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Institutional Differences in 16-19 GCE Advanced Level Education in England

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Abstract

The primary focus of this thesis is on whether there are any significant differences in the experiences of young people aged 16-19 studying GCE Advanced Level which result from whether they attend a school sixth form, sixth form college or tertiary college in England. The study uses quantitative and qualitative data to consider whether there are differences in examination achievement by young people or in their perception of their wider educational experience. The study also uses qualitative data on the views of senior staff in those institutions and of policy makers.

The study is original in three respects: young people in the three different types of institution completed an identical questionnaire, and were interviewed on the same basis; an original analysis of value-added data for tertiary colleges, separated from general further education colleges; and the research makes use of the researcher's extensive access to, and involvement in, contemporaneous 14-19 policy development.

The study shows that educational policy development in England is undertaken within a complex educational, economic and political environment, and provides an overview of 16-19 provision and policy in the home nations and some European countries, together with a consideration of tripartism in education in England – both its historical origins and development, and its likely future direction.

The main conclusion from the study is that there is little difference in the value-added to the examination performance of young people resulting from the type of institution they attend.

The study also suggests that the young people, regardless of the institution they attend, are generally positive about their experience; however, students in school sixth forms are less positive about a number of aspects of that experience.

As the research progressed, there were strengthening Ministerial steers towards tertiary tripartism – a strengthening of the divisions between academic, vocational and occupational learning.

Declaration and Word Count

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Learning and Skills Council could be relied upon to produce any book or article I requested, however obscure or ancient, and usually within two or three days. I am grateful to those who have commented on, and suggested improvements to, individual chapters and on the full work. Any errors which remain are my responsibility only.

Finally, I would not have thought of doing a doctorate ("people like me don't do doctorates") without the suggestion and encouragement of Professor Gary McCulloch. Gary was my tutor at Sheffield University from 1997, when I began a Master of Arts, and has been my supervisor throughout this research, first at Sheffield and latterly at the London University Institute of Education: he has an international reputation for his research on the history of education, and has guided me with enormous skill over the years. It is a privilege to have worked with Gary.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This study looks at the experiences of students studying General Certificate in Education (GCE) Advanced (A) or Advanced Supplementary (AS) Level courses in three types of educational institution in England at the start of the 21st Century. These institutions are attended by around 40 per cent of young people aged 16-19, who undertake what is commonly referred to as "general" or "academic" study in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges or tertiary colleges. The study also examines the views of senior staff in those institutions, and of policy-makers with experience and responsibilities in this area.

My interest in this topic was stimulated by comments in a pamphlet published to accompany a speech to the Association of Colleges on 21 November 2000 by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett. In that pamphlet, Blunkett said:

> *In many colleges, standards are high. And in terms of achievement and inspection grades, sixth form colleges stand out. Many are truly excellent – among the best providers in the country. And while their successes derive in some measure from the qualifications of their intake, the statistics also show that in terms of value added, sixth form colleges offer very high standards* (Blunkett, 2000a, p 8).

This statement was taken by some as suggesting that not only did sixth form colleges provide high quality education, but also that their offer was <u>better</u> than other providers. I wondered what evidence there was for such an interpretation, and, as sixth form colleges cater primarily for 16-19 year olds studying full-time for the GCE Advanced Level, I decided to compare that provision with the other two main state-funded routes for 16 year olds wishing to study GCE Advanced Level – school sixth forms and tertiary colleges.

Education in England is compulsory for all young people up to the age of 16, and mostly undertaken in schools (parents/guardians may decide to educate their children at home, although the local education authority has a duty to ensure that such education is appropriate to the needs of young people; a small number of young people under the age of 16 are in custody, but still receive education and training). School sixth forms provide general, and a small number of vocational, courses for 16-19 year olds studying full-time in an institution which provides education to young people from, typically, age 11: about half of all secondary schools in England have sixth forms. Sixth form colleges were established originally, and remain primarily, for 16-19 year olds only, studying general courses full-time. General further education colleges provide general and vocational courses for students aged over 16, with substantial numbers of part-time and adult students. The term "tertiary college", whilst not having any statutory meaning, is used where the college is the sole or main provider of 16-19 provision for their locality (that is, where there are not local sixth form colleges and few, if any, school sixth forms). Chapter 5 provides more detailed descriptions of these institutions, which between them had around 500,000 young people aged 16-19 studying for A/AS examinations in the summer of 2003 (derived from DfES, 2004a, pp. 12,13).

The study does not look at the experiences of a further 40 per cent of 16-19 year olds who follow vocational courses, full or part time, in general further education colleges, or at a further 10 per cent of young people in employment without training. At any particular time a final 10 per cent of young people are **N**ot in **E**ducation, **E**mployment or **T**raining (the "NEET" group), although over the three year period from age 16 to 19 a substantial number of young people move into, and out of, the NEET group (DfES, 2005e, pp. v,5).

The study looks at how those three types of institution came into existence, have developed, and where they may be heading. It also looks to see whether there are any significant differences – or significant commonalities – in the three types of institution. In particular, the study seeks to identify whether the achievement in examinations by young people differs dependent on the type of institution attended, and whether there are demonstrable differences in the characteristics in the cultures of the institutions – real or imagined.

"Culture" has been described as: "*one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language*" (Williams, 1976, p. 76). Of the many and varied descriptions of culture, I found the most useful for this study in the work of Prosser, who suggests that, in relation to schools, the ways in which the term "culture" are used fall into four broad categories: generic culture; perceived culture; wider culture; and unique culture (Prosser, 1999, pp. 7-9). *Generic culture* looks at similarities between institutions recognised as being within a particular group; this was a central aim of my research, looking to see whether there were any identifiable features common to, for example, school sixth forms which were stronger than in the other types of institution. Prosser describes *perceived culture* as comprising two elements: the culture as perceived by staff and students; and the culture as perceived by – or presented to – the outside world. This was also a key theme of my research, looking at how the institutions were described, particularly in fiction, and how they institutions described themselves, for example in their prospectuses. *Wider culture* sets an institution in its national context, and I have tried to do that by giving brief examples of the post-16 systems in a number of other European countries, together with a description of how the institutions developed within the economic, social and political context of England. Finally, Prosser suggested that an individual institution could demonstrate a *unique culture*, even when it was located within a recognised group. I describe the enormous range in size and curriculum offer which each type

of institution covers, and have also reported the comments made by students I interviewed.

Where there appear to be differences or commonalities in the cultural characteristics of the different types of institution, the study considers why these might exist. In some cases this might be as a result of history, but in others differences might result from a deliberate decision, as one of my interviewees described his decision, as the first head of a newly-established sixth form college, that students would refer to staff as "Sir" or "Miss", in order to instil a sense of discipline and order. The study considers what impact different characteristics of an institution might have on the institution, its staff, its students and the outside world, or, indeed, whether Lady Bracknell was correct in her belief that: "*Fortunately, in England at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever*" (Wilde, 1899/1971, p. 368). If causality can be identified, it might inform existing institutions in adapting their behaviour with the intention of improving the learning of young people.

Whilst the thesis as a whole is intended primarily to satisfy the requirements for the award of a PhD, I intended from the outset to share any results of significance, and have already shared extracts of the research with those involved in considering and promoting change in post-16 education, in the hope that this will help them understand better the nature of the institutions involved, and thus be better able to model the impact of change. For that reason, I have tried to write in a style which is likely to be accessible to that wider audience. I have sought to be consistent in my use of language, and in particular in the use of hyphenation. Thus, for example, I have hyphenated the words "value" and "added" where the term is being used to describe the statistical analysis of examination data but not where the words are used to describe, say: "the value added by an institution". The only exceptions to this are where I am quoting from another's work, where the original use is retained.

I considered using the past tense throughout, but felt that this set the research too firmly in the past, where my intent was to use the past to illuminate the present and to describe the institutions as they are today; I have, therefore, used the present tense when describing my research, the past tense when looking back. I was encouraged in this approach by recent critics who have noted that:

> *There is an assumption that academic writing has to be ghastly […] Why is so much academic writing so bad? One reason is that there is a belief that the passive voice is better, since it appears so much more scientific to say 'subjects were asked' rather than ' we asked them', and that goes with an assumption that long words are a sign of learning* (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 176).

The research was undertaken during a time of debate about the curriculum offered to this group of young people, which led to proposals for significant change in the curriculum. I was closely involved in that debate, and as a theme running through the study I have attempted to describe – from a personal perspective – how Government policy in this area was initiated and developed.

It is because of this personal perspective that I decided to report the research in the first person. I wrote the defence document to support the transfer of my registration from M Phil to PhD in the third person, and felt that document did not convey sufficiently the depth of my involvement, or the immediacy of the research.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study is significant for a number of reasons.

First, the research is original. There has been an increasing interest in researching post-16 education in recent years, but there are still gaps in key areas, one of which this study fills. What research there is has been on one type of institution, rather than providing a comparison, and until recently did not take fully into account the voice of the learner. I did find one study which involved a questionnaire sent at the

same time to schools, sixth form colleges and general further education colleges, looking specifically at whether sixth form colleges should be the preferred way forward (Lumby and Wilson, 2003). The findings of that research are reported later. My study provides an analysis of responses from young people from the three different types of institution to a common questionnaire. The study also provides an original analysis of the value added in examination results by tertiary colleges, through privileged access to the results of all young people in England in the summer examinations of 2003. In addition, this study looks beyond examination results and into the wider value added by institutions, together with consideration of the culture of those institutions.

Secondly, it is timely. I applied to undertake the research in March 2001, just as the Learning and Skills Council for England (LSC) took on its responsibilities under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. That act established the LSC with responsibility for funding and planning all post-16 learning and training in England other than higher education and independent education. This was the first time that a single body had the responsibility for planning 16-19 education in schools and colleges. The LSC was established with 47 local "arms", covering the whole of England, in order to be better able to respond to the different needs of those local areas. The new planning role was underpinned by changed remits for the Government bodies inspecting the quality of education and training, so that, whereas previously inspection was of individual institutions, they are now also required to inspect provision across a geographical area. Each local LSC was to review the provision in its area (the Strategic Area Review) and to consider what changes, including organisational, are desirable.

There were many who expected the outcomes of Strategic Area Reviews to be the closure of perhaps as many as 200 school sixth forms, where student numbers were

low, and an increasing growth of tertiary colleges. However, as the research was being completed, the Government published a White Paper: *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (HMG, 2005) which indicated that, far from a reduction in the number of school sixth forms, the Government wanted planners to have a "presumption" in favour of establishing new sixth forms at successful 11-16 schools. A further White Paper, in March 2006, gave the Government's response to a review by Sir Andrew Foster of the future role of further education colleges (including tertiary colleges), in which he called for those colleges to develop a "*core focus on skills and employability*" (Foster, 2005, p. vii). The White Paper endorsed Sir Andrew's recommendations, expressing an ambition that: "*every organisation in the FE system should develop a distinctive mission*" (TSO, 2006, p. 23).

The Government agreed:

> "*with Sir Andrew Foster and Ofsted that Sixth Form Colleges are a successful and well respected part of the FE sector. They exemplify the benefits of a clear, focused mission which creates shared expectations of high achievement and motivates both staff and students to give of their best. Tertiary colleges likewise make an important contribution*" (TSO, 2006, p. 27).

The White Paper, therefore, proposed an 'FE presumption' with capital funding being prioritised to the establishment of new sixth form colleges and the expansion of existing high-performing colleges wishing to expand their 16-19 provision.

Thirdly, the research is written "as lived". Throughout the research I was employed by the LSC with national responsibility for curriculum policy for 16-19 year olds, and in that role I represented the LSC on various working groups which were tasked with radical reform of 14-19 education and training. This raised significant ethical considerations, but I made clear to my employers, and to the Government Department responsible for education, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), that I was undertaking this research and would wish to use documents and

discussions of those groups in my research, except when specifically requested otherwise. The research was undertaken during a period of heated debate – both in Government and in the academic community – about the whole nature of educational research, and its use in the development of Government policy. A description of the ethical issues raised, and how they were addressed, is provided in the methodology chapter. Far from causing concern, however, my acknowledgement of this research resulted in me being invited to yet more meetings – for which I was usually grateful – and being given privileged access to individuals and to primary source documents. The study describes how it appeared to me that Government policy in this area developed and what it feels like to be part of policy development. I consider that this, in itself, makes a significant contribution, as it provides an insider's view of education policy making in England.

Finally, the research has already had an impact on addressing and challenging the misconceptions of colleagues about, in particular, the nature and purpose of further education. Increasingly as the research proceeded, I realised that my study was informing my contribution to policy-making, which in turn changed the field I was researching, primarily by constantly reminding colleagues that the majority of 16-19 education in England now takes place in further education colleges and sixth form colleges, not simply in schools. For example, in September 2003 the DfES launched "*Connexions Direct*", giving on-line advice to young people. The section on 'Learning after 16' gave advice about school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and further education colleges. On 2 September, the section on schools did not mention vocational provision and the section on further education colleges gave their purpose as: "*to prepare you for specific jobs*" (CD, 2003a). I called a colleague in the DfES, who asked me to provide a revised wording, with the result that the website on 12 September indicated that many school sixth forms: "*now offer a range of other courses, including GNVQ*", whilst many of the courses on offer in further

education colleges: "*can lead to university entry*" (CD, 2003b). In May 2005, I presented a paper to the Nuffield review of 14-19 Education and Training on the nature of planning of 14-19 education, and the policy mechanisms which steer institutional behaviour. That paper was added to the evidence base for the Review, and cited in the Review's annual report for 2004-05 (Nuffield Review, 2005, p. 148). As a result of discussion with colleagues who were acting as the secretariat for Sir Andrew Foster's review of the role of further education colleges, I provided a copy of my draft chapter on tertiary tripartism.

To my surprise, I have also been acknowledged by established academic researchers as a member of their community. In November 2005, I was asked to join an expert group advising a study by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) into the impact of forms of provision on participation and attainment of young people. The study team was relying in part on value-added research by the Responsive Colleges Unit, which I discuss, and criticise, in Chapter 8. I offered, and they gratefully accepted, my draft chapter as an alternative view. Again, in April 2006, I accepted an invitation from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to sit on an Advisory Group overseeing a research project funded by the Foundation looking at the willingness and motivations of young people to travel in order to study. The invitation made clear that the invitation was to me on a personal basis as a researcher, not as an employee of the Learning and Skills Council.

In addition, I give presentations on 14-19 issues at a wide range of conferences, usually around 15-20 each year, and my research has, I feel, improved the content of those presentations, ensuring that I have a good deal of relevant, recent and authoritative information to present. In the past year, for example, I have spoken at conferences for: the construction industry annual YouthBuild awards; the Church of

England Further Education conference; a conference for Staffordshire teachers and lecturers; and a delegation from Tajikistan led by the Minister for Education.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is:

"Is there any identifiable and measurable difference in the experience of 16-18 year olds which results from whether they study in a school sixth form, a sixth form college or a tertiary college, and if there is, does that amount to 'tertiary tripartism'."

To provide an answer to that question, I asked, for 16-19 year olds in full-time education in England, studying GCE Advanced level courses in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges:

Does the type of institution attended result in differences in achievement in AS/A2 level examinations?

Are there differences in the range and time devoted to "enrichment" activities in the three types of institution?

Are there cultural differences between the three types of institution?

Are the three types of institution seen as different by each other, by students, by outside observers?

Some of the terms used in those research questions may benefit from brief explanation before proceeding further.

Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A2 examinations were introduced into English education in 2000, in what was termed *'Curriculum 2000'*. These were a development of the General Certificate in Education Advanced level (A level) examinations, introduced in the 1950s and the Advanced Supplementary (AS) examination introduced in 1987. Whereas, until 2000, the normal pattern was for a young person to take three or four A levels, it was anticipated that a typical pattern would be for a young person to pursue 4 or 5 AS levels in different subjects in the first post-compulsory year (Year 12), and then concentrate on just three of those subjects in the second year (Year 13). The combination of an AS and A2 in the same subject equates to an A level in that subject (this was slightly different from the previous AS, which had the value of half an A level, but where the "second half" of the full A level was not available). The aims of Curriculum 2000 not only included the encouragement of increased breadth of study in general examinations, but also looked to rationalise and strengthen the linkages between general and vocational programmes (Hodgson and Spours, 2003, p. 28): its impact is not in the scope of this study.

"Enrichment" is a broad term which is intended to cover all those activities which a young person undertakes as part of their education other than the specific subjects they study. It includes tutorials, PSHE (personal, social and health education), religious education, sport, skills, citizenship and careers education and guidance, where these are organised by, or provided by, the institution.

