... have still to be widely accepted as normal and necessary locations for higher education.
(Parry, 2010, p. 44)

This model will allow FE colleges to stake their claim to an independent element in HE but as a distinct and separate curriculum and type of HE. In some respects this could mean a closer alignment with the USA system where 40 per cent of the HE institutions (mainly Community Colleges) offer two year degree courses, and attract those students who have not achieved satisfactory grades or cannot afford the fees and maintenance of the longer and higher-priced universities. Such college graduates still inherit a debt at

the end of their studies but with fairly low paid jobs; 40 per cent report they do not need a degree for the work they are doing (Perucci and Wysong, 1999). Furthermore, their conclusion is similar to the conclusions of a number of observers of HE in FE and the expansion of HE generally in England, that,

The [American] educational system operates in a way that reproduces the existing structure of inequality in the larger society.
(ibid, p.889)

Universities which are in the higher echelons of the HE structure will work to protect themselves and preserve their position. This will be feasible as they tend to have greater resources than many of the post-92 universities. The elite universities will be able to protect themselves from the worst elements and negative effects of the consumerist paradigm that has emerged in HE (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, may be in a position to charge higher fees (if permitted) and, in conjunction with their international and postgraduate fees, be independent of HEFCE support. The post-92 institution, on the other hand, with higher levels of 'non-traditional' students could experience a reduction in perceived academic capital and, in its place, a relationship with students based on an expectation of an exchange of tuition fees for a qualification that will at least provide access to jobs above the unskilled and semi-skilled that previously was open to them.

2. Staff in Partnerships.

The staff involved in HE in FE partnerships who were interviewed confirmed the value of the partnership in bringing the provision closer to communities and potential vocational HE students. Their primary consideration was for the students to be seen to be either welcomed as new students or through progression within the college. This reflects and confirms other work on HE in FE and the pre-disposition of FE staff and their self-perception of their role in providing access and their commitment to the students above research and scholarly activity (for example, Cunningham and Doncaster, 2002; Harwood and Harwood, 2004; Hughes, 2005; Page, 1997; Parry, 1999; Young, 2002, Widdowson, 2003). Yet, there was a clear identification of the perceived limitation of their role in partnerships. Whether tutors accepted their secondary position, or railed against the subsidiary influence on curriculum, staff development and limited time for scholarly activity, their understanding was the same; they were not regarded as the equals of their university colleagues. This will not be perceived as a barrier to application for FDAP for FE managers; the momentum and drivers of prestige, funding and government policy will ensure that FDAP and university status, where possible, will be embraced. The relationship from a FE perspective can be perceived to be often a paternalistic bond rather than a democratic, mutually supportive and enhancing association. The philosophy of the consortium arrangements as envisaged by HEFCE in 2000 does not seem to have materialised to any great extent. The paradigm of openness and transparency leading to trust and a shared, reciprocal basis for the working of partnerships has not come to fruition, revealing a deep-seated disjuncture between the rhetoric of partnerships and the reality for the actors. Even

within consortia arrangements, there may be a perception of the hegemonic relationship between the university and the FEC.

Staff, in acknowledging the difficulties that many students were experiencing with the academic demands of the FD and the additional support that was required, could be accused of maintaining the construction of such students as limited by their prior experience (Dunne and Gazeley, 2008) rather than supporting an emerging self-aware individual. This is contrary to Hocking et al's (2010) findings of HE teachers who '...distanced themselves from the deficit view of 'non-traditional' student.' (p. 101). Yet, some staff were aware of this dilemma and offered analyses that demonstrated a critical understanding of their position and that of their students. The individual staff member who is involved in supporting or teaching widening participation students may find themselves faced with living with the contradictions of contributing to the maintenance of inequalities and, at the same time, focus on the opportunities that education can give to such students as individuals. Staff have learned to accommodate the contradictions of their position; the problematic nature of individual agency versus structural limitations and the potential of educational opportunities is one with which they live. Belief in individual agency and a commitment to student support overcomes their awareness of social structures that have limited students' progress in the past and may continue to do so in the future. For some staff the dilemma is not one that is recognised; for others, the reckoning of social construction is apparent to them, even if the responses are not. As the landscape of HE changes, further work on the perceptions of tutors in FE would be useful to examine how they are adapting to a position

in the developing HE structure and the implications for a differentiated experience.