To describe something as "tripartite" simply means that it is: "*divided into or composed of three parts*" (Collins, 2000, p. 1634). In education, the term "tripartism" has been adopted, but has been used to describe slightly different divisions between institutions. First used in respect of secondary schools, the term refers to the development in the 1940s of three different curricula for 11-16 year olds (McCulloch,

1994, 1995, 2002). "Tertiary tripartism" similarly describes different curricula in the further education sector, providing general, vocational or occupational learning (Ranson, 1984), whilst more recently, the term "tertiary tripartism" has been applied to higher education institutions concentrating increasingly on research, teaching or skills (Ainley, 2003, 2005). In each of those cases, the focus has been on the differences between the curricula offered at the institutions; in this study, the focus is on differences in the delivery of the same curriculum in different types of institution.

It is important to note that the tertiary colleges: "*are institutions where a number of different teaching and learning traditions confront each other – some reflecting FE's vocational past, others reflecting newer, school or adult education traditions.*" (Lucas, 2004, p. 149). A number of people I met during the course of the research made the point that, even in the most liberal of colleges, the health and safety issues in some departments – such as Engineering or Catering – were such that a more disciplined approach was essential, with it more likely that Engineers would call their lecturers "Sir", and caterers would use "Chef".

It is possible, therefore, that the experience of students following vocational courses may result from the curriculum, rather than from the institution. In order to seek to reduce any such effect, and as relatively few students in school sixth forms or sixth form colleges follow predominantly vocational courses, I have focused entirely on the GCE Advanced Level provision in all three types of institution. For the same reason, I have not considered provision in those general further education colleges which do not describe themselves as "tertiary", as in those colleges, the majority of 16-19 provision is vocational or occupational. I also decided that the schools I approached as case studies should have at least 150 students in the sixth form, as there is clear evidence of lower value added by smaller sixth forms (DfES, 2004b, p. 36).

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Finally, much of my research derives from working with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and working for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In 1839, for the first time, Parliamentary responsibility for state education in England was placed in the hands of a separate body, a Committee of the Privy Council. In 1900, responsibility passed to the newly created Board of Education. In 1944, the Ministry of Education was established, to be followed by the Department for Education and Science (DES) in 1964; the Department for Education (DFE) in 1992; the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1995 and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2001 (DfEE, 1995a). Where appropriate, I will use the title of the Department at the time, but where policies develop over time, for ease of understanding, and brevity, I will refer to the various incarnations as simply 'the Education Department', and the principal Minister in the Department will be referred to as 'the Secretary of State' (there were four Secretaries of State in the five years of the research: David Blunkett, Charles Clarke, Ruth Kelly and Alan Johnson). The changes in title represent changes in responsibility, perhaps most interestingly the coming together in 1995 of Education and Employment, only for the two functions to separate again in 2001, when Employment transferred to the newly created Department of Work and Pensions. These different responsibilities are likely to have had an impact on the development of educational institutions, and have been mapped in great detail for the period to 1999 (Aldrich et al, 2000). I considered, however, that any impact was likely to fall on all types of post-16 provision, and that any differential impact between schools, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges would be difficult to identify, and, in case, marginal to the main thrust of my research.

The DfES is the Government Department responsible for education in England. The political head of the DfES, the Secretary of State, is accountable to Parliament, as is the administrative head of the DfES, the Permanent Secretary. The LSC is technically a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) – commonly referred to as a "quango" (quasi-autonomous Government organisation). The LSC is not part of the DfES, nor are its staff Government employees (civil servants): but the Chair and Board of the LSC are appointed by the Secretary of State, and the Chair and Chief Executive are accountable to Parliament. This rather complex relationship is beyond the scope of this study, but in essence, the LSC is charged – with others – with making a reality of the Secretary of State's vision, with the DfES as a monitor.

THE OVERALL APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

The research involved four activities: deciding on methodology; literature review; fieldwork; and reading, writing and attending meetings about the education of young people in the course of my employment.

A literature review dominated the first phase of research, and is reported in Chapter 2. It involved finding and reading whatever was in the public domain about the three types of institution, whether fact or fiction, written or in other media, and also the more specific literature relating to methodological issues of educational research. I had access, initially, to the library facilities of the University of Sheffield, and subsequently those of the Institute of Education. I also had access, through the Knowledge Centre of the Learning and Skills Council, to extensive inter-library loan facilities and the ability to obtain journal articles through the British Library. The internet offers a wealth of information, and I regularly interrogated a range of sites, including the Education Information Resources Centre (ERIC) and the British Education Index (BEI), but also those of the Economic and Social Research Council, Times Educational Supplement, British Educational Research Association, DfES,

Learning and Skills Development Association and National Foundation for Educational Research. Amongst internet search engines, I found www.google.com invaluable, particularly in helping to find primary sources for extracts from speeches or newspaper comments which had been cited in other works.

I read widely: the books on my shelf, therefore, include works on or about: Aristotle and Foucault; Prime Ministers Thatcher and Major; Thomas Arnold of Rugby School; Billy Bunter of Greyfriars and the biographies or autobiographies of people from a range of occupations and activities, as well as a range of academic texts and journal articles. The reporting of that reading seeks to describe the institutions as they are – or are perceived to be – today. Having first described these English institutions, the final section of the chapter seeks to place them in the educational, social and economic circumstances of England, and to provide a brief overview of 16-19 education and training systems in the other home nations and a selection of European countries.

Chapter 3 provides, as background, the results of a literature-based investigation of the historical development of the notion of educational tripartism since 1938, first in schools, then in further education, and more recently in higher education.

Chapter 4 describes how I developed the methodology which I considered would best enable me to address the research question, and Chapter 5 looks in detail at the historical development and current state of the three types of institution which are at the heart of this study.

I use the term "fieldwork" to distinguish those activities that contribute to the originality of my research. The results of the fieldwork are set out in Chapters 6 to 9, The fieldwork; interviews with students and teachers; a questionnaire completed by

students in three school sixth forms, two sixth form colleges and two tertiary colleges; an original analysis of DfES quantitative data to identify the value added to the achievements of 16-19 year old students at tertiary colleges; and discussion of my emerging conclusions with a number of "elite" policy-makers.

My employment throughout the period of this research was in policy-making for 14-19 year olds in England. The background papers for meetings, discussions in those meetings and with those individuals I met at the wide range of events I was obliged to attend, and address, as part of my day job all fed into this research. This work is not reported separately, but at various intervals throughout the thesis, because its significance is not to describe my day-to-day work over the last five years, but rather to show how that work has informed, and been informed by, my research. A by-product of this approach is to provide an additional thread running through the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

I think perhaps because my first career was as a mathematician, I have subsequently developed a great love of literature. By the time I completed this research I had filled two bookcases with books, journals and official documents, and 26 ring-binders with around 800 miscellaneous items, including photocopies of articles from journals, pages or chapters from books, material downloaded from the internet and pages from newspapers – and this was just those pieces I kept. Clearly, the material could be presented in any number of ways, but I have chosen to present it first by giving an overview and comparison of the way in which the three types of institution are described or presented in fiction, history, research, and in public. I have then followed through this approach by giving more detail – separately – on schools and colleges. Finally, I provide a brief overview of 16-19 education and training systems in the home nations and a selection of European countries. I have used the term "literature review" in a broad sense, to include any way in which a school or college is described or depicted in a publicly accessible form. Thus I have included books and articles, but also other media, including television and film, advertisement, prospectuses, and even letterheads. The only restriction I imposed upon myself was to avoid discussing things: "*such as buildings, furniture, dinosaur bones and Roman coins.*" (McCulloch, 2004, p. 3).

I recognised that there was a hierarchy of documentary sources, and that: "*unpublished and relatively inaccessible documents appear to carry greater intrinsic weight worth to the historical researcher than published documents which are widely available*" (McCulloch, 2004, p. 31). I looked at the records available at Kew, which holds many government records, but considered that most were well before my period of primary interest. I did have access to a number of drafts of education Green Papers, White Papers, the work on the Tomlinson Working Group and subsequent work on 14-19 reform, including advice to Ministers. I also received

papers on the various other aspects of policy-making in which I was involved over the period. I also requested, and was given, access to the original responses to the Green Paper: *14-19: opportunity and excellence*, to which, whilst they would have been available to other researchers, access had not been sought (indeed, I believe that access has still not been sought). I also, throughout the period of the research, coordinated the production of a two-monthly report from the Director of Young People's Learning at the Learning and Skills Council to the statutory Young People's Learning Committee, which provided the Committee with an overview of all developments, and forthcoming events, in the 14-19 field. I used this material where I felt it added to my work, but without breaching the Civil Service code of practice on confidentiality.

In addition to its immediate value to the study, any use of such material gives access, albeit secondary, to other researchers, and can also alert them to the possible availability of primary material relevant to their interests. I say 'possible availability' because I have considerable reservations about the future availability of such material. I refer later to a 'think piece' from Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State, which appeared fleetingly on the DfES website and is no longer available in its original form, and to a description of opportunities at 16 which appeared on the Connexions Direct website for a matter of days. I am also not sure that the DfES is as rigorous in its creation of hard-copy files as it was, even in 1997-98, when I had a year's secondment to the DfEE, and certainly, I doubt if all nine drafts of the 14-19 Green Paper, growing from 20 pages to over 90, will eventually be deposited at Kew. A further problem results from the constant changes to those bodies involved in education: a fellow researcher, looking into the establishment of the National Curriculum in England, was looking for access to the original consultation responses in the late 1980s. Gordon notes that the Education Reform Act of 1988:

established two bodies to advise on the curriculum: the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC). These in turn were replaced in 1993 by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and subsequently, in 1997, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (Gordon, 2002, p. 202).

During one of these changes, and within ten years of being generated, the original consultation responses were misplaced. I fear researchers of the future may not have access to the rich original sources that we enjoy today.

The institutions in fiction

I looked at how the different types of institution have been depicted in fiction, whether in books, film, television or the theatre.

Publishers and producers of fictional material are, presumably, seeking a product which is likely to be popular, and profitable. They will know what is likely to sell, in what quantities, to which markets, and that will be reflected in the volume and subject matter of material produced.

So it is no real surprise that by far the majority of fictional depictions of post-16 educational institutions in England have been of schools – boarding schools, and primarily boys' boarding schools. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* set the scene, which has had numerous imitations, even currently with J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series of novels and films. There is almost a genre of 'method writing' for the school story, with some key themes which seem almost compulsory: sport, popularity, bullying, food (i.e. the horrible school dinners compared to the joys of the food parcels from home and the tuck shop), crime and punishment. The benefit of a boarding school setting is that it isolates the student and the teacher from the outside world.

Protherough suggested that: "*Since school novels are increasingly drawn on as sources for educational history, it is inevitable that one criterion for judging them should be their 'truth' to school life, their authenticity*" (Protherough, 1979, p. 140).

However, he does note that – as early as 1914 – one commentator complained about: *"the 'very insistent and rather discordant note of realism' in some of the newer schools stories, including matters because they are 'true to life' which he thinks ' are better not discussed"* (Protherough, 1979, p. 140).

There is very little fictional material about further education, but more about higher education. As I suggested at the beginning of this section, if it was thought there was a market, there would be material. Almost everyone in England has had experience of the school system, and so may be able to identify, in part at least, with fictional depictions, and whilst fewer have experienced higher education, it is an aspiration for many. There are around six million young people and adults in further education annually, but I am not clear that for many of these it is an aspiration. Additionally, the stereotype of higher education builds on that of the boarding school, involving privilege and collegiate living in an enclosed environment, for a number of years, with Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* a classic example of the genre.

The institutions in history

It has been pointed out that whilst there is much writing about the history of education, this has been largely separated from social research and educational enquiry (McCulloch and Richardson, 2000, p. 1).

Brian Simon's four-part series, covering the period from 1780 to 1990, is more than a study of the history of education, being: *"an attempt to relate the ideas of reformers and the changes introduced to contemporary social and political conflicts"* (Simon, 1974/1960, p. 13). Taking over 30 years to complete, Simon's work stands alone. There is, however, much other literature about the history of English secondary education. I particularly enjoyed the work of Curtis and Boultwood

(1962), which combines a comprehensive overview of events from 1800 to 1960 with vignettes of leading thinkers about education.

McCulloch (2005) provides a selection of articles and book chapters from leading writers on the history of education, and refers back to similar collections put together by Musgrave (1970) and Lowe (2000).

There are many books which give the history of individual institutions. Most of these are about the public schools, and, therefore, of limited interest to this study. Similarly with books about individuals, usually eminent headteachers, where it feels, for example, that one of Thomas Arnold's classes must have been asked to write an essay about "My Favourite Headteacher" – and then all had them published. I found Arnold fascinating, and read Stanley (1844), Bamford (1960) and Wymer (1953), with Stanley's work by far the most interesting, providing so much of Arnold's original work.

Schools and colleges also feature in biographies and autobiographies, although inevitably the former tend to be limited to dates, institutions and achievements, whereas the latter offer some reflection on the experience.

The institutions in research

Banks (1963/1955) compared the tripartite division in secondary education, whilst Barber and Dann (1996) looked at issues of raising achievement in inner cities, whereas Bridgwood and Ashforth (1990) considered the future for tertiary colleges as the momentum for change developed.

Tertiary colleges were seen, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as a radical solution to the nation's problems (Dean and Chappin, 1977; Cotterrell and Heley, 1981)

Only rarely, and recently, have researchers reported the views of learners in post-compulsory education about the institutions they attend. One notable exception is research by the Further Education Development Agency (subsequently to become the Learning and Skills Development Agency and, from April 2006, the Learning and Skills Network) reporting the "voice of the learner". A first study considered transition issues, and reported the views of young people in Year 11, anticipating college, and again after half a term in the college. Many of the responses were about freedom, maturity and independence. However, these were clearly seen as double-edged; and with an overall view that college was:

- *"not as completely different as I thought it would be"*
- *"I suppose it's maturity in a way"*
- *"I'm more independent. But in a way it's good and in a way it's not"*
- *"It's quite scary sometimes, because college is so different from school"*
  (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, pp. 20-21).

The second phase of that research was based on interviews with students at a sixth form college and a tertiary college, and whilst primarily concerned with the "learning careers" of the interviewees, did comment on the "*subtle elitism*" (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999, p. 21) which existed, not only between the sixth form college and the tertiary college, but also between academic and vocational programmes at the tertiary college. In particular:

> *[the sixth form college's] work ethic and apparent lack of internal friction was achieved partly through the exclusion of most vocational and part-time students from daytime access, and at the cost of an inward-looking, almost exclusively HE focus. On the other hand, [the tertiary college's] diversity resulted in tension and snobbery between some groups, and the growth of a significant recreational subculture* (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999, p. 36).

These findings are reinforced by research on tertiary colleges which had, for reasons of competition, established "Sixth Form Centres". Whilst, unsurprisingly, the colleges considered that the advantages of such centres (improved public

image, academic ethos, improved competitiveness) outweighed any disadvantages, four of the sixteen colleges surveyed noted that there was: "*resentment from other parts of the college based on perceptions of preferential treatment, insularity, elitism etc*" (Morris et al, 1999, p. 22).

Ainley and Bailey (1997) also report the views of learners in further education, but Glanville (1999) provides the only example I have found of a researcher comparing the views of post-16 students in schools and colleges. Glanville's work, a pilot for a larger study, consisted of interviews with 29 students from a school and a college in South East London, and a school and college in Cornwall. The study focused on reasons for remaining in education and reasons for their choice of institution.

There is relatively little published research focusing specifically on further education. Participants at a DfEE further education research seminar in November 2000 suggested that this was in part because university education departments focused on teaching school teachers, although noting that the ESRC had agreed to fund a project which had the intent of "*Transforming Learning Cultures in FE*" (DfEE, 2000b, paragraph 2.2)

The background research in Barnett (2001/1986) is impressive, and the value to a researcher of his meticulous reporting of primary sources is immeasurable. Barnett is, however, telling a story, not writing a research thesis – what the Sunday Times describes as a "*catalogue of bloody-mindedness, fat-headedness and cack-handedness*" (Barnett, 2001/1986,endcover) – and, overlooking the fact that I am myself cack-handed (i.e. left-handed), I did wonder whether, to some extent, material was selected or rejected depending on whether or not it supported that story.

Barnett does not necessarily judge. Much of the time, the reader is left to come to their own conclusions about motives behind particular action, or inaction. When considering education, for example, Barnett describes the initial briefing in 1941 by Norwood to his Committee as "*an exercise in hypocrisy, if not deception*", because "*Norwood was to tell Butler the following month that he would not be going into great detail in considering the future of education in the technical and modern schools*" (Barnett, 2001/1986, p. 299). An alternative construction might be that Norwood had, within a month, come to appreciate that the Committee he chaired would not be able to discuss in detail the future of education in schools of which they had little or no experience – or that, even if Norwood himself wanted such a discussion, he had been talked out of it (McCulloch, in press).

I have been pleased to be a core member of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training. The Review, which began its work in October 2003 and expects to report finally in 2007, is looking at:

> *Every aspect of 14-19 provision […] qualifications reform, the aims which should underlie such reform, the appropriate learning experiences of young people, the connections between education, training and employment, and the institutional framework* (Nuffield Review, 2005, p. 11).

The Review has commissioned a significant number of papers, including three on the organisational patterns of the 14-19 phase. Hodgson, Spours and Wright (2005) describe the system as being strong in terms of incentives to compete, but weak in terms of incentives to collaborate; Fletcher and Stanton (2005) describe the difficulties of establishing the effects of organisational patterns on performance; and reveals the extent of selection by post-16 institutions, where:

> *…schools cater for 45% of those with 8 or more GCSEs above grade C, their sixth forms only contain 29% of those with 5-7 GCSEs above grade C. […] Could it be that Grammar-School-type selection is alive and well, not only in most sixth form colleges but in the sixth forms of many 'comprehensive' schools?* (Stanton, 2004, p. 7).

In 1998, the DfES published a short, but interesting, piece of research on the factors which caused young people to change their course of study early in their post-16 learning. The study looked at young people following A level courses in schools and sixth form colleges, NVQ students in further education colleges, GNVQ courses in school sixth and those on Youth Training courses. The main findings were that: A level "switchers" were more likely to find the course more difficult than they expected, particularly in schools, where they were more likely to have been accepted onto the course with low GCSE results; NVQ switchers found the course more theoretical and less practical than they had expected; GNVQ switchers found the course too easy; and the Youth Training switchers found their work placements unsatisfactory, often being asked to do menial tasks not directly associated with the company's products. The research found that careers education and guidance had little impact on young people's choices, but, of particular interest to this study, found that for NVQ switchers: "*neither the college environment, nor any perceived differences in teaching style compared with those experienced pre-16, appeared to have been significant factors*" (DfEE, 1998b, p. 2).

I only found three pieces of comparative research about the three types of institution. Lumby and Wilson (2003) sampled the opinions of schools, sixth form colleges and general further education colleges on the specific issue of the value of sixth form colleges. Their research, which involved staff, not students, provided some interesting results. First, there was a clear "pecking order" from sixth form college to school to general further education college. Secondly, staff in the different institutions saw their contributions in very different ways: progression to higher education was the highest-ranked in schools, but was the lowest-ranked in both sixth form colleges and general further education colleges. Personal and social development was ranked highly in schools and sixth form colleges, but not mentioned in general further education colleges. Finally, and perhaps

unsurprisingly, only the general further education colleges saw themselves as a priority group being: "*those who have not succeeded at school*" (Lumby and Wilson, 2003, p. 542).

A second study looked at reasons young people gave for staying on in full-time education at 16. This study (Keys and Maychell, 1998) also looked at school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and general further education colleges, but the questionnaire was sent to general further education colleges serving the same areas as the school sixth forms – so almost by definition, covering very few, if any, tertiary colleges. I found the study unsatisfactory for my purposes for three further reasons: first, the number of responses from sixth-form colleges was low, and meant that statistical analysis of differences in responses was only possible between the school sixth forms and general further education colleges; and secondly, slightly different questions were asked of the students in school sixth forms. Finally, the institutions were asked to administer the questionnaire to a random sample of full-time students who had completed their compulsory education in 1996 (Keys and Maychell, 1998, p. 59): whilst the students in the school sixth forms and sixth form colleges may have been following broadly similar courses of study, I think it likely that many more of the general further education colleges students would be on vocational courses – the more so because those colleges were located in the same areas as the school sixth forms. Nevertheless, the study produced results which are of interest:

Table 4.1: Students' reasons for remaining in full-time education

Why continue in full-time education?	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
	%	%	%
I needed to get appropriate qualifications for a job	57	39	43
I wanted to carry on studying	47	66	53
I needed to get qualifications to go to university	36	52	48
I didn't even consider leaving	15	35	25
I needed to retake GCSEs	9	34	29

(Keys and Maychell, 1998. p. 16)

The final comparative study I found was that mentioned earlier, being undertaken by LSDA into the impact of different forms of provision. The outcomes of that research were beginning to be published as I completed this study, in the form of a brief article (Schagen and Savory, 2006) and a more detailed paper (Stanton and Fletcher, 2006). The research first identified 27 local authority districts where Year 11 pupils who lived within the area largely went on to study post-16 at an institution within the same area, and tested a number of: "*strongly held opinions about the relative merits of different institutional arrangements for post-16 education*" (Schagen and Savory, 2006, p. 33), including that: pupils were more likely to stay on if their school had a sixth form; sixth form colleges achieve better results; and tertiary colleges do as well as other providers. The research concluded that there was: "*little evidence of differences in formal outcomes that can be attributed to type of institution, or institutional mix*" (Stanton and Fletcher, 2006, p. 21).

Peer pressure was also a significant factor in a further study of post-16 decision making, where one young woman was advised by her friends, even though she was unlikely to achieve the grades, to: "*fight for a place in the sixth form*" (Foskett et al, 2003b, p. 7). The author of that report discerned a 'fashion' for post-16 study, an interesting concept of consumerism.

Labaree (1988) provides a fascinating case study of a school established explicitly to cater for what it perceived to be its market. Central High School in Philadelphia was a: "*model meritocracy*" which: "*relentlessly pursued the market metaphor to its logical conclusion*" (Labaree, 1988, p. 61). Perhaps the greatest relevance of Central's history for this study is to demonstrate the unexpected, and undesired, consequences of an attempt to apply market principles to the education system, and the determination shown by the middle classes to secure their position against the threat of egalitarianism. This is a theme which Simon identified in the English system for the 1980s, where there remained: "*in reserve, another strategy – the circumvention of comprehensive systems by new types of school, ideas beginning now to germinate in the minds of the Radical Right*" (Simon, 1999/1991, p. 500, original emphasis).

The call by David Hargreaves for more teacher-led research appears to be being answered. In 1999, a National Teacher Research Panel was established by the Teacher Training Agency and the DFES, to promote teacher involvement in research, subsequently moving to come under the remit of the General Teaching Council for England and the National College for School Leadership. One of the first acts of the Panel was to establish a Best Practice Research Scholarship programme, under which some 5,000 teachers were funded for research within their own school. A report of the work of the Panel was published in 2004, showing many examples of good practice, including one local authority which had appointed a research officer to support teachers, and highlighting that, in fact, a considerable amount of teacher-research had been undertaken over the years, but had not got beyond the individual teacher's own school, department or even, in some cases, beyond the teacher's own classroom (TES, 2004a).

Seifert suggested five patterns of behaviour which: "*would probably describe most students*" (Seifert, 2004, p. 147). Those patterns of behaviour were: mastery – students confident in their own ability; failure avoidance – students who publicly express their expectation of failure, in order to protect their self-esteem if they should fail; learned helplessness – students who do not believe that their efforts can make any difference to their life; work avoidant – students who are bright, but bored, and do the minimum to get by: and hostile work avoidant – students who refuse to learn in order to seek 'revenge' on their teacher (Seifert, 2004, pp. 146-147).

Finally, in another sector, Stone (2005) examines the patent (learning) and latent (social, moral and religious control) functions of education in a university setting, noting, in particular, a switch in emphasis from the latter to the former in the last two decades.

The institutions in public

I was particularly interested in how the different institutions described themselves – and were described – to the outside world. I give detailed examples in the relevant chapters which follow, drawn from five sources.

I looked at the prospectuses which schools and colleges provided for their 16-18 provision, many of which were available on, or through, websites. Those prospectuses had a number of interesting features: first, they appeared to be appealing to both young people and their parents/carers, typically with a front cover which showed happy, smiling, young people, taking part in sport, drama, music and – less commonly – in a classroom. Where classrooms were depicted, often they would show young people using a computer, or in a science lesson, which I took as a sign of the high level of resources. Secondly, I noted that where college prospectuses were usually available to download from the website, many of the

schools' sites did not allow download, but requested a name and address to which the prospectus would be sent: as any student already in the school would be able to simply pick up a copy, I took this as a means by which the school could follow up any initial expressions of interest. Finally, I felt that many of the prospectuses carried implicit criticism of their competition; emphasising what was good, and different about themselves inevitably would lead to comparison. Rarely – although it did happen – was criticism explicit.

A second means of marketing post-16 provision was advertising. External advertising was used very much more by colleges than by schools, because colleges had to encourage potential students to visit in order to find out what was on offer, whereas schools had the majority of their potential sixth formers already on site. Many colleges took out full-page advertisements in local newspapers, or even larger inserts, and sometimes would leaflet every house in an area: most schools, by contrast, would place a small advertisement in a local newspaper, giving details of a forthcoming open evening. In some areas, schools and colleges got together to avoid clashes – in other areas, it was alleged that some schools deliberately ensured their open evening did clash. A number of colleges went even further, with large banners on their buildings, strung across city centre streets, and on the back or sides of buses.

Schools and colleges do not only need to recruit students; they also need staff. For teaching posts, the Times Educational Supplement (TES) carries by far the largest number of vacancies each week; at peak recruiting time it can have 300 or more pages of jobs. With so many jobs to choose from, it is important that an individual school or college advertisement catches the attention of a potential applicant. However, a large advertisement, with pictures of students, in colour, is expensive, and it was clear that such advertisements were used much more frequently by

colleges, where they were advertising a number of posts, making it more cost-efficient. However, this is not necessarily of significant disadvantage to the schools, as the TES advertises college posts in a separate section (FE Focus) from schools. Increasingly, both schools and colleges include in their advertisements the various 'kite marks' that they have accumulated, such as Beacon Status, Disabled Ticks, ArtsMark, and Specialist School.

In 2005, the LSC Management Group decided to change its letter heading. The existing letter heading comprised a red arrow, 'Learning and Skills Council' in blue, and the address in black; the new one was all black. It was estimated that this would save the LSC over £3 million annually. In contrast, schools and colleges were increasingly, as in their job advertisements, including their various, multi-coloured, kite marks; again, they have realised that a letter, even an envelope, is a form of marketing.

The final public descriptions of schools and colleges I looked at were inspection reports. Until 1992, inspection of schools was infrequent, and of colleges almost non-existent, and no reports of those inspections were made public. In 1992, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established to inspect schools in England on a regular, four-year, cycle, and the newly established Further Education Funding Council was to inspect colleges – including sixth form colleges – also on a four-year cycle; both inspectorates were to publish their reports. From 2001, Ofsted took over the role of inspecting colleges. With around 1,800 schools with sixth forms, 100 sixth form colleges, 50 tertiary colleges and 250 other further education colleges, this clearly results in a large number of documents – probably approaching 8,000. I have included extracts from a number of recent reports in the relevant chapters below, as well as extracts from a number of thematic reports which the inspectorates have produced, such as recent publications looking at common

features of a number of failing colleges (Ofsted, 2004e), and common features of particularly successful colleges (Ofsted, 2004f).

THE SCHOOL SIXTH FORM

The school sixth form in fiction

> *Leggo!*
> *Geroff!*
> *Yaroo!*
> *These stentorian cries echoed down the corridor of the Upper Shell*
> (Thomas, 1992, p. 285)

The overwhelming majority of schools in fiction share the characteristics of being private (note: in England, strangely, schools which are privately run are referred to as 'public' schools), boarding, and focussed largely on activity outside the classroom. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes, 1997/1857) is semi-autobiographical, and is based entirely on life at Rugby School under Thomas Arnold, but with little to say about the teaching. Stephen Fry's semi-autobiographical description of his – privileged – secondary education seems to present a theme which is a feature of many autobiographies, where he seems to be saying: "*didn't I do well in spite of not trying at school*", instead, I feel, it shows a remarkable capacity of schools to recognise talent in the most unworthy of young people. Schools also appear as bit players in many novels, including Dickens (*Dotheboys Hall*), Charlotte Bronte (in *Jane Eyre*) and Thackeray (in *Vanity Fair*). Those descriptions, whilst limited and dated, are perhaps more realistic than the later works of Frank Richards (the *Billy Bunter* series), Geoffrey Willans (Molesworth) and, more recently, J K Rowling (the Harry Potter series).

Bunter began life at Greyfriars in the comic *The Magnet*; many similar characters to those in the Remove at Greyfriars were portrayed in *The Bash Street Kids* (Beano) and *Lord Snooty and his Friends* (Beano). In *The Bash Street Kids*, a considerable

amount of the action takes place in the classroom – but little of it, sadly, involves teaching and learning. None of these characters age, with Bunter in the Magnet for some thirty years until it closed, and the *Bash Street Kids* still in the Beano after 50 years. The *Bash Street Kids* celebrated their 50 years by being signed up in 2005 by the Government's Food Standards Agency to promote healthy living – the 'five-a-day' campaign.

In film, depending on one's age, thoughts turn immediately to those two esteemed institutions – *Hogwarts* and *St Trinian's*. Neither of these, one supposes, would be used in the promotional literature of the current public boarding schools; nor, indeed, would *Dotheboys Hall*. A more classical version of the public school is given in *Goodbye Mr Chips* (H G Wells), with the kindly schoolmaster who teaches three generations in the same school, and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Muriel Spark), where Miss Brodie looks carefully after her 'girls', reminding them that they are 'the crème de la crème'. Both these last two films stress the closeness of the relationship between teacher and pupil.

Early television had Billy Bunter (I can still recall the theme tune: '*Portsmouth*'), and throughout the 1980s and 1990s the BBC showed a series on a comprehensive school: Grange Hill. The difference between these is marked; Billy Bunter was in the same form – the Remove – throughout his ten years on television (1952 to 1962). Somehow it was possible for young minds to accept that Gerald Campion – who played Bunter – was aged 15 throughout the series; in fact, Campion was 31 when the series started! Similarly, Jimmy Clitheroe was playing the 'Clitheroe Kid' on television until he was 47, and Janette Tough played 13 year old schoolboy Wee Jimmy Krankie on television and on the stage until retiring in January 2006 at the age of 58. The traditional ability of a willing audience to indulge in fantasy, to suspend belief, is as true today as it was in Shakespeare's day, or perhaps it is that

we live with reality on a daily basis, so want something different for our entertainment.

Grange Hill made no such concessions; it was appealing to an older audience, and television perhaps no longer seemed magical to young people (or adults). The students moved through the school, took their examinations and left; the teachers – including the headteacher – left for new jobs; and the school was re-organised. Still, however, some features remained; little was shown of the classroom, and one of the teachers – Mr Bronson – was blessed with a wig and features very reminiscent of Quelch in *Bunter* and 'Teacher' in *Bash Street Kids* (after 50 years, still un-named). The series began in 1978, and the school developed a sixth form in 1984, when it merged with two other local schools. Storylines featuring the sixth form were primarily set in the common room, but became less frequent over time, as the majority of viewers of the programme were aged 9 to 13, and were more interested in the exploits of their peers.

Recently, television has provided some programmes which seek to both entertain and inform. In 2004 Channel 4 presented a series – *That'll Teach 'Em* – which took a group of 15-16 year olds back to the 1950s, to be put through: "*the tough regime of a 1950s state grammar school and the academic rigour of O-levels*" (Channel 4, 2004)*,* and in 2005, the BBC showed *Ahead of the Class*, a dramatised version of the book by Marie Stubbs about her experience in coming out of retirement to take over a school following the murder of its previous headteacher (Stubbs, 2003). I didn't find these programmes convincing as they are neither one thing nor the other, truly documentary of truly entertainment – perhaps television's equivalent of Tom Brown's Schooldays.

In May 2005 I joined colleagues from the Marketing team at the LSC in a meeting with executives from one of the four main terrestrial channels. The meeting had been arranged in order to discuss possible educational programme themes for the next couple of years, with a particular focus on 14-19 year olds.

A number of ideas were discussed: tackling bullying, teenage pregnancy, drugs, and so on. Towards the end of the meeting, I commented that, as I have noted above, there was little, if any, thought given to showing a classroom in action. One of the television executives thought for a short time, before saying: "*Well, I suppose that's because we don't think that would make good television.*". This point was also made by Ted Wragg, who noted that for most jobs, for most of the day, there is little drama, and as a result, the television producers:

> *…have to spice up the action. […] As Michael Parkinson once said […] Match of the Day is not the edited highlights, it is all the highlights. The resulting 10 minutes of end-to-end action may bear little resemblance to the other 80 minutes of routine passing and tackling* (Wragg, 2004, p. 113).