3. Students.

Many students were either unaware of a partnership with a university or considered it to be relatively less pertinent to them compared to the role of the FE college. Nevertheless, there was a clear distinction between the perception of some students who were aware of the implications of undertaking a degree in a FE institution as opposed to attending the awarding university itself and those who were more focused on the accessibility of the FE college and the preference of an environment that was more user-friendly to students. Drawing on the results of the data analysis, the difference between the younger, full-time students and the older, part-time students is highlighted here. Those who may regard themselves as students accessing the open job market and, therefore, competing against graduates from universities, recognise the FE course provision as a possible disadvantage. For those who are undertaking a degree that is closely aligned to a specific vocation this is not so great a problem; where the degree is part-time, it is undertaken alongside work placement or a permanent work position and the relationship between study and its value to work is generally understood and valued. There is a tension between the understanding of these students that the requirement to undertake a degree is an expression of a credentialised system that has imposed a further burden on them that does not necessarily improve their ability to enhance their work function (although personal expansive and transformational learning was highlighted), and the opportunities for further individual and work enhancement. Yet both

sets of students, whether part-time or full-time, older or younger have become entrenched into the stratified HE system. These particular students (and staff) demonstrated that they had an insight into the individual agency/structural interface of the HE in FE landscape and that they could present a critical awareness of the perceived value of the FD they were undertaking and its relationship with other degrees as well as (for some) their stated social position. Nonetheless, the main message that came from both such students was that they did, in the main, value their HE experience and that the partnership between HE and FE had offered an opportunity for them to take advantage of HE. In this respect, partnerships *have* supported individuals and widened participation to education at HE level. Here is the opportunity for a real application and extension of social justice and widening participation. If, in recognising the real, lived position of the FE tutor and the HE in FE student, staff from both sides of the 'divide' were to work together on an equal, reciprocal basis and recognise the strengths of their particular roles, a force for change that is in student interests could be developed.

In the literature, social class and other disadvantages (although class to a greater extent than gender and ethnic minority considerations (Parry, 2010)) still remain a phenomenon that need to be recognised; authors such as Avis (2006a) and Reay et al (2001) have recognised this in terms of social inequalities in education. Whilst agency may offer some individuals opportunities to access possibilities of social mobility, the literature as cited and potentially for some of the students in this study, indicate that structural social inequalities are a factor in limiting and defining individuals' identity and mobility. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), in considering health and social

indicators (including education), have found a clear link between inequality (rather than average level of income) and low achievement and a range of associated problems. The UK and the USA have been identified as the most unequal societies amongst the wealthy nations (that is, excluding developing countries [Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009]) and also experiencing some of the great and seemingly entrenched and intractable social and educational problems. Various reports and policy statements claim the need to resolve these problems and offer proposals for resolution to such problems (see for example, the Milburn Report, 2009, on social mobility and access to the professions; the Harris Report, 2010). Yet the resolutions rarely attribute either the problem or its solution to the fundamental dilemma of social inequality. In fact, there is an argument that merely disguising the real problem through strategies to 'encourage' the academically-advantaged to apply for the selective universities exacerbates the problem in two ways. One is that, in not recognising the base-line problem, the state and individuals will continue to focus their energy on avenues that will maintain the inequalities and perhaps even aggravate the divisions in society; those who can overcome their social/structural limitations may find their 'salvation' in a degree from a high-status university and a greater potential to access higher paid and higher esteem careers but the 'remainder' will be locked into low-status and low-waged work or part-time, temporary unemployability/unemployment. Secondly, those who gain access to HE from the lower socio-economic groupings are predisposed to attend post-1992 universities or FE colleges (Reay et al, 2009). These sentiments are expressed by some of the students, and particularly by younger students who may have preferred to attend a 'proper' university, as well as employers, as

second-best courses in second-best institutions. The reality of the recipients belies the rhetoric; they continue in the identity of the 'failed' student on the 'failed course' (Bowers-Brown, 2006) with an horizon of a proportionately and absolute greater debt burden (Callender, 2002; Guardian, 2003, cited in Bowers-Brown, 2006), with a greater propensity for lower salaries and lower social esteem, when compared to those who attend an elite university.

4. Foundation degree students and staff: Positioning of HE students within the increasingly differentiated HE framework.

There is a likelihood that FDs will become the accepted route for work-based HE qualifications if the findings of FDF (Callender et al, 2010; Yorke and Longden, 2010) that employers are prepared to provide financial support to their employees undertaking a FD become the norm. If employers are persuaded of the values of FDs that are distinctly related to their business this could well become an accepted element of an employee's conditions of service as well as an expectation on the part of the employee themselves. This clearly applies to mainly part-time students who are undertaking their work-placements with an employer where they were employed prior to their studies. Such student-workers could approach HE with an expectation that their job prospects may be improved and with it, prospects of social mobility (although whether this is the case is disputed). The example of the FD courses taken by Learning Support Assistants with hopes of becoming teachers is one evidenced; yet this contradicts the main purpose of FDs in supplying an intermediate workforce rather than a route to a full professional qualification.

The position of full-time students is somewhat different, as became apparent in this research. Some of them have developed an understanding of their position in the HE differentiated landscape and expressed concern about their future. Research on graduates (as opposed to students, particularly those classified as 'widening participation' students) has revealed that they have greater awareness of the differentiated nature of the HE sector and that, for some, having chosen a post-1992 university, has given them '... a hang-up about having a degree from a post-92 university' (Brooks and Everett, 2008, p. 251). These students have come to a realisation that gaining a postgraduate qualification is seen as the new benchmark, particularly in the globalised economy; the postgraduate qualification is the new minimum standard imposed upon graduates. Little (1997) in critiquing Dore's (1979) work on 'The Diploma Disease', cites Dore's criticism of societies' seeming fixation with certification as a pathway to national predominance and that this has become 'a pathology of societies', (Little, 1997, p. 7). For the individual, this has become a rational pursuit,

If the pursuit of certificates is the socially legitimate way to improve one's life chances in a society where resources are scarce and income and status differences great, then it is highly rational for individuals and their families to engage in their pursuit.

Little, 1997, p. 7)

For Little and for Dore the criticism is against society, not the individual. This has a similar resonance for most of the full-time FD students in this study; they understand that they are further differentiated by undertaking their qualification in a FE college rather than a university and by taking a FD. Some have come to realise that the perceived educational difference between themselves and other students (and particularly those graduating from elite universities) has not improved compared to their position as

previously perceived disadvantaged position. Relatively speaking, there has been little improvement for such students; they are locked into a structure that allows them some scope for movement but one that will not challenge and, indeed, facilitates the maintenance of hierarchies that underpin various life opportunities. Through a combination of a 'highly individualised process, associated with a considerable self-surveillance...' (Brooks and Everett, 2008, p. 250) and a desire to better themselves (whether this is the notion of economic betterment or a search for the identity of self through education), it seems that some of the FD students have inadvertently endorsed and become integrated into the credentialised but now normalised pattern of entry into HE. Partnerships of HE in FE have played their part; cast within this differentiated and 'streamed' sector, students have taken advantage of those HE opportunities that have been more accessible to them. Furthermore, there is evidence within dual institutions that some colleges are using FDs to *stream* students against those deemed to be 'bright' enough to undertake a full degree, as opposed to guiding students onto an alternative appropriate course and thereby revealing a further endorsement of the stratification of the HE field (Bathmaker, 2010). FD students seem set to be streamed by course, HE institution and by FE colleges; situated educationally this does little to support social mobility. Moreover, it is to be noted that work already undertaken in the field of teaching and learning assistants by Wilson et al (2007) shows that a substantial proportion (41 per cent) of graduates reported that they had not experienced any additional opportunities as a result of their achievement of a FD. Further work on a range of FD students and their 'success' in positioning themselves in the job market more widely and over an extended time period

would be a contribution to the field and would test whether limitations as identified here were apparent. Work being presently undertaken by Callender et al (2010) will contribute to this. Further work on HE in FE students' identity from a critical perspective and one that allows the perception of the students themselves to be expressed should be undertaken. A focus on younger students, who might be potential applicants for university-based HE, as opposed to the mature students who have traditionally regarded FE as their 'second chance', would be of value in exposing the developing relationship between FDs, the structure of HE and individual identity and potentially, social position.

There is evidence to suggest in this study that not all partnerships have presented themselves as educational partners that will provide a transparent and open relationship that can lead to genuine spaces for staff to work on a basis of mutual respect. Given the present political and economic climate and the pressures from college managers to raise their aspirations to awarding their own HE qualifications, partnerships are likely to find themselves in the backwater of policy formation again, with the foreground being taken by an FE sector that increasingly asserts its confidence in a strongly focussed policy backdrop of free market ideology. Alternative pathways and ways of working can be envisaged and opportunities for HE and FE in recognising their mutual objectives could be forged. A willingness to undertake such a programme is needed, however, from both sides of the HE FE divide.

In evaluating the extent to which I was able to answer the research questions, the limitations of my access to students and to a lesser extent, the

staff, in the partnerships has to be taken into account. As identified earlier in the Research Methods chapter (six), my request to interview and undertake focus groups was left to the good offices of my contacts in the various college partners and the response they received from those tutors who were prepared to be interviewed and who were prepared to 'release' their students from their normal class time (other than one student focus group that attended during their lunch hour). Furthermore, I had no control over the range of subjects or the profile of student (for example, age, attendance, gender). I had no access to student biographical details, including their social class. This limits the strength of the conclusions around the positioning of these students on a social basis and the role of HE in FE partnerships in this configuration. Although criticisms have been levelled against studies based solely on one's own students (see Gorard and Smith, 2006, p. 590) and the limitations that subsequently relate to the outcomes of such studies, other but different limitations are presented to a researcher in accessing students *outside* one's own immediate institution and student groups.

The question of the role of partnerships has been evidenced as underlining and extending the differentiated and stratified HE sector; this is demonstrated in the perceptions of staff (including managers) and students. This is substantial and therefore sufficient to award confidence in the answer to this question.

An evaluation of the third question follows.