Ironically, in the last couple of years there has been a relative deluge of television series set in schools, with 'Teachers' (Channel 4), 'Waterloo Road' (BBC) and 'The Street' (BBC) – the latter two appearing after each other on Tuesday evening prime time. Unfortunately, none of these series would necessarily be used as recruitment tools for the profession, with the most recent episode of 'The Street' being devoted to a teacher wrongly accused of abuse. Indeed, the body of work is now so substantial as to merit a PhD study of its own, leading to publication (Ellsmore, 2005).

The school sixth form in print

The most common reference in factual books to schools are in biographies, autobiographies, authorised biographies and, a more recent appearance, the biography where, whilst unwilling to authorise, the subject has assisted in: "*checking*

the main facts and facilitating interviews with several of his friends" (McKinstry, 2001, p. x).

It is first important to note that people writing biographies (Spice Girls and footballers apart) are likely to be towards the end of their careers, and as such, to have been brought up in a different era, where entry to University was the exception, and college education unlikely to lead to prominence in public life.

There is a class divide. Dickie Bird, the cricket Test umpire, describes his life in 449 pages: he leaves school on page 10 (Bird, 1998/1997). Geoffrey Boycott, the Yorkshire and England cricketer: "*passed seven O levels and could have easily have stayed on to do A levels*" (McKinstry, 2001, p 25), but his father had been severely injured in a mining accident – breaking his back – and Geoffrey felt he had to contribute to the family income. According to McKinstry, Geoffrey never forgot what might have been, a feeling which only served to increase his resentment of those in authority in his chosen sport. Frank Muir, the comedy writer, was another whose promising school career was affected by tragedy: "*Was I on my way? No, I was not. […] Dad died*" (Muir, 1998/1997, p.. 58). Muir's father died when he was in the sixth form, having enjoyed his schooling, and he left: "*to work in a carbon-paper factory*" (Muir, 1998/1997, p. 59).

Dudley Moore was a member of the Cambridge Footlights, had a long running comedy partnership with Peter Cook, was an excellent pianist and a successful Hollywood actor. Short and with a club-foot, Moore was bullied and teased by his fellow students throughout much of his time in school, but at the same time his academic ability was respected by his teachers. However, when he was thirteen, he made a joke in class at his teacher's expense – which: "*was the turning point in his young life*" (Paskin, 1997, p. 23). A turning point for sure; this endeared him to his

fellow students, who stopped the bullying, but enraged his teachers, with the exception of his music teacher. Moore did little in his final year: "*I stayed away from music lessons a lot*" (Paskin, 1997, p. 34), but still gained an Organ Scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford.

Margaret Thatcher was Conservative Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. However, Thatcher, whose academic career, with an Oxford degree in chemistry, and subsequently qualifying for the Bar, found difficulties with her sixth form education. According to her unauthorised biographer, her headmistress did not encourage Thatcher's ambitions, and was snubbed publicly – twice – as a result (Campbell, 2001, p. 43).

Even the previous generation expressed mixed feelings about their schooling; Arnold (Lord) Goodman, the lawyer and, for much of the 1970s and 1980s, unofficial Government troubleshooter, wrote a biography of 451 pages. By page 11, he had decided that: "*I would leave my new school early. I had not enjoyed it much*" (Goodman, 1993, p. 11). Fortunately, having been born in 1913, he was able subsequently to decide at 18 to become friendly with a Professor of Law, and enrol at his University. Robert Graves, the writer, agreed with a friend that: "*there were perhaps even more typical public schools than Charterhouse in existence, but that we preferred not to believe it*" (Graves, 1960/1929, p. 36), and: "*did everything possible to show how little respect I had for school tradition.*" (Graves, 1960/1929, p. 55): nevertheless, he won a classical exhibition to St John's College, Oxford. Finally, Rab (Lord) Butler, Conservative minister for ever associated with the Education Act 1944 (the Butler Act), was at Marlborough when Cyril Norwood joined: "*and revolutionized the curriculum, so that the school came right to the front in obtaining scholarships at the universities*" (Butler, 1971, p. 10). Notwithstanding Norwood's revolution, Butler: "*found classics as taught at Marlborough very*

unrewarding" (Butler, 1971, p. 11); he left and obtained an exhibition in French at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where, at the time, his father was Master. Nepotism had no part to play in this appointment, Butler simply went: "*home to Pembroke*" (Butler, 1971, p. 13), and subsequently got Firsts in all three parts of his tripos: French, History and International Law.

There may, of course, be many other books by, or about, individuals where their school life plays a prominent part; I simply have not come across them, with the exception of the autobiography of the late Richard Whiteley, the television news and quiz-show presenter. Whiteley enjoyed boarding at the independent Giggleswick School – except for sport – and particularly enjoyed his time in the sixth form, where he was taught by Russell Harty, who went on to huge success as a television presenter and chat-show host. Harty's teaching: "*was, quite frankly, inspirational. […] He brought with him a vision of the world outside school which few of us had experienced*" (Whiteley, 2000, pp. 29, 30).   Whiteley later returned to Giggleswick as a governor of the school.

The school sixth form in research

Cumbria local education authority in 1997 published a series of briefings on "Life after School", one of which was entitled 'Staying on or leaving school' (Cumbria, 1997). Part of that briefing provided the 10 main reasons given by young people for choosing to stay on in full-time education at 16; that information was used to inform the research questionnaire. Other parts of the briefing, whilst not pursued, may be of interest for further, wider, study. In particular, the briefing showed that where students were attending schools with sixth forms, 65 percent of those staying on would remain in the school, whereas for those young people in schools without 6th forms, only 10 percent of those staying on would enter a school 6th form.

This finding was confirmed by analysis undertaken for DfEE by the Policy Studies Institute of the data from the Youth Cohort Study (DfEE, 1998c).

Also in 1998, a study was undertaken of students' reasons for staying in a school sixth form.   A total of 358 students responded to the questionnaire, but responses from 22 students were excluded, as they had changed school for their sixth form studies. The responses are presented below:

Table 4.2: School sixth form students' reasons for post-16 choice

Reason for post-16 choice	Proportion responding
	%
I wanted to stay somewhere familiar	89
It provides the course I want to do	65
The teachers are very supportive and helpful	56
There is a relaxed atmosphere for sixth formers	54
The teachers are generally nice/interesting	49
The teachers of the subjects I want to do are very good	43
I feel safe and secure	34
The standards of teaching are very good	32
The school has a good reputation	29
I was impressed by the information on the sixth form	17
The school has good discipline	11
My brothers/sisters are at this school	9

(Keys and Maychell, 1998, p. 25. Percentages sum to more than 100, as students were able to make more than one response)

Young people who had chosen not to stay in a school sixth form might be expected to be less positive about that option, but nevertheless, it is of interest that researchers talking to young people in sixth form colleges found that those students felt that staff in schools did not always help them make choices by: "*providing, or allowing to be provided, unbiased and informed advice*" (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 91). A further message for schools from that research was that:

> *Schools argue a range of benefits for young people in staying on at school, for example leadership opportunities. The young people themselves do not always see things in the same light. Above all they want to mix with their peers and be treated as adults.* (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 92)

Whether in school, college or work, young people in their late teens are engaged probably more than at any other age in what has been described as "identity-work" – trying to discover who they are, and to decide what they want to become. Research on this has been undertaken which suggests that school sixth formers were constructing themselves as middle-class, and pathologising working-class students: the researchers do not, however, offer any theories to explain this behaviour (Kehily and Pattman, 2006).

The school sixth form in public

The governing body of a maintained secondary school in England is required by legislation to:

> …*establish a strategic framework for the school by -*
>
> *(a)   setting   aims   and   objectives   for   the   school;*
> *(b) setting policies for achieving those aims and objectives;*
> *(c) setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives.* (HMSO, 2000)

Ofsted, when inspecting a school, reports on whether the governors have established such a framework, and whether it is appropriate:

> *New Mills School and Sixth Form Centre's previous mission statement has been replaced with a clear and more appropriate list of aims in which the school emphasises the need to develop the intellectual potential of each pupil, produce a range of opportunities, to contribute to physical, personal and emotional growth and to give pupils a sense of social responsibility* (Ofsted, 2000, paragraph 87).

It is not surprising, therefore, that schools use the language of aims and objectives explicitly in their prospectuses:

> *Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College aims to provide the very best for our students. Consequently, they are encouraged to develop lively, enquiring and independent minds as members of a community which values each and every individual* (Blatchington, 2006).

Schools also wish to send out other messages to potential students and, perhaps, to their parents. So a school: "*strives to provide a stimulating and safe environment*"

(Homewood, 2006), or might: "*ensure that all students are successful in their applications to higher education*" (Hardley, 2006)

Many schools have mottoes, although these tend now to be in English rather than in Latin (my own secondary school's was: *Res non Verba* – Deeds not Words):

"*working together to achieve success*" (Lymm, 2006)

"*an achievement orientated place of study*" (Devizes, 2006)

"*We wish for the standard of dress to reflect the Sixth Form students' position of responsibility, their career aims and to enhance the reputation of the school in the eyes of the local community, to visitors and also to set a positive example to students in Years 7-11*" (Shenfield, 2006)

The Times Educational Supplement (TES) provides by far the largest market-place for teaching posts in the United Kingdom: the issue for 29 April 2005, for example, had 233 pages of jobs in secondary (not independent) schools (TES, 2005). That same issue of the paper carried a claim that 95 per cent of teachers chose the TES when job hunting (TES, 2005, p. 371).

I looked first at the names of the 56 schools advertising posts of secondary school headteacher or deputy headteacher. Exactly half (28) of those schools managed without additional identifiers, such as Castledown School (TES, 2005, p 75); the next most common group were High Schools (11), followed by Community Schools or Colleges (9), Grammar Schools (3), Academies (2) and Specialist Schools (1); two schools described themselves as "School and Sixth Form Centre". None of those schools included the word 'Comprehensive' in its title.

As a former secondary school mathematics teacher, I paid particular attention to the advertisements for Main Scale mathematics teachers – that is, those without any additional allowances, and so aimed, primarily, at newly qualified teachers: there were 12 pages of jobs. The advertisements from schools with sixth forms fell into

three broad groups: the first group seemed to be generic advertisements for any post at the school, with no information about the actual post (for example, Seaford Head Community College, TES, 2005, p. 188); the second group made it clear that Mathematics was a popular choice at A level, but without giving any explicit indication that it would be available to the successful applicant (for example, Whitby Community College, TES, 2005, p. 193); and the final group (for example, Sandhurst College, TES, 2005, p. 187) looked for teachers who would teach across the age and ability range – which might be construed to include A level. What was clear was that the possibility of A level teaching was considered as a key marketing advantage.

Salaries were not included in cash terms for any of the vacancies, but as MPS (Main Professional Scale) or, occasionally, MPS+1.

The layout of the job advertisements themselves are of interest. Those for Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher are larger than for classroom teachers, and therefore allow for the inclusion of more detail: in particular, they allow for the inclusion of logos and kitemarks. A variety of these are used, including: Investors in People; Sport England Sportmark; School Achievement Award (sometimes more than one); Disability two-ticks; and the logos showing specialist status. In this particular issue of TES, the highest was six, excluding the school's own logo (Burnt Mill School, TES, 2005, p. 77).

From 2002 to 2005, Ofsted conducted area-wide inspections of provision throughout a local education authority for 14-19 year olds. Whilst focussing primarily on whether there was in place a coherent 14-19 strategy, the inspectors commented in particular on the guidance for young people onto post-16 programmes. In five of the

20 reports I reviewed, inspectors made adverse comments about the guidance

given in schools, two examples of which are given below:

> *There is good liaison between the colleges and 11-16 schools. […] None of the 11-18 schools invite college representatives in to talk to students.*
> (Ofsted, 2001b, p. 20)

> *The 11-18 schools concentrate too heavily on providing information about their own sixth form. Students have to obtain information for themselves about other providers* (Ofsted, 2001c, p. 15)

These comments immediately suggest intentional, or unconscious, bias by staff in

11-18 schools, putting institutional needs ahead of the best interests of the young

people. I think that may be too superficial, and that other reasons might be in play,

such as a genuine pride in the school, and a belief that staying on, albeit not on the

course of choice, is genuinely better for the young person than following their course

of choice at another – almost by definition – inferior institution. This was certainly

the experience of a group of apprentices in the West Midlands, who found

apprenticeship was sold: "*like it's the left over tin on the shelf*" (Unwin and

Wellington, 2001, p. 50), although one young person was patronising beyond his

years to careers officers:

> *…they like do their best and keep giving you information but […] It's made really clear that you're not taking the best choice if you leave. I had loads of arguments with people but they've all been to college and university and that so they think that's what everyone should do. But it was better for them* (Unwin and Wellington, 2001, p. 50).

Other researchers found that: "*In the majority of cases […] the school's own sixth

form is openly promoted at the expense of other options*" (Foskett et al, 2003a, p.

13).

These findings are consistent with those of a further study, which asked over 1,300

students aged 16-18 in full-time study about the guidance they had received in

making their choice; 50 per cent of those in schools sixth forms said they would

have liked more help, compared with 42 per cent in sixth form colleges and 41 per cent in general further education colleges (Keys and Maychell, 1998, p. 42).

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, in his annual report for 2003/04, said: "*Almost all school sixth forms are effective and provide successfully for their students, especially those taking A levels.*" (Ofsted, 2004g). An annex to that report provided details of schools and colleges considered to be: "*particularly successful*", having been praised in at least two successive inspections. The list of 68 institutions included 45 secondary schools, 16 sixth form colleges and seven further education colleges. Two secondary schools with sixth forms had received glowing reports at three successive inspections; the extracts below are from their most recent inspection reports.

> *Oxted has a very good sixth form. […] Sixth formers have access to an exceptionally wide range of enrichment and extension activities, as well as opportunities to take responsibility and develop leadership skills. […] Students show considerable maturity in their attitudes to work and make a substantial contribution to the life of the school. […] [Students] value the quality of teaching and the willingness of staff to give up time to help them.* (Ofsted, 2003).

> *The sixth form A-level curriculum is very good. It is unusually broad in the range of courses it provides, catering for every student's needs. […] Students enjoy the sixth form and are pleased they stayed at this school. […] They like the way everyone knows each other and are impressed by the helpfulness and commitment shown by their teachers. They feel they are treated like adults.* (Ofsted, 2004d).

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 enabled Ofsted inspectors to report on a school's sixth form separately from the rest of the school; thus whilst a school might be considered to be performing satisfactorily, Ofsted could find the provision in the sixth form to be 'inadequate'. The Education Act 2005, which introduced a 'lighter touch' inspection regime, replaced this terminology with 'requiring significant improvement'. The use of this terminology was important, as, if a reinspection of the sixth form confirmed the finding, the Learning and Skills Council was given the right to propose

the closure of the sixth form. I felt it might be instructive to look at what reasons Ofsted gave for those findings, as well as providing the key features of sixth form provision Ofsted found to be 'outstanding'. I should stress that the extracts below are not intended to be representative; at 31 December 2004 only six schools were listed by Ofsted as having an inadequate sixth form, and awaiting reinspection.

The Ellowes Hall School, Dudley was inspected in November 2004. Ofsted inspectors found that: teaching was good, and students learnt well when on courses suited to their needs; too many students were badly advised to embark on unsuitable courses; the curriculum was unsatisfactory and did not provide adequately for students who had not achieved higher grades at GCSE; students liked the school; the sixth form met a distinct local need; and leadership and management of the sixth form was unsatisfactory (Ofsted, 2005b).

Bebington High Sports College was inspected in October 2004. Ofsted inspectors found that: standards in examinations were low and there was significant under-achievement; advice, guidance and support for students was unsatisfactory; the curriculum provision was poor and did not meet student's needs; students' attitudes were very good and their behaviour excellent; leadership was unsatisfactory and management poor (Ofsted, 2004a).

It seems rare for television documentaries to report on success; I certainly cannot recall the headline: 'Is this the best school in Britain?'. In November 1996, however, The Ridings School in Halifax featured in a BBC Panorama programme, as a result of which it was dubbed: 'the worst in Britain' and 'The School from Hell'. There followed an emergency Ofsted inspection, and the short term closure of the school before a 'Superhead' could be 'parachuted in'. (I should declare an interest, as I

had prepared the case in 1994 for the merger of two schools to create The Ridings, and my last teaching post was under Peter Clark, the 'Superhead'.)

Some eighteen months later, reporters from the Times Educational Supplement interviewed students at the school:

> *Michelle said she got an A-star in PE. The reporter said, 'well we won't bother putting that in' […] Mary Burns added, 'At the end of the day, if you get money slapped in your hands for slagging off your teachers then you're going to do it, aren't you* (TES, 1998a, p. 11).