2. Critical hermeneutics and its contribution to understanding the questions and its limitations

In this study, critical approaches have been used to analyse and to expose the assertions made by government policy on higher education, in the light of the perspective and lived experiences of the individual agents. As a critical paradigm it seeks to move beyond the superficial text of the situation and counters rhetoric with the interpretations of those individuals who are central to the social condition under investigation. The interplay of government policy and its agencies and the players in FE/HE partnerships have displayed not only a tension, or even a fissure, in the expectations on the part of the students and staff and the reality of their situation. It has been evidenced that some students are undoubtedly aware of the limitations of their position, either through an analysis of the structural/individual agency intersections and a critique of the credentialist demands of employment, or through a more immediate experience and increasing realisation of the hierarchy of the HE system and their place within it. HE in FE is socially positioned and *they* consider that they are socially positioned within this structure. Using a critical hermeneutical method has permitted the disclosure of the dichotomy and tensions felt by both the staff and the students involved in HE in FE partnerships; on the one hand there are opportunities for higher education to which they aspire, for job security and for an educational experience; yet they appreciate that this does not necessarily give them access to the kinds of career prospects of those in prestigious universities which offer high-profile vocations such as medicine or law, combined with growing employer expectations of higher qualifications. Such a tension exposes the dialectical

relationship between the individual and position in society. A critical hermeneutic approach can initiate a dialogue around this relationship and, in entering into such a dialogue, understanding and even remedies may become elucidated. Without the possibility of such a trajectory, individuals are merely a subjugated self (Billett, 2010) 'enmeshed in social structures' (p.11); certain individuals may escape their subjugation through consciously resisting and/or negotiating their projection through work and life and living with the contradictions; but this does not necessarily mean that this will have any resulting effect on other individuals or structures. Alternatively, the notion of the agentic self suggests a possibility of an individual who can accommodate different structures and engage with those structures to ensure their self-determination and one that offers them ontological security from the encroachment of the state. Studies that focus on individuals alone and provide interpretive texts of their perceptions and experiences, can only propose limited and one-sided social, economic or political direction to engage with perceived injustices and barriers to human fulfilment. Critical hermeneutics offers such a possibility and in this study has provided a means of engaging with the questions that combine structural and individual agency, and the challenges that are presented to the development of future possibilities in the securing of genuine widening participation through educational structures.

Whilst other approaches offer a similar analytical framework, critical hermeneutics provides a way of using the individual's perception and the text they produce within their perceived context, of inscribing meaning to features and issues that were previously hidden behind a facade of ideology and the

rhetoric of those whose interest it is to protect such features. The hermeneutic circle of interaction between actor, interpreter and text is continuous and never completed. In this study, individuals demonstrated the limitations within which they operated and how they accommodated these in terms of the structure of their work contexts and the constraining discourse of the government and its adherence to a neo-liberal framework. This is a framework, whilst couched in language that signals positive messages of 'freedom' and 'opportunities', gives the opposite to the realities faced by the agents and raises, at best, a compromise with their lot. Tutors are confronted with the contradictions of the partnership; meaning is distorted through language that hides the university's struggles to maintain its position of predominance, other than those who are prepared to acknowledge that, for them, the boundary has slipped and they are now encompassed with FE, rather than as a partnership of two equal halves. Yet within this model is an opportunity for dialogue (Habermas's 'communicative action', 1972) that may open up social consensus towards new developments; and through Freire's (1972) 'naming' the world the possibility emerges of new ways of seeing and being. As it stands at present, this is difficult to envisage; a dominant discourse in education of a marketised system that underlines an increasingly differentiated and stratified HE system seemingly predominates and looks set to become further established in the HE domain. The critical hermeneutic circle never stops, however; through the continuous and iterative process a creative alternative can be developed to offer genuine educational opportunities.

Other limitations to this exercise were experienced. Those individuals (be they students or staff) who seemed to be unaware (or did not surface them) of the structural position of the students or the HE in FE interface could not offer perceptions that interacted with these concerns. Certain tutor comments revealed a limited amount of support and a lack of awareness of the demands on HE in FE tutors; this does not bode well for the future development of HE in FE and opportunities for genuine engagement in exploration and discourse of the issues they raised. For critical hermeneutics to facilitate Habermas's emancipatory discipline that offers human beings a pathway to greater 'autonomy and self-determination' (How, 2003, p. 117), individuals need the 'space' to explore alternative methods and avenues for action. The possibility that this offers, places educationalists in both a privileged and responsible position to create such spaces. Partnerships can offer such a space and as has been shown, in some cases, have been able to do this. Failure to offer this and accept the confines of the 'traditional' HE culture of assumed superiority, both denies the potential of critical hermeneutics to develop knowledge that can radically challenge the status quo in a meaningful way to those who are the 'widening participation' recipients of educational benefits, and at the same time limits those in HE from seeing the true value of their work. Participants in education do not benefit in this scenario. It can be argued that the only beneficiaries are those who have the locus of power and who distance themselves from the objective of critical hermeneutics in exposing and critiquing the ideology, constraints and limitations that restrict the full development of the potential of human society. Critical hermeneutics seeks to fill any vacuum that exists in understanding of societal developments and its impact on potential

emancipation through the interpretation and reinterpretation of the parts with the whole. In order to understand the parts, one needs to understand the whole and vice versa.

3. Further work and dissemination

The role of partnerships can be seen as supporting government policies of a neo-liberal nature. In so doing, partnerships have missed an opportunity they may have held in establishing opportunities for individuals from a disadvantaged social position to benefit in undertaking HE. Instead, partnerships have entrenched the socio-economic positions of students and placed FE staff in a more conflicted position in face of the contradictions of the demands of the FE culture against their professional commitment to the education of their students. Staff will face the burden of FDAP and full degree-awarding powers; further research on their progress through this would enlighten the sectors as to the nature of their work and the role of HE in FE.

The HE landscape, including the place of partnerships, is changing. It is becoming much more differentiated and stratified and recent proposals will entrench these features further. Research needs to continue to follow these developments and highlight the effect on the sector. The students, including FD students, remain in a disadvantaged position socially and economically. Further work needs to be done to track FD students; however, research already undertaken (e.g. Wilson et al, 2007) reveals that many FD graduates have not accrued additional benefits or opportunities as a result of the FD achievement.

In terms of dissemination of the outcomes of this study I will work with a range of groups to inform, stimulate discussion and hopefully, affect practice and policy within partnerships. In particular, I will raise the potential of how relationships may change as a result of the substantial and fundamental amendments to HE funding presently under discussion (Browne, 2010). My main connections lie with staff teaching HE in FE as well as those who have responsibility for managing staff and curriculum of HE in FE; it is with these groups that I can propose a range of activities that will allow me to work alongside them. My experience of HE in FE staff development is that it tends to be limited to the operational aspects of HE in FE and partnerships. Whilst this may be necessary, it does not encourage reflective thoughts, processes and approaches to the issues facing practitioners. Dissemination of this particular study has already been undertaken across the last few years and I have delivered four presentations; one of which was to a HE in FE conference with a large number of FE practitioners. This latter activity was an example of how I see my work being used in the future. My approach was one from a critical perspective and was a sole voice in raising critical questions about the role of HE in FE partnerships. This work needs to continue as it initiates discussion around the deeper issues and contradictions that practitioners may find in their practice. I emphasise the word 'initiates' as the process of dissemination should not be seen as an,

end-point, conclusive, hard, formal, structured, rational, public, authoritative and complete...

(Barnes et al, 2003, p. 162)

In relation to the use of dissemination as an emancipatory tool, work with practitioners and managers in the field of HE in FE should and will be

prioritised over that of working with academics. Whilst the production of academic journal papers is often regarded as a 'sine qua non', there is a danger that discourse limited to that of the academic community, although productive for the academic, does not in itself, provide a vehicle for emancipatory work.

Most importantly, dissemination in the context of an emancipatory framework does not operate on a fixed and linear notion of dissemination and that once dissemination has taken place (often in the form of a report or a presentation) it is complete. Neither can an emancipatory framework assume that the outcomes are generic,

... dissemination models need to readjust their focus on the universal and recognize unique, specific and contextualized meanings in the construction of knowledge.

(Barnes et al, 2003, p. 156)

Dissemination within an emancipatory paradigm cannot predict or even anticipate the outcomes of further work and this is true of my position; given the HE policy shifts proposed by the Coalition government, the reactions of students, staff and potential students, the path for further development is not obvious. Unlike dissemination that is 'evidence-based' and informs policy or practice, the outcomes are not necessarily transferable across HE in FE partnerships and not intended to be. Whilst I can initiate discussion, distribute summaries of the study, establish opportunities for interaction between the players in the field of HE in FE, I cannot pre-determine or take an authoritative position as to how partnerships should progress and how they might respond to the latest policy diktats. This can only be done by those involved in the processes themselves.

Postscript

When I started this study in 2005, the world was a seemingly different place to that when I finished in 2010. The 2005 world seemed to represent the triumph of the neo-liberal, free market philosophy that encircled all individuals and all countries; the lifeworld of individuals was encroached upon at an increasing rate by systems designed to ensure the acceptance of a culture of commercialism to which individuals conformed. Government policy and rhetoric envisaged greater social justice through widening participation that would, outwardly, rectify the injustices that the 'inevitability' of the market economy brought to bear on individuals. Now, seemingly, we are experiencing a sea-change in our acceptance of the beneficence of a system that has plunged the global economy into a dark period. The question now arises; will this simply be an interregnum after which the systems will be reinstated (albeit amended or even strengthened)? A reflection on the purposes of education and the values that ostensibly became suppressed through instrumental rationality over the last 40 years or so needs to be under constant scrutiny. The world that seems to be emerging with the new Coalition government represents a return to a strengthened stance of the neo-liberal world of a free market philosophy as evidenced for example, in the development of certain policies around reducing welfare provision, but perhaps tempered through the influence of a liberal philosophy of certain elements within the Liberal Democrats. Policy on FE education indicates that it is likely that FE will be given powers to award their own qualifications, including degrees. The cheaper option of FE degrees will be attractive to those 'widening participation' students currently trapped in their social, economic and geographical location; it is doubtful that, given the record as