In January 2005, the BBC showed 'Ahead of the Class', a dramatised version of the experience of Marie Stubbs, coming out of retirement to take charge of St George's School in Maida Vale, following the murder of the previous headteacher, Philip Lawrence, when trying to break up a fight: again, not a flattering tale. Most recently, Channel Five equipped a supply teacher with hidden cameras, and screened the programme in April 2005 under the title: 'Classroom Chaos'. A spokesman for Channel Five said: "*I hope this film will open every parent's eyes to the chaos that reigns in many classrooms and makes meaningful teaching almost impossible.*" (BBC, 2005b). Whilst I would not deny that bad behaviour occurs in schools – I taught in secondary schools for 13 years – I would query how representative this film was, showing incidents from six of the 18 schools in which the supply teacher had worked, and using someone in her late 50s, returning after a 30-year gap.

One other interesting – and very public – source of data about school sixth forms arises when proposals are brought forward for changes in provision, either establishing new sixth forms or closing existing ones. Always controversial, I was involved in detailed discussions with the Department in 1993/94 over a proposal by Calderdale Council to close two 11-16 schools and establish an 11-18 school in their place. Those discussions centred on a desire by the then Secretary of State, John

Patten, to be able to consider such proposals objectively, against an agreed and public set of criteria. The proposal was ultimately approved, and the new school was The Ridings, in Halifax – which subsequently gained such notoriety. As Reorganisations Co-ordinator for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), I prepared the evidence base for the FEFC response to over 100 such proposals between 1994 and 1998, of which around 70 were approved. The detailed example below has most of the features typical of the reasons given by schools for the opening, or retention, of school sixth forms, and is worthy of detailed description.

Under the Education Act 2002, the LSC was given the power to propose changes to sixth form provision, including closure. This power came into force on 1 April 2002, and the following morning, The Independent newspaper carried an exclusive interview with Bryan Sanderson, Chairman of the LSC, under the headline: "Efficiency plan may close up to 200 sixth forms" (Independent, 2002). That evening, Radio 5 Live broadcast an interview with Bryan Sanderson. The interviewer, Jane Garvey, introduced the item by saying: "*Dozens of sixth forms around Britain are facing the threat of closure or could be forced to merge. This Learning and Skills Council, which apparently – I didn't know this – is responsible for the education of everyone aged 16 and above, says this move is necessary to improve efficiency*" (BBC, 2002). Bryan Sanderson responded by quoting Ofsted as saying that at least 150 students were needed to provide a good range of subjects, but that much smaller numbers could be effective if the school offered a very limited and specialised offer. However, he concluded that: "*there are 1,800 sixth forms, to put it in context, around the country […] and it would be remarkable if some form of change wasn't needed*" (BBC, 2002). On 25 April, The Times carried an article by Bryan Sanderson denying that the LSC had any agenda for closing small sixth forms, and indeed, considering that the 14-19 Green Paper would: "*offer increased protection for sixth forms providing high-quality education*" (Times, 2002).

Regardless of those assurances, the Secretary of State again considered it necessary to set out in public the principles under which proposals would be considered. Those principles were published in October 2003, and were described under the five headings of: quality; distinctiveness; diversity; choice; and cost-effectiveness (DfES, 2003d).

Discussions over the second of the five principles – distinctiveness – delayed publication by many months. The Sunday Times, in June 2003, carried an article outlining the issue, with quotes from "Westminster sources" and " a former official" (Sunday Times, 2003). In essence, the Prime Minister's special adviser on education wanted <u>discrete</u> sixth form provision, in the form of separate institutions, which would result in the creation of about 100 new sixth form colleges, rather than <u>distinct</u> provision, such as sixth form centres in tertiary colleges. I was involved in the drafting of the text of the document – although my contribution was on cost-effectiveness – and it seemed like something of a game to see the draft bouncing between DfES and No. 10 with some minor amendments, but with one word being changed each time. Distinctiveness won. It was interesting to see in January 2004 the Minister for Lifelong Learning emphasising, during a debate on a proposed reorganisation in Cumbria that: "*the word is <u>distinct</u> not <u>discrete</u>*" (Hansard, 2004a, column 234).

The first proposals under these new powers were brought forward in Haringey, by London North LSC. The proposals arose from an inspection report by Ofsted of post-16 provision in Haringey, which was critical of provision in four schools in the east of the borough, and at the local general further education college. Two proposals were offered for consultation: a sixth form school; or a sixth form college – both of which would involve the closure of the sixth forms in four schools, together with the transfer of some 16-19 provision from the college. The difference between

the two proposals was that the first institution would be under local authority control, the second would not; three other options, including a tertiary college, had been rejected by the LSC, and were not offered for consultation.

Responses to the consultation (Tribal, 2003) fell under a number of headings: those favouring the sixth form school; those favouring the sixth form college; those favouring either; and those favouring neither. The responses were perhaps predictable: some of the schools involved wished to keep their sixth forms, or if not, to have a sixth form school; local colleges had a preference for a sixth form college, except for the college affected, which asked for the tertiary option to be reconsidered. What is of particular interest is the detailed concerns expressed in general, or in favour of the various options.

There were a number of criticisms of the consultation process – limited circulation of the consultation document, not enough time to respond, not enough documents in minority languages, and so on. My experience shows this to be common; many consultations fail on a technicality, rather than on the strength of the case, and the process can be quantified in a way which a proposal cannot – it is easy to demonstrate that less than three months was given between the first publication of the proposal and the closing date for comment, but less so to demonstrate that the new provision will produce better results than the existing arrangements.

Local colleges were concerned that a new purpose-built sixth form facility was likely to be very popular, but that it was more likely to attract students who would have continued in education post-16 anyway, rather than those who would otherwise have left the system. The result of this, they felt, would be to damage existing colleges and lead to unhelpful competition.

The schools' main concerns were that the proposals were counter to the wishes of parents, who were strong supporters of the schools, and that the proposals would lead to difficulties in recruiting and retaining teaching staff, particularly as there would still be 11-18 schools in the west of the borough. Schools were also concerned that a sixth form school, or college, would be seen as having a particular ethos and identity, and that the new arrangements would discourage participation in post-16 learning by the less able and those from black and ethnic minorities. Most of the schools wanted to see arrangements under which their staff could continue to have some sixth form teaching; the support for the sixth form school was on the basis that such arrangements would be easier if all the establishments were under the local authority.

The final proposal from the LSC, agreed by the Secretary of State, was for the closure of four sixth forms and the establishment of a sixth form school.

A proposal by West Sussex LSC to remove sixth forms from schools was the subject of a discussion on BBC radio in 2004, involving two sixth formers from schools affected. Responding to the LSC point that change was necessary because of the poor examination performance on students in the existing system, one of the students considered that: "*only 10 per cent maybe of the whole sixth form experience can be put down to statistics. I mean, what about the leadership […] what about the friendships*" (BBC, 2004). As mentioned earlier, a proposal in Cumbria led to an adjournment debate in the House of Commons (Hansard, 2004a, columns 227-238).

THE COLLEGES

The colleges in fiction

In view of their relatively recent establishment, it is perhaps not surprising that sixth form colleges have not yet been used in fiction, either written or film. Indeed, the only time I can recall a sixth form college featuring in a television drama was in 2000, when one of the sites of Pendleton College was appeared on the ITV soap, Coronation Street, as Weatherfield Prison; the college site, with its high walls surmounted by barbed wire, was ideal in that role.

No such wealth of fictional depiction of sixth form colleges or further education colleges exists. For sixth form colleges, I'm afraid, I found nothing; further education provided more, but of dubious quality. Henry Wilt, the eponymous hero of Tom Sharpe's series, began life as a lecturer in a further education college, but none of the action takes place in the college, which serves only as a justification for his misery; I think it likely that the introduction of inflatable dolls had more to do with the transfer of 'Wilt' to the big screen than the attraction of Liberal Studies for Bricklayers 3 at Ipford Tech!

More recently, Channel 4 has been presenting a daytime programme for young people – *Hollyoaks*. This focuses around young people, most of whom are attending the local tertiary college – Hollyoaks Community College. The format is similar to that adopted by Grange Hill, with the college primarily the backdrop for a series of inter-personal relationships, rather than as a teaching and learning venue. Nevertheless, it has been a series which has interested the LSC's Marketing team, as a medium through which to bring the attention of young people to a range of new educational opportunities – which the Marketing team insist on referring to as '*our products*'. The references to Apprenticeships in Hollyoaks builds on a proud tradition of subliminal advertising by Government and its agencies, perhaps at its

best in the 1940s, with Dan Archer extolling the virtues of artificial insemination for cows to his farming colleagues in Ambridge.

The Wilt series of Tom Sharpe has a connection with further education. Sharpe had lectured from 1963 to 1972 at Cambridge College of Arts and Technology, and in the first of the series had Henry Wilt teaching liberal studies to "Bricklayers 3" (Sharpe, 1976). By 2004, Wilt had been promoted to Head of Department, but whilst the book is firmly placed in the present world of Al Qaeda, the college is still the "Tech", and run by the Education Authority; the only change is that Wilt is now teaching "Gender Assertiveness" (Sharpe, 2005/2004).

Wilt was made into a film, a rare, and possibly unique example of a further education college on the big screen. I have only been able to find one example of a further education college as the setting for a television series, but this was unusual in that the majority of the action <u>did</u> take place in the classroom. The series was about an English language evening class for non-English speakers, and utilised as many as possible foreign stereotypes. *Mind Your Language*, which ran from 1977 to 1979: "*…was still very dodgy comedy. It may not have been racist, as some claimed, but it certainly wasn't clever*" (BBC, 2003). The teacher was pleasant, but the series would not be mistaken as an advertisement for further education.

The colleges in print

The first sixth form college opened in 1969; the first tertiary college in 1974, and before then very few young people would have pursued an academic education anywhere other than in school. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as yet, very few people have gone through a college education and had a career subsequently which merits a biography or autobiography. Those young people who have been

successful, in entertainment or sport, very often achieved that success at the sacrifice of post-16 education.

There are, however, some examples. Spike Milligan, comedian, jazz musician, author – but primarily remembered as the creator and founder member of *The Goons* – was born in 1918 in India, brought up and schooled in India, but had a fitful education, as the family moved often. The family returned to England just after Milligan's 15th birthday, and he was over the minimum school leaving age. Milligan enrolled at the Woolwich and Greenwich Day Continuation School in order to: "*qualify himself for a decent job*" (Carpenter, 2004/2001, p. 21), and appears to have done well, getting a positive reference. Carpenter believes, however, that Milligan was forever convinced that he had the brains to have gone to university, but was born into the wrong class. Ironically, Carpenter also records that Richard Ingrams, at one-time editor of Private Eye: "*suggested that Spike's originality of thinking was largely the result of his having had so little education*" (Carpenter, 2004/2001, p. 11).

John Major, Conservative Prime Minister from 1990 to 1997, records that: "*At school, I did as little as possible. I thought of the place as a penance to be endured*" (Major, 2000/1999, p. 20). That, and his parents' ill health, meant that Major decided to leave school in 1959 after passing just three O levels: History, English Language and English Literature. His father's death, three years later, seems to have been the catalyst for Major to realise that a good job depended on qualifications, and at 19 he had to decide whether to study at evening class or by correspondence. Major eventually decided on correspondence, as attending evening classes: "*would wreck political activities*" (Major, 2000/1999, p. 31). Finally David Blunkett, who was Labour Secretary of State for Education and Skills from 1997 to 2001, and subsequently held other Cabinet posts. Blunkett seems to have enjoyed his schooldays, devoting a third of his autobiography to his time in a variety

of day and residential schools for the blind. Blunkett is another who was young – 12 – when his father died, and whilst the schools he attended seem to have been caring, they did not have high aspirations for their charges. The Principal of his senior school – Allbrighton Hall (a constituent part of the Royal Normal College for the Blind) – did not believe in O levels and A levels, but did allow Blunkett and a few others to enrol on evening classes at Shrewsbury Technical College, where he took two O levels a year for three years, and A level Economics. Returning to his home in Sheffield to work, he enrolled at the local further education college to do further A levels, eventually being offered a place at Sheffield University: "*The offer was precisely what I had secretly dreamed of, but never dared believe would come my way*" (Blunkett, 2002, p. 87).

The colleges in research

There is little or no research specifically into sixth form colleges before the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the most significant being two questionnaires issued in 1977 by sixth form colleges to their own students. Since then, there have been a small number of studies, looking at sixth form colleges from very different perspectives.

In the 1977 questionnaires, one college surveyed current students, the other surveyed students who had left six months previously. In both surveys, staff/student relationships were often quoted as being worthy of special mention. Former students who had progressed to university were strongly of the view that the sixth form college prepared them well for higher education, and, in fact, gave them an advantage over those who had been in school sixth forms:

> *In some respects I feel two years ahead of the other students at university. […] I feel as if I am quite used to a lot of the features of university life they are new to. I am used to being with people of only my own age and having a certain familiarity with the staff* (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 197).

Shorter (1994) and Robinson and Burke (1996) concentrated on the challenges facing sixth form colleges immediately following the 1992 Act. Both expressed concerns that the colleges were so wedded to their distinctive ethos that they would be unwilling, or unable, to adapt to changing circumstances. A powerful example of this is given where sixth form college principals left: "*their vice or associate principals to manage 'FEFC type' functions whilst [the principals sought] to maintain their 'specialness' based on academic principles*" (Robinson and Burke, 1996, p. 9). In both studies, one future scenario was that sixth form colleges would not survive, but would be taken over by general further education colleges.

A rare example of the learner voice appears in a study of institutional culture and dispositions to learning, which followed 50 young people through four years of further education, rarer still in that it is the voice of students in a sixth form college (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000).

A detailed, and later, study of five sixth form colleges seemed to confirm the desire of those colleges to maintain a distinct ethos and culture, even though the research found that: "*there was no single staff culture in all the case study colleges*" (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 72). The only two consistent values found were to see students as individuals, and to instil a work ethic. Within each staff, the researchers found what they described as traditionalists and innovators; and whilst the balance was changing as older, former grammar school, staff retired, the researchers also commented on an increased tendency for staff to meet as departments, rather than in a single staffroom, which perhaps mitigates against whole-staff development.

Among the messages for sixth form colleges from this study were that sixth form colleges faced choices in selecting a market; some were defining their mission as excellence at level 3, others as providing excellent teaching to students of all ability

levels and all ages in the community. The study also noted that, whilst young people appreciated being treated as individuals, for many staff this did not extend to involving students in decisions about their learning (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 92).

Finally, the researchers noted: "*strong support for the continuity of a tripartite system of post-16 provision, in the interests of diversity and choice*" (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 28). What is interesting is that the sixth form colleges saw the post-16 tripartite system as: school sixth form; sixth form college; and general FE college.

In his doctorate study, Machon identifies two distinct phases in the establishment of sixth form colleges. The first phase, from the mid-1960s up to 1974, he typifies as one where reorganisation was based on an assessment of what was best for young people; schools and staff were opting **in** to a sixth form college system. Until 1974, there would have been a broadly consistent pattern of provision within each local authority area; however, the amalgamation of neighbouring authorities into larger entities introduced conflict. Machon identifies how that the community college model in the county area of Leicestershire conflicted with the grammar school model in the City; a similar situation existed where I attended secondary school, in Dewsbury, a county borough in West Yorkshire, where one of the few tripartite secondary systems was surrounded by a comprehensive county. As the counties were substantially larger, there was pressure for the smaller authorities to change; Machon describes the sixth form colleges created at this time as resulting from staff seeking to opt **out** of a comprehensive system (Machon, 2002, p. 69).

There is further evidence that by the mid-1970s sixth form colleges were being seen as a positive way forward, rather than as a defence, and Macfarlane notes that, in 1976, the Headmasters' Association confirmed that:

> *Many of us who now work in the [Sixth Form] Colleges entered them as an act of faith or necessity and are now pleased and proud to report that our faith was more than justified and that necessity has been turned into a virtue*"
> (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 192).

Whilst this is a powerful argument, and may well be of historical interest, there is little evidence to suggest that the subsequent development of the two groups of colleges has been different in any significant way.

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) undertook research in 2001/02: "*to identify the key features of student achievement at sixth form colleges*" (LSDA, 2003). The researchers concluded that sixth form colleges made a major and distinctive contribution to post-16 learning, particularly at level 3, and were characterised by the good levels of morale among both staff and students. Key success factors for the colleges included the rigorous but sensitive use of value-added data, commitment from senior management and the governing body to raising achievement, and effective college-wide strategies.

In listening to the views of students in sixth form colleges, one group of researchers identified some messages for further education colleges. The sixth form colleges' students:

> *…feared that they would not be treated as individuals and cared for sufficiently in a GFE college. They did not want to mix with a majority of adults. […] Students, and by all accounts their parents, accorded little prestige to GFEs. The success stories of GFE students on higher level courses is little known* (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 91).