perceived by the actors in this study of the partnerships as they stand, that there will be a substantial shift in this perception and that the inner conflict that has resulted from the perceived contradictions of their educational experiences will be alleviated. Yet a critical perspective, as well as reflecting and projecting the reality of the participants' experiences within the context of their social position, seeks opportunities for human fulfilment. In so doing, new possibilities emerge through the dialogue and interplay between the various actors. The tension that HE in FE tutors experience between their perceptions of delivering HE as an emancipatory experience and sensing the constraints of their subsidiary role for both themselves and their students, against those of their counterparts in universities, are such that responses could emerge that reconfigure the HE landscape again. Partnerships could provide avenues for meaningful dialogue and possibilities between HE and FE in developing courses and genuine educational experiences for students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Focus Group Questions

FD students

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Start of meeting or before collect information on:

Gender;

age range;

title of Fd/BA;

which year

Questions

1. Why are you undertaking this fd?
2. What has been your experience of the fd in terms of:-
 - a) The curriculum (is it what you expected in terms of the content?)
 - b) Teaching & Learning methods. Is there any difference to your previous experience?
 - c) Interaction with each other. Are there opportunities for discussion.
 - d) Interaction with tutors
 - e) Relationship to your work role
3. Do you think the college regards you as an HE student? (Not relevant if in an HEI)

4. How does the fact that this course is part of a partnership with an HEI, affect you and your studies? How? (May need rewording for those based at HEI)
5. Do you think that doing this course has changed your perception of the world around you – i.e. work, home, life in general? Do you see the world differently? How? Do you feel more empowered to address issues at work or beyond?

Appendix 2

Focus Group Questions

HE in FE staff – FECs

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Questions

1. How many partners do you work with?
2. Indirect funding via a partnership (P)?
3. Indirect funding via franchising?

On the role of HE in FE and Partnerships

1. How do you perceive their role of delivering HE in FE
2. How do you perceive the role of FE working with partnerships?

3. How well are the Partnerships working? Can you give examples of good practice and why it is good? What's the difference between the good and the not so good? What makes the difference?
4. What is your perception of government's proposal for FE to deliver HE without courses being validated by an HEI? What do you see as the pros and cons?

On Staff delivering HE in FE

1. What are you looking for in staff delivering HE in FE? How do you appoint such staff?
2. What do you expect such staff to do –is it different to working on FE courses? If so, how? Give examples.
3. What support do you give to staff delivering HE in FE? E.g. time to undertake higher quals? Time for scholarly activity? How might you define scholarly activity?
4. Where does research and scholarly activity lie in this? Is there a difference between the role of the FE tutor delivering HE in FE and the role of the HE lecturer in HE delivering the same qualification?

The students – particularly Fd students

1. Who are the Fd students? Are they a new kind of HE student? Do you think they would have undertaken an HND if no Fd had been available? Would they have undertaken the course if there had been no partnership?
2. Do you (and your college) regard them as having different requirements to those of other students in the college? If so, how?
3. How did the Fd students access the course – ie via you or the HEI? What do you think is a good marketing strategy to use to attract Fd students?

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

Fd students

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Start of interview or before collect information on

Gender;

age range;

title of Fd;

which year

previous educational experience

work role and experience

Questions

6. Why are you undertaking this fd? What is the purpose? Is it just for work/vocational reasons?
7. How did you find out about the course?
8. What has been your experience of the Fd in terms of
 - f) The curriculum (is it what you expected in terms of the content?)
 - g) Teaching & Learning methods
 - h) Interaction with other students
 - i) Interaction with tutors

- j) Relationship to your work role
- 9. Do you think the college regards you as an HE student? (not for HEI students?)
- 10. How does the fact that this course is part of a partnership with an HEI, affect you and your studies? How? (May need rewording for those based at HEI)
- 11. Do you think that doing this course has changed your perception of the world around you – i.e. work, home, life in general? Do you see the world differently? How? Do you feel more empowered to address issues at work or beyond?

Appendix 4

Interview Questions

Staff (those with management responsibilities)– in FECs

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Start of meeting or before collect information on (if possible):-

Gender;

What is your role in the college? An HE manager? Or part of your responsibilities along with others?

Info. on the HE in FE they have at their colleges – (could this be collected before the meeting or after the meeting?)

1. How many partners do you work with?

2. What direct funding do you receive? For the number of courses rather than amount in financial terms. (This may be perceived to be sensitive – need to emphasis confidentiality)

3. Indirect funding via a partnership (P)?

4. Indirect funding via franchising?

On the role of HE in FE and Partnerships

1. How do you perceive your role in delivering HE in FE at the college?
2. How do you perceive the role of FE working with partnerships?
5. How well are the Partnerships working? Can you give examples of good practice and why it is good? What's the difference between the good and the not so good? What makes the difference?
6. What is your perception of government's proposal for FE to deliver HE without courses being validated by an HEI? What do you see as the pros and cons?

On Staff delivering HE in FE

5. What are you looking for in staff delivering HE in FE? How do you appoint such staff?
6. What do you expect such staff to do –is it different to working on FE courses? If so, how? Give examples.
7. What support do you give to staff delivering HE in FE? E.g. time to undertake higher quals? Time for scholarly activity? How might you define scholarly activity?
8. Where does research and scholarly activity lie in this? Is there a difference between the role of the FE tutor delivering HE in FE and the role of the HE lecturer in HE delivering the same qualification?

The students – particularly Fd students

4. Who are the Fd students? Are they a new kind of HE student? Do you think they would have undertaken an HND if no Fd had been available? Would they have undertaken the course if there had been no partnership?
5. Do you (and your college) regard them as having different requirements to those of other students in the college? If so, how?
6. How did the Fd students access the course – ie via you or the HEI? What do you think is a good marketing strategy to use to attract Fd students?

Appendix 5

Interview Questions

Tutors (those delivering HE in FE responsibilities)– in FECs

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Start of meeting or before collect information on (if possible):-

Gender; Age

What is your role in the college?

How much HE teaching do you do? (Number of hours/proportion of annual timetable)

Info. on the HE in FE they deliver (courses and at what levels)

Is the HE delivered as part of a P?

Can you answer the following questions?:-

1. How many partners do you work with?
2. Indirect funding via a partnership (P)?
3. Indirect funding via franchising?

On the role of HE in FE and Partnerships

1. Why do you think FECs are delivering HE?
2. How do you perceive the role of FE working with partnerships?
7. How well do you think the Partnerships are working? Can you give examples of good practice and why it is good? What's the difference between the good and the not so good? What makes the difference?
8. What is your perception of government's proposal for FE to deliver HE without courses being validated by an HEI? What do you see as the pros and cons?

On your role in delivering HE in FE

9. How did you get into teaching HE in FE? What preparation and support were you given for this (new?) role?
10. What kind of support (if any) do you, or did you, receive from the HEI in the partnership?
11. Tell me about your work as an HE tutor in FE. Is it different to working on FE courses? If so, how? Give examples.

12. What support do you receive for CPD as a tutor delivering HE in FE? E.g. time to undertake higher quals? Time for scholarly activity? How might you define scholarly activity?
13. Where does research and scholarly activity lie in this? Is there a difference between the role of the FE tutor delivering HE in FE and the role of the HE lecturer in HE delivering the same qualification?
14. How do you think the HEI regards you as an FE tutor delivering HE in FE?

The students – particularly Fd students

7. Who are the Fd students? Are they a new kind of HE student? How do you think they regard themselves? Do you think they would have undertaken an HND if no Fd had been available? Would they have undertaken the course if there had been no partnership?
8. Do you (and your college) regard them as having different requirements to those of other students in the college? If so, how?
9. How did the Fd students access the course – i.e. via you or the HEI? What do you think is a good marketing strategy to use to attract Fd students?

Appendix 6

Interview Questions

Managers (those with responsibilities for HE in FE and Partnerships)– in HEIs

Explain the background to the study and its output (the thesis).

Explain the procedure (taping and noting; transcriptions)

Emphasise confidentiality and anonymity for individuals.

Distribute background to the thesis

Collect signed agreement slips.

Start of meeting or before collect information on (if possible):-

Gender;

What is your role in the HEI? And in relationship to HE in FE and Partnerships?

1. How many FE partners do you work with in total?

On the role of HE in FE and Partnerships

1. Why has this university become involved with validating/delivering HE in FE? Is it because of pressure from govt? A genuine desire to promote HE at a 'lower' level that will then free the university to concentrate on higher level work and feel assured of a flow of students from a wider market that then satisfies WP targets?

2. Do you regard a partnership as a preferred form of working with FECs or a more distanced validation only? Why is this? What are the benefits/problems?

3. How do you perceive the role of universities working with FE/HE partnerships? (May be answered in 2). Issue of widening the market and assuring numbers in the future (demographic downturn)? Quality issues? Role of IQER?

4. How well are the Partnerships working? Can you give examples of good practice and why it is good? What's the difference between the good and the not so good? What makes the difference?

5. What is your perception of government's policy for FE to deliver HE without courses being validated by an HEI? What do you see as the pros and cons? Again – QA issues and academic quality.