Other than the description of the establishment of Halesowen College (Terry, 1987) already referred to, and a study by the Responsive Colleges Unit (RCU, 2003) which I consider in Chapter 8, I found no research relating specifically to tertiary colleges. There is, however, a growing body of research about different aspects of further education. Some researchers have looked in detail at the impact of incorporation of

colleges, and in particular the introduction of the FEFC funding methodology (Spours and Lucas, 1996, Lucas, 1998, McDonald and Lucas, 2001), whilst others have considered the development of further education within the context of Government ambitions to establish a Learning Society (Coffield, 2000, 2001, Green and Lucas, 1999). One study reported on interviews with students at two colleges, concluding that FE students' intentions tended to be instrumental and transitory, always as a means to an end (Ainley and Bailey, 1997).

The colleges in public

The governors of sixth form colleges – other than the Roman Catholic sixth form colleges – have to comply with articles of Government made by order of the Secretary of State. Those articles of Government include that the governors are responsible for: "*the determination of the educational character and mission of the institution and for the oversight of its activities*" (DfES, 2001a).

I looked at the on-line prospectuses of 10 sixth form colleges. Each one had an explicit mission statement, identified as such, and, without exception those mission statements included either the word 'excellence' or the term 'high-quality'. So, two typical examples:

Barton Peveril College's mission statement is `*to be a centre of excellence in post-16 education, adding value to our students' experience and levels of achievement*' (Barton, 2006).

John Leggott Sixth Form College's mission is "*to be a centre of excellence providing many high quality opportunities in a supportive and caring environment* " (Leggott, 2006).

Vacancies are advertised in FE Focus, a separate section in the Times Educational Supplement dedicated to news about further education and jobs in that sector; the edition of 29 April 2005 included vacancies for senior managers and for teaching staff.

The advertisement for Vice-Principal of Winstanley College was quite short, but got over a number of messages: the vacancy arose because of the promotion of the previous post-holder to a post as Principal; the college specialised in A level courses for its 1700 full-time 16-19 year old students; the college had featured for five years in the top ten of best-performing colleges; it was a Beacon College; and finally, in language not used by schools, it was in financial health category A. (TES, 2005, p. 13). The other senior management vacancy also commented on financial health.

A feature of the majority of the vacancies for teaching staff in sixth form colleges was that the actual salary, on the national Sixth Form Colleges pay scale, was given, together with the possibility of additional payments to those who had passed the Professional Standards Threshold. Almost all advertisements made it clear that the post involved A level teaching, almost all were looking for 'suitably qualified individuals', and all were recruiting 'Teachers', or, for promoted posts, Senior Tutor or Head of Department.

The sixth form colleges used kitemarks and logos in their advertisements, but most seemed to be content with just Investors in People and the Disability two-ticks; a few also displayed their Beacon, or Centre of Vocational Excellence awards.

The Henley College, in Oxfordshire, publishes annually its "Enrichment Programme" which is offered alongside the main course of study for full-time students. In

2003/04 that programme included opportunities in some 30 general areas, including music and drama, sign language, the Alexander Technique, self-defence and public speaking, together with almost 30 different sports: ranging from football, rounders and rugby to scuba diving, off-road biking and – inevitably – rowing (Henley, 2003).

In his annual report for 2003/04, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools commented that: "*Sixth form colleges continue to be highly successful in almost all aspects of their* work", and identified 16 sixth form colleges as: "*particularly successful*" (Ofsted, 2004g). The two inspected most recently were Newham Sixth Form College and Godalming College; the inspection reports for those colleges included the following comments:

> *Newham Sixth Form College is a thriving sixth form college. […] The student body is ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse; over 90% of students aged 16 to 18 are from minority ethnic groups. The college recruits 98% of its students from disadvantaged areas* (Ofsted, 2005d).

Students at the college highlighted a number of features, including: high-quality teaching; friendly staff who support and value students; accessibility of tutors and teachers; being treated like adults; and the cleanliness and safety of the college environment.

Ofsted inspectors described Godalming College as being situated in: "*an affluent area. […] Unemployment is low at 0.9% and average house prices are very high. […] 95% of students identified themselves as white*" (Ofsted, 2005c).

Students at the college liked: being treated like adults; friendly and supportive staff; good individual help and support; and the good atmosphere in the college.

In 2003, the convenor of the Tertiary Colleges Network wrote to the Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council that:

> *Those of us who work in tertiary colleges believe that we contribute to institutions which have a unique mix of academic and vocational courses, a particular pattern of student enrolments from different age groups, broad curriculum offering, and a special relationship with our 11-16 partner schools. All of these have contributed to typical characteristics such as strong pastoral support, rich and varied cultural life, close community involvement and outstanding academic success* (Burnett, 2003).

The governors of tertiary colleges are responsible for: "*the determination of the educational character and mission of the institution and for the oversight of its activities*" (DfES, 2001b).

I looked at the on-line prospectuses of 10 tertiary colleges. The mission statements varied, and whilst words such as 'quality' and 'excellence' did appear, they were not as common as 'community', or the phrase 'to meet the needs'. Typical examples were:

> "*to meet the requirements of learners predominantly in Barnsley and the surrounding areas of South Yorkshire*" (Barnsley, 2006).

> "*a college at the heart of its community providing high quality education and training to meet the diverse needs of individuals and organisations in Braintree and its surrounding areas*" (Braintree, 2006)

There was a very strong impression from many of the prospectuses that the college was the servant of its community – whatever you want, we'll provide. An interesting feature of these statements is the reference to serving the locality; in the second half of the 1990s, a number of colleges had become involved in franchising delivery to other organisations around the country. In most cases, the college would invite a training provider to make provision on behalf of the college, draw down the appropriate funding, and pass on most – but not always all – of that funding to the provider. Concerns were raised about the quality assurance of such provision, with one college having partners in every local authority area in England, and funding

rates for such provision were cut substantially. Now, colleges emphasise their localness.

The colleges advertise primarily in FE Focus. Most of the posts are described as 'Lecturer', with promoted posts as Course Leader, Programme Manager or Head of School. It is a requirement (following from the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts consideration of Halton College – for which I prepared the briefing for the Permanent Secretary of State, and the accompanying press notice) that all newly-appointed lecturers in further education on full-time or substantial part-time contracts should have a relevant teaching qualification, or should obtain one within 2 years (full-time) or 4 years (part-time); some of the advertisements indicate specifically that applicants should already have a teaching qualification, whilst others adopt variants of the wording: "*or be willing to undertake one*" (Uxbridge College, TES, 2005).

Tertiary colleges often used block advertisements, giving greater space for logos and design features, including pictures of happy young people (Yeovil College, TES, 2005, p. 32). The most common logos were Investors in People and the Disability two-ticks.

In his annual report for 2003/04, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools identified seven general further education colleges as particularly successful. Three of those colleges were members of the Tertiary Colleges Network; the two inspected most recently were Brockenhurst College and Burnley College.

Ofsted inspectors praised the outstanding leadership and management at Brockenhurst College, the high standard of teaching and learning and the strong focus on continuous improvement. Students at the college particularly liked the

relaxed, friendly community atmosphere, good support from caring teachers and support staff and being treated as adults and with respect (Ofsted, 2004b).

Strong leadership was also a key feature of Burnley College, together with good and improving quality of teaching and a welcoming, secure and calm learning environment. Students at the college commented on the good advice they received prior to and during enrolment, the secure and welcoming environment and being treated as an adult (Ofsted, 2005a).

By contrast, Ofsted inspectors found the overall quality of provision to be inadequate at People's College, a tertiary college in Nottingham. The inspectors identified some key strengths at the college, including a wide range of partnerships and links with employers and schools, as well as good informal support for students from teachers. However, the inspectors felt that improvement was needed in a number of areas, including the quality of teaching and learning, management of the curriculum and quality assurance arrangements. Students at the college liked the helpful and caring teachers, the relaxed and friendly college atmosphere and what they considered to be good teaching. The improvements looked for by students at the college were to do with premises: more car parking, better catering facilities and temperature control of classrooms (Ofsted, 2004c).

A HOME NATION AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

In this section I wish first to describe the context in England in which the schools and colleges to which I turn later have developed over the last thirty years, and in which they are operating in 2005. The second part of this section provides an overview of education provision for 16-19 year olds in the home nations and in a number of other European countries.

Three broad contexts are described, the economic, educational and political. Whilst in my earlier discussion of the nature of educational research I noted the concerns that such research should be educational in nature, and not borrow from other disciplines, equally, it is wrong to:

> …*deny that there are restraints on the educational process – economic and social, political and ideological – which require analysis. Rather, I would say, it assists researchers to take the necessary overall view so far as education is concerned, including due recognition of these restraints* (Simon, 1977a, p. 4).

The three types of institution that are the subject of this study receive fuller description in later chapters, so the points made about education in this chapter are of a more general nature.

Proposed changes in education in England are usually described as: "*the biggest in a generation*": in reality, most are tinkering at the margins. Ted Wragg, listening in 1991 to the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Clarke, outlining the latest Government proposals, concluded that, in essence, Clarke had said: "*It is a far-reaching reform, and its most radical feature is that it leaves everything exactly the same*" (TES, 1991, p. 88). Private Eye magazine, in 2005, put almost the same form of words into the mouth of Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly, when introducing the White Paper on 14-19 reform (Private Eye, 2005, p. 20). For some, since the late 1970s England has been in a: "*constant period of 14-19 curriculum and qualifications reform*" (Hodgson and Spours, 2003, p. 9).

One of the changes with the most far-reaching consequences may be seen as the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in the mid-1980s, with the first examinations in 1988. It was not so much the introduction of the examination, which replaced two previous examinations and retained the same grading system, as an accompanying change in the assessment, moving from norm-

referencing to criteria-referencing. If it was believed that only 25% of 15 year olds were capable of passing an examination, setting the pass mark was easy – and for the 11 years preceding the introduction of GCSE, the proportion of 15 year olds achieving five or more grades A-C had, indeed, been steady at between 24% and 26% of the cohort (TSO, 1997, p. 9). In the following four years, that proportion rose to 37%, and by 2004 had exceeded 53% (DfES, 2005c, p. 1).

With more 15 year olds succeeding, more wished to stay in education and pursue General Certificate of Education Advanced (A) levels. Prior to 1986, A levels had been subject to a "double-norm" effect; young people's achievements at O level was artificially restricted, which in turn restricted the number pursuing A levels; A levels, in turn, were norm-referenced, with a failure rate of 30 per cent recommended by the Secondary School Examinations Council, and with further expectation that 20 per cent would be awarded a grade E (Tymms and Fitz-Gibbon, 2001, p. 164). A doubling of the proportion of young people succeeding at 15 has led to a similar increase in the proportion of young people achieving the qualifications which had been considered previously as entitling admission to higher education. In addition, there has been significant reform over the last 20 years of the vocational qualifications available for 16-19 year olds, with a particular emphasis on raising the standards of the qualifications and the quality of delivery such that vocational qualifications would be recognised by employers and by higher education as being of the same status as A levels (Sharp, 1997).   Growth in higher education was probably unavoidable. Whilst I am doubtful whether this growth in achievement and participation was anticipated, in part or in full, and have been able to find no evidence of an assessment of the likely impact, the changing economic circumstances in England may not have made the growth entirely undesirable.

Maynard Keynes acknowledged that the basis of his economic theory was: "*precarious*" (Keynes, 1967/1936), but that theory nevertheless underpinned British economic policy until the mid-1970s, despite many detractors. In the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1973, there was a fourfold increase in the price of oil, inflation – in single figures from 1941 to 1973 – rose to a peak of 24% in 1975 and remained in double figures almost continually until 1981. Crucially, however, unemployment figures also rose, from 4.8% of the working population in 1976 to 9% in 1981 (House of Commons, 1999, p. 16). At its simplest level, Keynesian economics relied on equilibrium between inflation and unemployment; this was now shown not to be the case.

Ralph Miliband attributed consideration of a post-capitalist society to the Labour Party, and in particular to: "*Mr Crosland among others*" (Miliband, 1973, p. 11). Ralph's son, David, was later the co-author, with David Finegold, Ken Spours, Ewart Keep and David Raffe of an Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) book: "The British Baccalaureate" (Finegold et al, 1990), and Schools Minister in the DfES – in which capacity he appointed in 2004 the members of the Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform, including Spours, Keep and Raffe – which broadly recommended an English Baccalaureate (I was privileged to represent the LSC at an IPPR seminar in 2004 which considered the Interim Report of the Working Group; the 20 or so attendees included Spours and Keep, and were addressed by Miliband).

The Callaghan Government collapsed in 1979, and the Conservatives were elected, with a new leader – Margaret Thatcher. A new paradigm was needed, and this was provided by Karl Popper and Milton Friedman, who has been described as believing that: "*All that is required is that confronted with relative market valuation, economic men and women make rational choices*" (Hutton, 1995, p. 226/227).

The new Government was determined to apply market principles, if possible, to all aspects of its responsibilities. Nationalised industries were privatised, compulsory competitive tendering was introduced for many local authority services and, in education, schools were given delegated budgets, based on pupil numbers and were allowed to enrol pupils up to the physical capacity of the building – where previously the local authority would limit enrolments at popular schools in order to ensure the viability of all schools in the area. Finally, across a range of services, performance indicators were introduced, to be made public, and to make those services more "accountable".

It is perhaps instructive to consider what the position was before these measures were introduced. From 1987 to 1994, I worked in a local authority, and had responsibility for education premises. When the authority was required to undertake competitive tendering for school cleaning, our first task was to commission measurement of all the schools, as we had no reliable records; schools had been allocated a number of cleaning hours, and had, in general, accepted that allocation as reasonable. When performance measures for further education were introduced, those included retention (the proportion of students enrolling who completed the course) and achievement (the proportion of those completing the course who passed the final examination); when published, those figures showed in some colleges both retention and achievement rates as low as 30% for individual courses, which means that of 100 students enrolling on a course, only nine completed the course and achieved the qualification.

Looking back, neither of the above two situations seem credible, and are much less likely to survive in a market situation. However, the Government, then and today, wants a free market, but centrally regulated, hence the emergence of a range of regulatory "Offices": Ofsted for education; Oftel for telecommunications; Ofwat for

water; and most recently, in 2005, OFFA, the Office for Fair Access to higher education. As a result, education is not a free market, but has been described as a 'quasi-market', one which will:

> *…differ from conventional markets in one of three ways: non-profit organisations competing for public contracts, sometimes in competition with for-profit organisations; consume purchasing power either centralised in a single purchasing agency or allocated to users in the form of vouchers rather than cash; and, in some cases, the consumers represented in the markets by agents* (LeGrand and Bartlett, 1993, p. 10).

The politics of a country are subject to evolution as well as revolution. A change of Government may bring about the reversal of policies, but to be remain in power, a political party must move with the times; the Labour Party in England since the mid-1980s is, perhaps, one of the best examples. It is difficult to identify key points in evolution, but for the purposes of this study, Harold Wilson's political advisers 'experiment' of 1974 seems to be a good starting point.

Wilson acknowledged that previous Governments had used advisers who were neither members of one of the Houses of Parliament nor civil servants. However, he increased the numbers of those advisers, and established his own Policy Unit. Wilson also identified the key roles of the political advisers, including: "*to prepare 'think pieces' for his Minister which can generate long-term policy planning in the Department*" (Wilson, 1976, p. 203).

Callaghan, succeeding Wilson, broke with the unwritten convention that. As Prime Minister, he was entitled to have views about education – but should not voice them in public. The Ruskin speech which began the Great Debate can be seen as sowing the seeds for New Labour's three priorities in the General Election 20 years later: "*Education, education, education*".

Margaret Thatcher's Governments are best remembered for their commitment to market forces, the emphasis on the individual, guided by the writings of Hayek that: "*a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive* policy" (Hayek, 1986/1944, p. 178) and culminating in Thatcher's declaration that there was: "*no such thing as society*" (Thatcher, 1987b). For education, this meant a range of policies to increase competition, common funding systems for schools and for colleges, assumed "*efficiency gains*" (the Government assumed that when made independent from local authority control, colleges would be able to make year-on-year savings, and so reduced the funding being made available), and the ability of schools to "opt out" and become self-governing. This was Thatcher's: "*paradoxical project*" (Finegold, 1993, p. 48), where, in order to give more freedom to the individual, the Government took more powers to itself. The Major years which followed were dominated more by the economy than by education.

1997 saw the election of a "New" Labour Government, with education at the heart of its policies. Whilst one of the architects of New Labour contends that the party still: "*stands in the proud philosophical tradition of modernising social democracy*" (Mandelson, 2002, p. x), he acknowledges that its policies were: "*based on an explicit rejection of both the old-fashioned dogma – as opposed to the values – of the traditional left and the laissez-faire ideology of the right. This is what became known as the Third Way*" (Mandelson, 2002, p. xxviii). Others, even within the Party, see New Labour differently, as: "*not Labour renewed. It is Labour rejected, Labour renounced*" (Gould, 1999). In reality, however, it seems fairly clear that a political party that has ambitions for 50 per cent of young people to "experience" higher education cannot rely on the working class vote keeping them in power.

Personally, I cannot agree with those who claim that New Labour is post-Thatcherite (such as Driver and Martell, 1998); but I can understand why they make that claim.

One example may be useful. One of the first acts of the Labour Government elected in 1997 was to return grant maintained schools to the control of the local authority; these were schools which had been encouraged by previous Conservative Governments to become independent of the local authority and be (more generously) funded centrally. In 2002, the Labour Government created a new category of schools, to be known as Academies, which it encouraged to become independent of the local authority and be (more generously) funded centrally. The Conservatives wanted to protect grammar schools from being reorganised and to reduce the power and influence of local authorities, Labour was frustrated by the continuing lack of progress of some of the worst-performing schools, and wanted to give them a fresh start, in new premises; different issues – but very similar solutions.

There is one other important characteristic of the Labour Party since 1997, which has impacted significantly on its policy-making; a determination to be re-elected. Of course, every Government wants to be re-elected, but until 2001 no Labour administration had been re-elected after serving a full term of office (Harold Wilson's Government, elected in October 1964, was re-elected in March 1966). The principal feature of this determination, was a change from established public expectations that a new Government would spend two years doing unpleasant, but necessary, things including tax rises and cuts in services, before two years of spending leading up to an election; Labour appears to have started on the re-election campaign trail on 2 May 1997 – albeit successfully.

One common theme in policy development over the last 25 years – and probably from the creation of local authorities in 1902 has been the relationship between central and local Government. Lowe (2002) provides a summary of that relationship, concluding that local authorities had: fulfilled their role of identifying and catering for local need; been innovatory, addressing realities, whereas central

Government has developed policies: "*targeted at an imagined England*" (Lowe, 2002, p. 158); and finally, that local authorities had acted as a counterpoint to central Government. Lowe contends that the Thatcher Government's reduction of the powers of local authorities may have: "*perhaps irremediably, constrained their ability to keep Westminster in check and to offer locally visions of what education might be*" (Lowe, 2002, p. 158).

Tim Brighouse, at the time the Chief Education Officer of Birmingham, was even more pessimistic: he considered his experiences over 50 years, as a pupil through to the present, and likened it to a football match. For Brighouse, those 50 years represented the second half of the match, at the end of which, as far as the local authorities were concerned: "*the whistle is usually blown for the end of the match, or as a prelude to a short period of extra time*" (Brighouse, 2002, p. 187).

The debate continues, and indeed, on the very day I wrote this section, the editorial in *The Times* newspaper led with a story on "*War over Schools*", describing the battle between central and local Government over education reform as likely to be "*the defining political contest of 2006*" (Times, 2005). The latest topic of contention is, unsurprisingly, about structures of education, with a White Paper (HMG, 2005) proposing greater freedom for schools, and the role of local authorities increasingly being as "commissioning" education rather than "providing".

The above gives a very brief summary of the context in which the English post-compulsory education has developed over the last thirty years and in which it operates currently. I describe the three case study institutions in detail in Chapter 5, but wish now to provide an overview of the English 16-19 education system, in order to be able to compare it with other European systems.

Data selection

In deciding how to present an international comparison of 16-19 education I had two key decisions to take: what data source, and what countries.

The most extensive data on education in different countries are provided by the data sets published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). However, these data are: "*collected by countries primarily for their own purposes and methods, so timings and definitions vary. […] Published data are more complete on some issues of interest than others*" (NAO, 2002, p. 1). For Europe, the *Eurydice* database, part of the Socrates programme, provides less detailed information than the OECD, but does so in a consistent format, updated on a regular basis.

The National Audit Office drew heavily on OECD data in producing a report for the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (NAO, 2002), providing an international comparison of the United Kingdom with nine other countries, including the United States and Australia and four European countries: France, Sweden, Germany and Italy. Upper secondary and post-secondary education in each country is described in the report in no more than a couple of sentences.

John West, from the Centre of Labour Market Studies at Leicester University, provided a summary of 14-19 education and training in other countries to be included in *14-19: opportunity and excellence* (DfES, 2003a, pp. 42-67), which was the DfES response to consultation on its 14-19 Green Paper (DfES, 2002a). The purpose of West's summary was not:

> *to draw conclusions about whether the features and developments described are desirable in themselves, still less whether they could be replicated effectively – if at all – in England. The countries featured are designed to*

show a range of practice in the context of developed countries not unlike ourselves in economic and cultural terms (DfES, 2003a, p. 42).

As the English system had already been explained in depth in the main document, England was not one of the nine countries West chose, which again included the United States and Australia, and six European countries: France, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands.

West noted three main objectives common to each of the education and training systems: the production of citizens capable of participating in society; an efficient platform for higher education; and preparation for participation in work. However, he noted that:

> *Each country attempts to achieve such objectives while respecting other core social values such as the desire for equality, for common initial experiences and the strength to recognise merit and ability, factors which differ in their strength between countries* (DfES, 2003a, p. 43).

Other key factors which West considered helped shape the different educational systems included the historical pattern of education – with most countries seeking to adapt rather than reform – the size of the higher education sector, and the extent to which a 'licence to practice' was required in order to take up particular occupations.

Again, however, West had drawn his information from the OECD data sets and from the *Eurydice*, and I felt it was more appropriate for me to revisit the source data.

The descriptions below are drawn largely from summary sheets provided by *Eurydice* (Eurydice, 2005). My criteria for the selection of countries were that the four countries of the United Kingdom should be included, and that the descriptions of the other European countries should have been updated in 2004 or 2005. *Eurydice* describes 16-19 education as "post-compulsory" education.

The value of international comparisons has been described as enabling: "*informed self-review*" and "*linking purpose to progress*" (NFER, 2002, p. 2). Informed self-review is recommended because looking at external evidence of relative performance avoids a common weakness of self-review, namely that of looking for change within an existing context, rather than looking at changing the context. The notion of linking progress to purpose is stressed because of the temptation, which is all too evident in Government Green and White Papers, to see international comparison as a competition, rather than as informing national aspirations – so requiring a clear understanding of where England wants to go, and looking at how other countries have achieved that, rather than looking for measures which move England up the league tables of international comparison, but may not improve our international competitiveness.

What follows can be only a broad generalisation; it excludes, for example, the independent sector. Thus, as the descriptions below follow the same format, for ease of understanding, this may tend to over-emphasise similarities. The complexity of the current English system – if 'system' is an appropriate description – is described in greater detail in Chapter 5.

In all these countries, except the Netherlands, education is free up to the age of 18; in the Netherlands, fees are payable but may be remitted if parental income is low (amongst those European countries not described below, only Italy charges fees for students under 18, with a similar remission policy as the Netherlands).

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Upper secondary education is provided in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and further education colleges, although there is only one sixth form college in

Wales, and none in Northern Ireland. There are no general entry requirements, although institutions may set requirements for specific courses.

There is no national curriculum for 16-19 year olds. School and colleges can offer from a wide range of qualifications, subject only to those qualifications being included on a list approved by the Secretary of State. Religious education is compulsory in school sixth forms and in sixth form colleges, but there is no prescribed curriculum, and the subject is given wide interpretation.

There are some 4,000 available qualifications, and 150 or so examination bodies, classified broadly as 'general' (such as the General Certificate of Education Advanced level ['A' level]) and 'vocational' (National Vocational Qualification [NVQ]). Consequently, there are a wide variety of means of assessment, including internal and external, formative and summative, and, for NVQs, competence-based assessment rather than examination.

The reform of 14-19 education and training in England is described in detail elsewhere in this study, but in essence looks to introduce a common core of learning, including 'functional' Mathematics and English, with optional elements making up specialist lines of study, within a Diploma framework. Similar work in Wales has led to trials on a Welsh Baccalaureate, and in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DENI) agreed in June 2004 the introduction of an 'Entitlement Framework', for post-16 learners, which guarantees access to a minimum number and range of courses, including vocational.

Scotland

Post-compulsory education is provided in school sixth forms and in further education colleges. There are no general admission requirements to the institutions, although schools and colleges may set requirements for entry to specific courses.

There is no national curriculum for post-16 learners. The main qualifications studied are Highers and Advanced Highers and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). Some institutions also offer the English A level examinations.

With a wide range of different qualifications comes a wide range of assessment techniques, including written examinations, continual assessment, oral and practical work, and, for SVQs, assessment against a set of competencies.

In November 2004, the Scottish Education Minister announced a package of measures to reform secondary (including upper secondary) education. Those measures included a review of the curriculum for all students 3-18, to deliver more choice, emphasise numeracy and literacy, and provide extra learning time for students following the Highers programme.

Sweden

All upper secondary education takes place in the gymnasieskola, which is for young people aged 16-19 only. There are 17 national programmes, together with specially designed programmes. Entry to these programmes requires pass grades in Swedish, English and mathematics; if the young person has not achieved those grades, they can retake them at the gymnasieskola.

There is a national curriculum for this age group. Fourteen of the 17 national programmes are vocational, and all programmes include a common core of English,

Mathematics, religion, civics, science, physical education, health and artistic studies, which comprises about a third of the programme.

There is no final examination, but a leaving certificate, which provides a summary of the courses studied and grades awarded throughout the young person's time in gymnasiekola; students may re-sit tests after leaving.

The Government is looking to improve achievement rates in 16-19 education. The proposals include: grading subjects, not modules; introduction of an upper secondary diploma, revitalising modern apprenticeship; improving the quality of vocational programmes; and including history into the core.

Spain

Secondary schools in Spain cater for students aged 12-18, with education compulsory to 16. If a young person achieves the certificate of Compulsory Secondary Education at 16, they can continue to study either to the Baccalaureate or to Intermediate Level Specific Vocational Training.

The core curriculum of the Baccalaureate is determined nationally, and in 2002 the Government began moves towards a National System for Vocational Training and Professional Qualifications.

Both routes are subject to continuous assessment. Success in the Baccalaureate leads to the award of the Bachiller certificate; in the vocational route, the award is of a Técnico certificate in the particular specialism.

A Bill introduced into Parliament in March 2005 provided for: the inclusion of citizenship in some post-16 programmes; the introduction of Initial Vocational

Qualification Programmes for young people who had not achieved the certificate of Compulsory Secondary Education; and developments to the existing post-16 curriculum to provide flexibility and better links between general education and vocational training.

Portugal

Education in Portugal is compulsory until age 15. If a young person has achieved the basic education certificate at 15, they can remain in secondary school, or enter a vocational school.

There is a national curriculum for 15-18 year olds. This was revised in 2004, to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of the country, and now comprises: five scientific or humanities courses; 10 technological courses; and artistic courses in three broad areas. Portuguese, a second language, philosophy, physical education and ICT are a compulsory component of all the courses.

Students are assessed at the end of each year, which determines progression. On successful completion of the course, students in secondary schools receive a secondary education diploma (together with a vocational qualification certificate if they complete a technological course); students in vocational schools receive a vocational qualification equivalent to the secondary education diploma.

Some key objectives for the Government for 15-18 year olds, underpinning the changes in 2004, were: to provide a range of educational and training pathways with a guarantee of basic education for all; to tackle social exclusion; to coordinate training supply to labour market needs; and to guarantee the offer of the full range of courses and to attract around 50% of young people onto the technological, artistic or vocational courses.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, education is compulsory until age 16, with transfer to secondary school at age 12. There are two types of secondary school, one providing pre-university education (VWO), up to age 18 and the other providing general secondary education (HAVO) up to age 17. At 16, young people can transfer to a vocational educational course (MBO), where they may study until 17 or continue to 20.

In both VWO and HAVO, students have to choose from one of four subject combinations: culture and society; economics and society; science and health; or science and technology. Each combination includes a common component accounting for just under half the teaching time, a specialised component accounting for about a third of teaching time and an optional component. On MBO, there are two learning pathways, vocational training (with between 20% and 60% as practical training) and block or day release, where practical training takes up at least 60% of the course.

VWO and HAVO are assessed by school examinations and a final-year national examination. Students following the MBO route are assessed throughout the course on individual elements of the course, which can be combined into a final diploma.

There are no current plans for significant change to upper secondary education in the Netherlands.

Greece

Education is compulsory in Greece until age 15, with transfer to secondary school at age 12. At 15, students leave the junior high school, and can continue their

education until 18 at a comprehensive senior high school (EL) or a technical vocational school (TEE), if they have achieved the junior high school certificate.

The curriculum for 15-18 year olds is set nationally by the Pedagogical Institute, with a general curriculum comprising a number of compulsory elements including history, mathematics, science, a foreign language and citizenship.

Students take regular tests, organised by their schools, and on successful completion receive either a senior high school leaving certificate or, for those on technical or vocational courses, a specialist diploma.

The Government are looking to improve provision for 15-18 year olds, through: new teaching methods with an emphasis on developing a student's critical abilities and promoting skills for independent study; expansion of the curriculum; and increasing the number of students following vocational routes.

Germany

Full-time education is compulsory in Germany until 15 or 16, and varies in different areas of the country, with transfer to secondary school is at age 10 in most of the country. On completion of the compulsory phase, students can transfer to a full-time course at a general upper secondary school or vocational school, but all students must continue in at least part-time education until age 18. Admission to full-time education is subject to meeting admission standards, admission to the dual system (part-time vocational school and part-time on-the-job training) is open to all.

The curriculum in the general upper secondary school is in three broad groups: language, literature and the arts; social sciences; and mathematics, natural sciences and technology. The vocational course includes a requirement to study German,

mathematics and a foreign language. In the dual system, vocational training covers around 350 vocational areas.

The general school prepares students for entry to higher education, and the full-time vocational schools prepare students for a specific occupation or higher education. Students on the dual system are assessed by a body representing the particular occupational area, and may also receive a certificate from the school recording their success in the more general curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The literature review served a number of purposes. First, I did not find any existing research which provided the detailed comparison of the three types of institution which I intended to provide, re-assuring me that my research was likely to make an original contribution.

Secondly, whilst I thought that my experience in working with schools and colleges had given me a good understanding of those institutions, this was significantly deepened by the detailed and systematic approach required of a literature review. This, I felt, would help me to develop more focused and probing questions for the questionnaire and interviews, and would also help me in interpreting responses to the fieldwork.

I was struck by the subtly different ways in which the institutions described themselves, stressing their strengths and, in particular in the case of some schools, not going out of their way to explain that the experience for a sixth former today is very different from that experienced by their parents.

I fully expected there to be a far greater literature on schools than on colleges, but was surprised to find relatively little in that literature relating specifically to the school sixth form. In fiction, this may reflect the fact that whereas most young people and adults can associate with the 11-16 part of a school, far fewer have had experience of the sixth form. In research, perhaps, for much of the last 50 years the post-16 curriculum in schools, being relatively short and focused on GCE A Level, has not offered as much opportunity for experiment and research as the 11-16 phase or, in particular, primary education.

I found two benefits in comparing the post-compulsory education and training system in England with that in a number of other countries. First, it helped me to understand the extent to which the developing post-16 curriculum in England was unique, and secondly it helped me to understand whether there were differences in the institutional structural response to delivering that curriculum.

On the first, all the countries I looked at appear to have the same five broad aims for 16-19 education and training: developing individual potential; employability to meet the nation's needs; inclusiveness; raising standards, particularly in English and Mathematics; and raising participation, at 16-19, in higher education and into lifelong learning. All have adopted policies, and are adopting or adapting the post-16 curriculum accordingly.

However, the structural means towards those aims differ. This is consistent with the 2002 NFER study of 18 countries (including five outside Europe) which participated in the International Review for Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks project (INCA). NFER described the organisational frameworks of those countries as either *integrated* (with a mix of general and vocational in the same institution – such as in

England) or *segregated* (where general and vocational provision are separated – as in Germany) (NFER, 2002, pp. 12-14).

The NFER study concluded that, whilst the challenges faced by upper secondary education were similar across the world, the response to those challenges had to reflect national contexts and heritages. At the same time: "*they have to try and satisfy the (conflicting) demands of different stakeholders and different political priorities. This may explain why review and reform are constant elements in educational policy and provision*" (NFER, 2002, p. 51).

This reinforced for me the need to constantly bear in mind the historical contexts in which the three types of institution had been established and had developed. I look at the history and development of the case study institutions in Chapter 5, but wish first to look in detail at the history and changing understanding of tripartism in English education.

CHAPTER 3

"IF I PASS DO I GET INTO UNIVERSITY?"