On Staff delivering HE in FE

15. Do you require minimum standards of qualifications and experience of FE staff delivering HE as part of a partnership agreement or as part of your QA processes? If not, why not? Is this not selling the students short?

16. Whether you do or not, what would you expect in terms of the qualifications and experiences of the FE staff?

17. Do you perceive teaching HE in FE to being different to teaching HE in HE? If so, how? Give examples.

18. What support does the university offer to staff delivering HE in FE? E.g. discounted tuition fees for higher quals? Joint staff development activities. Give examples.

19. Where does research and scholarly activity lie in this? Is there a difference between the role of the FE tutor delivering HE in FE and the role of the HE lecturer in HE delivering the same qualification with regard to research and scholarly activity? Aren't FE teachers teaching HE simply cheap labour?

The students – particularly Fd students

10. Who are the Fd students? Are they a new kind of HE student? Do you think they would have undertaken an HND if no Fd had been available? Has the development of partnerships given additional opportunities to Fd students in accessing such courses? Would they have undertaken the course if there had been no partnership? Is this not the rhetoric of WP and increase in HE numbers when we know that the increase in numbers of level 5 students has been 0? (ie cf to numbers taking HnDs and HNCs in 2000-2001 when we had 100,000 students c.f to Fd numbers of 72,000 in 07-08.)
11. Do you (and your FEC partners) regard them as having different requirements to those of other students in the HEI? If so, how?
12. Do you think the Fd students in the FECs are regarded as HE students? How do you ensure they have the appropriate support and learning in an HE culture?
13. How did the Fd students access the courses – ie via you or the FECs? What do you think is a good marketing strategy to use to attract Fd students? What draws Fd students in – is it the prospect of being an HE student in a university or accessing a FEC with the security of a known culture with access to a qual that they believe will give them better job prospects?

Appendix 7

I understand my rights as explained to me and am happy to give my consent for the researcher to record and use my interview or focus group data.

Print Name:.....

Sign:.....

I understand my rights as explained to me and am happy to give my consent for the researcher to record and use my interview or focus group data.

Print Name:.....

Sign:.....

Appendix 8

Data collected for the purpose of a Ph.D – Denise Robinson.

This is to identify what will happen to any information or data that is collected in focus group meetings or interviews.

It is normal practice to tape-record and/or take notes in interviews and focus group meeting to help ensure the accuracy of the researchers understanding of information given. As a result each participant will be asked to sign a slip giving me permission to record and use the material for analysis and report writing. I wish to stress that none of the information provided will be used in a way that can be attributed to you specifically. At the risk of sounding over formal but for your information I have copied the code of ethics covering this research below.

Individual staff will not be identified. Data pertaining to any individual will be available only to that individual but will otherwise remain strictly confidential. Hard data will be stored in locked files and soft data will be password protected, basic data being available to the researcher only. All staff and students interviewed or included in focus groups will have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice should they wish to do so. There is a policy of keeping data collected during research for re-analysis or inspection by the commissioning body (subject to confidentiality restrictions) for a period of five years post completion of the project after which the data will be destroyed. In addition all research staff are committed to the professional codes of conduct (notably the Code of Practice of the British Sociological Association) and relevant legislation (e.g. the Data Protection Act).

Appendix 9

Statement explaining the research being undertaken by Denise Robinson for her PhD

The research is focused on HE in FE and particularly around the issues of partnerships between HE and FE. To this end, Fd students are to be included as well as FE staff delivering HE in FE. Fd students are part of the 'new' HE and their views need to be expressed and included within the research.

Focus groups as well as individual interviews are being requested.

All focus groups and interviews are confidential and no person will be identified in the research.

Ethics statements are also distributed to those participating.

Appendix 10

Coding of data

(with reference to transcripts)

- a) Progression Routes
- b) Development & Support Role
- c) Partnership Variations
- d) Capacity of FECs to manage HE
- e) Power Positions
- f) Staff: perception of position.
- g) Research vs Scholarly Activity
- h) FDAP Powers for FE Colleges
- i) Perception of FD Students

Appendix 11

Example of Coding of Transcript

(see following pages)

Appendix 12

Glossary

AoC	Association of Colleges
CaSE	Campaign for Science and Engineering
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CUREE	Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education
DEE	Department for Education and Employment
DES	Department for Education and Science
DBIS	Department of Business, Innovation and Skills
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
EPPI	Evidence for Policy and Practice Information
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council in England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IfL	Institute for Learning
IQER	Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review
FDF	Foundation Degree Forward
FEC	Further Education College
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FENTO	Further Education National Training Organisation
LEA	Local Education Authority
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
LLUK	Lifelong Learning UK
LSC	Learning and Skills Council

LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
NERF	National Educational Research Forum
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NTI	National Training Initiative
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
Quango	Quasi Non-government Agency
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
UCU	University and College Union
UVAC	University Vocational Awards Council