A HISTORY OF TERTIARY TRIPARTISM

INTRODUCTION

Tripartism is the name given in education to a tendency to categorise young people into three distinct groups for the purpose of their learning. The aims of this chapter are to consider tripartism as a seemingly unique and resilient feature of the English education system, and to investigate how the tripartite debate has developed and changed from the Crowther Report (Ministry of Education, 1959) through the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (1985) and the Dearing Report (Dearing, 1996) to the White Paper 14-19: Education and Skills (DfES, 2005a), with particular reference to implications for post-16 learning.

The tripartite debate described below has been concerned with looking at the tendency to look for three different curricula for a particular cohort of young people. Whilst my approach is different, in considering whether there is a tripartite institutional response to delivering the same curriculum, I nevertheless feel that there may be resonances in the two approaches.

Much has been written on tripartism in compulsory secondary education, that is, up to the minimum statutory school leaving age, and in the early part of this chapter, covering the period up to 1985, I have focused on that work, most notably that of McCulloch, who describes the: "*resilience of tripartism*" (McCulloch, 1995, p 129), and gives the warning that: "*We must confront the myths about the past that often inform, and misinform, contemporary policies. We must also resist at all costs the temptation to 'raid' the past for easy answers to current issues*" (McCulloch, 1995, pp. 114-115). The latter part of this chapter, which looks at the period 1985 to 2006, shows not only that McCulloch's warning has been unheeded, but also that tripartism has been extended to cover post-compulsory education in further education, and, increasingly, into higher education.

The term 'tertiary tripartism', referring to differentiation of students aged 16-19, was coined only recently (Ranson, 1984), and so the early parts of this chapter focus on secondary tripartism, the school system from 11-16. The chapter includes a description of the development of policy around 14-19 education from 2001-2005, which was the main part of my work in that period, and where I had access to key source documents – with acknowledgement that I might wish to use them as part of this study. The core of this chapter is in four parts, attempting to illustrate the standing of the tri-partite debate about education in, broadly: 1968; 1985; 1998 and 2005. In each part, the evidence is presented as far as possible in chronological order.

1938-1968

Plato is usually credited with first describing three distinct groups in society: gold; silver; and copper. The first group – gold – were the philosophers. The second group were the auxiliaries, the skilled merchants and tradesmen. The third group were the craft workers and farmers. In fact, Plato considered that there were four groups in society, but that the final group – the slaves – did not merit inclusion in his classification.

The Spens Report in 1938 recommended that there should be three types of secondary school. The Norwood Report in 1943 confirmed that such an organisational structure reflected the three "rough groupings" of pupils. The report categorised these as:

> the pupil who is interested in learning for its own sake – such pupils would enter the learned professions

the pupil whose interests and abilities lie markedly in the field of applied science or applied art – these pupils would do well in industry, trade or commerce

the pupil who can deal more easily with concrete ideas than with ideas – these would be the workers.

The grammar, technical and secondary modern schools were to have parity of esteem; they would be "*of diversified types, but of equal standing*" (Board of Education, 1943, paragraph 2).

However, Norwood gave no justification for his three groupings, saying simply that: "*whatever may be their ground, [they] have in fact established themselves in general educational experience*" (Board of Education, 1943, p. 2). Indeed, Cyril Burt, the educational psychologist whose evidence to the Hadow Report of 1926 had concluded that children should be in separate types of school (Van der Eyken, 1973), distanced himself firmly from Norwood's classification (Burt 1943, pp. 126-140). Were the three types of mind such a firm reality, it is perhaps surprising that the technical schools did not flourish, although the picture was considerably more complex than that (McCulloch, 1989). Also in 1944, the minimum school leaving age was raised to 15, with provision being made for it to be raised to 16 as soon as practicable.

The Crowther Report stressed the need for an alternative road for those who "*cannot grasp the general except by way of the the particular; cannot understand what is meant by the rule until they have observed the examples*" (Ministry of Education, 1959, p. 394) – a definition remarkably close to that of Norwood.

The Beloe Committee was asked to consider whether any changes should be made to the examinations system in England – other than GCE. The committee reported in 1960 and concluded that, for the top 20 per cent of the total 16 year old age group GCE O level provided an appropriate objective, and that a new examination, the Certificate in Secondary Education (CSE) should be provided for the next 40 per cent – that is 20 per cent being expected to pass four or more subjects and a further 20 per cent who might attempt individual subjects. There would be no examinations for "*the bottom 40 per cent*" (Beloe, 1960, pp. 47-48), a recommendation which has been described as: "*Failing the Ordinary Child?*" (McCulloch, 1998).

Interestingly, around this time, contestants on a popular radio quiz show had just "20 questions" to identify a mystery item; the first question was always "*Is it animal, vegetable or mineral*". It appears that the prevailing view was that anything could be subject to tri-partite classification.

Marx and Engels accepted that there were different classes in society, and that "*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas*". They acknowledged that the ruling class was also the "*ruling intellectual force*" (Marx & Engels, 1965, p. 60). However, for Marx and Engels the class system is an economic construct, not mental. Marx described: "*the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness*" (Marx 1904, p. 11).

In 1964, the newly elected Labour Government announced the raising of the school leaving age to 16, and initiated preparations to ensure there were sufficient places and teachers. The end of the tri-partite system was expected to flow from Circular 10/65. However, while many local authorities did put together proposals for secondary reorganisation towards the development of comprehensive schools under

the terms of the Circular, others dug in their heels. In the House of Lords on 10 February 1965, Lord Newton said that local education authorities (LEAs) were "*pressing ahead with experiments almost certainly too fast.*" and Lady Horsbrough added that the Government should "*keep their minds open and take no decision for the time being.*" (Hansard, 1965).

Others put the case for retention of selection more forcibly: "*Equity or justice, rather than flat equality, demands that men should be treated differently if there are relevant grounds for so treating them*" (Peters, 1966, p. 118). One particularly interesting viewpoint was that:

> *While it is accepted that comprehensive schools may well raise the level of aspiration of their pupils, may be more productive of 'O' and 'A' levels, the concept of inflation applies equally to examination certificates as to money; the coinage will be debased.* (Young and Brandis, 1967, p. 150);

These commentators appear to have been saying "this would be good for young people, but bad for the country". In 1968, the raising of the school leaving age was postponed – to 1972.

1968-1985

In 1969, the first sixth form college in England opened in Luton, and in 1970 the first true tertiary college was established in Exeter. However, one of the first acts of the Conservative Government, elected in 1970, was to withdraw Circular 10/65. LEAs were given the choice of either continuing with their plans for comprehensive reorganisation or retaining their selective systems. In the event, the great majority of LEAs kept to their plans to end the eleven plus selection process and to create new comprehensives, and Margaret Thatcher, as Secretary of State for Education, was credited with approving the closure of more grammar schools than any other Secretary of State.

In 1972, the minimum leaving age from secondary schooling in England was raised to 16 – a Labour Party manifesto commitment from 1945: "*at the earliest possible moment*" (Labour, 1945). However, if a young person had reached their 16th birthday by Easter, they were still allowed to leave, avoiding the examination period.

Even with these changes, however, concerns remained, and Jim Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College in 1976 launching the "Great Debate" – the first time a Prime Minister had taken such a high profile stance on education – acknowledged that the middle ground had been ignored.

The Conservative Government elected in 1979 was keen to introduce measures to improve the country's performance in comparison with international competitors. The Government was concerned that: "*we need a better educated, better trained and more adaptable workforce*" (HMSO, 1981, paragraph 5). The first steps in addressing those concerns were in the field of youth training, with the Youth Training Scheme being introduced in 1980. Also in 1980, the Certificate in Extended Education (CEE) was introduced; this was primarily for students who had obtained CSE grades 2-4 and who wished to stay on in school but not to repeat their CSEs. There were five grades, of which grade I was the highest and grade V the lowest. CEE grades I, II and III, obtained by candidates who took the CEE examinations conducted by a consortium of GCE and CSE boards, were certified by those boards as being equivalent to at least GCE grade C.

In 1982, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) was launched. This was a programme to stimulate vocational and technical learning for 14-18 year olds, including links between schools, colleges and employers. The programme was administered by the Manpower Services Commission, an agency of the Department of Employment, rather than through the Education Department; this

caused some in the education world to question whether, or to what extent, the education system should be preparing young people directly for employment. Others saw it as the start of a return to tripartism – A levels for the academic; TVEI and the range of BEC, TEC, City and Guilds examinations for the middle band; and the Youth Training Scheme for the rest (Gleeson, 1987). However, what this did represent was the extension of tripartism beyond compulsory schooling, into education and training for those up to the age of 18. Some feared that this also signalled the return of selection, but in a speech in February 1984, the Secretary of State for Education, Keith Joseph said: "*If it be so, as it is, that selection between schools is largely out, then I emphasise that there must be differentiation within schools*" (Joseph, 1984, p 500). Increasing numbers of schools were introducing differentiation – streaming, setting, banding – rather than attempting to teach always in mixed ability groups. The extent of differentiation varied between schools, and within schools between different subjects. Very few schools held firm to the belief that "comprehensive education" meant "mixed ability teaching".

From September 1985, the CSE and GCE examinations were combined into a single examination – the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) – with the first awards being in 1987. However, the grades to be awarded for GCSE built on those for the GCE (which was graded A-F, with A-C as a "pass", whereas CSE was graded 1-6, with grade 1 being "equivalent" to a GCE grade C). GCSE grades A to C were still generally referred to as a "pass", and grades D to G as failure, even though the official terminology was that all were passes, but the grades A to C being "higher passes". In addition, in some subjects it was decided that there would be 'differentiated' papers, meaning that young people could be entered into an examination designed to result in grades D to G only (although exceptional performance could result in grade C).

Again, various interpretations were given for this decision; for some, it was to address the concern that a grade 1 at CSE was not generally regarded as of the same status as the GCE grade C. Others, however, saw the motivation as an attack on teachers' professionalism, as CSE was predominantly teacher-controlled, including a range of internal assessment techniques – continuous assessment, coursework – rather than a traditional examination.

There are probably elements of both behind the decision; certainly teachers had substantially less control over the curriculum or the assessment of GCSE, but most GCSEs had more teacher-assessed coursework than had GCEs. Most significantly, GCSE grades were criterion-referenced, rather than norm-referenced – in other words, based on achieving a standard, rather than a quota.

CSE examinations had been administered through local examination boards – I was an examiner for the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Examinations Board – and the move towards a national examination was seen by some as a precursor for a national curriculum. However, the Government roundly rejected any such interpretation, making it clear that:

> *The establishment of broadly agreed objectives would not mean that the curricular policies of the Secretaries of State, the LEA and the school should relate to each other in a nationally uniform way. In the Government's view such diversity is healthy....and makes for liveliness and innovation.....The Government does not propose to introduce legislation affecting the powers of the Secretaries of State in relation to the curriculum* (HMSO 1985, paragraph 37).

In the same document, the Government made it clear that, on one issue in particular, it had no doubts:

> *The Government is committed to the retention of A levels: they set standards of excellence which need to be preserved...they provide the foundation for degree courses; and they play an important role in selection for higher education* (HMSO 1985, paragraph 101).

This was still a post-16 examination system designed to serve the needs of universities or the perceived needs of employers. The GCSE removed, or significantly reduced, the contribution of coursework and continuous assessment which had been a feature of CSE. Yet in my personal view it is primarily through coursework and continuous assessment that young people are best able to demonstrate their ability to be flexible in the way they think and learn; precisely the adaptable skills that employers look for in a modern workforce. Many – outside Government – considered that the main difficulty with the A level arose from attempting to use an old system to test for new skills. The formal examination system was not appropriate to subjects which did not exist when A levels began, subjects such as Business Studies and Computer Studies, subjects where employers were identifying a significant shortage. There was still a need for a vocational qualification which had parity of esteem with the A level.

Ministers talked of retaining the 'gold standard' of the A level (Britain had abandoned the true gold standard in 1931). Eventually, and in the time-honoured tradition of government, Ministers began to consider an 'independent' review of A levels; independent in the sense that the members of the review team would not be politicians or civil servants, less so in that they would work to a remit given by the Government.

An interesting feature of this period was the growing power of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, a confidence to publish inspection evidence which supported the Government:

> *...whether teaching groups are streamed, banded, setted, or deliberately formed from pupils of widely differing ability, teaching is frequently directed towards the middle of the teaching group* (HMSO 1985, paragraph 24).

However, whilst apparently endorsing even greater discrimination in streaming, banding and setting, in the very same paragraph the Inspectorate expressed concern that:

> *In a large minority of cases, teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve are clouded by inadequate knowledge and understanding of pupils' individual aptitudes; or by the stereotyping which is a consequence of preconceptions about categories of pupils* (HMSO 1985, paragraph 24).

1985-1998

In 1985, the Certificate of Extended Education (CEE) was ceased, and the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) established. A new examination was established post-16, the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE). Twenty five years on, this appeared to be Crowther's 'alternative road'. Sadly, the CPVE was to be a school-based qualification, with no input from college or employers. At the time of its introduction, I was acting Head of Computing in a secondary school, at a school which hosted a collaborative CPVE course involving three other schools – only in that way were we able to establish a cost-effective teaching group size. The experience was very different from TVEI, where teachers were taken out of school and joined up with others from outside the profession to create a team which had teaching skills, but also offered a world of work "reality check". The big mistake, in retrospect, was that CPVE was a qualification, TVEI was a way of learning. The good news, however, is that many of those involved in TVEI have retained their passion for its vision, and are now in positions where they are able to influence decisions: involvement in TVEI is good to be able to include on your CV.

The National Curriculum, which in 1985 the Government decided it would not propose, was announced in 1986 and imposed in 1988. The policy change was, as always, blamed on schools. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher explained at the

Conservative Party conference in 1987 that: "*We want education to be part of the answer to Britain's problems, not part of the cause*" (Thatcher, 1987a).

Schools were given the option of escape from dogma, though not the dogma of teachers, but of the local education authority (LEA) – further education colleges were, in 1992, simply removed from LEA control. National Records of Achievement were introduced.   In 1994, the Department moved from Elizabeth House to Sanctuary Buildings, nearer to the House of Commons (a move regarded by civil servants as indicative of increasing status in the Cabinet pecking order – confirmed for them when Michael Heseltine and the Department for Trade and Industry were relocated to Canary Wharf. An alternative, and possibly less attractive, view is that being so close means that Education Ministers are able to respond to the division bell and conduct their day-to-day work in the Department).   Secretaries of State came and went, the DES became the DFE and then the DfEE, there were Education Acts almost every year, and bodies such as the Funding Agency for Schools and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council were established, ran their course, and were replaced. In 1997, there was a change of party in Government for the first time since 1979. Only two things seemed to have survived – A levels and the rule of three.

The independent Higginson Committee reported in June 1988, and the main recommendations – the replacement of A levels – were immediately rejected. However, Ministers were still content to make very strong and impassioned statements, such as:

> *The Government is committed to a parity of esteem between academic, technological and creative skills...The Government wants to ensure that there are no tiers of schools within the maintained system but rather parity of esteem between different schools.....those who argued so vigorously for the pros and cons of selection and the 11 plus examination in the 1950s and 1960s lived in a different educational world.* (DfE, 1992, paragraph 1.49)

There was some movement, particularly towards modularisation of A levels, but a subsequent inquiry under Sir (now Lord) Dearing concluded that:

> *The traditional linear A level has stood the test of 45 years....Modularity has a great deal in its favour, but there are, for want of a better word, enthusiasms in education for one approach or another, and dangers in an 'enthusiasm' becoming the universal practice, before the consequences have been digested and evaluated. That process of evaluation takes years* (Dearing 1996, paragraph 10.59).

Once again, the main determinant of the future of A levels was not what was best for young people, nor even of employers, but that: "*...some of the older universities question whether modular A levels are the best preparation for higher education*" (Dearing 1996, paragraph 2.33). Dearing acknowledged that modular degrees were a particular feature of a number of the 'new' universities, but chose to stay with the old – the 'Russell Group'.

Dearing concluded that three types of mind meant three types of examination, with A levels – the 'gold standard', for the academic and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) for the next group. Dearing believed that GNVQs offered: "*an alternative approach to academic qualifications. They are valued particularly by young people whose approach to learning is by doing and finding out*" (Dearing 1995, paragraph 5.14).

The GNVQ was clearly the alternative road (now a 'pathway') that Crowther wanted for those who "*cannot grasp the general except by way of the the particular; cannot understand what is meant by the rule until they have observed the examples*" (Ministry of Education, 1959, p. 394). Finally, for those in work, there was the National Vocational Qualification.

What was perhaps most striking about the Dearing Report was that, whilst apparently emphasising the hierarchy of Crowther's three types of mind, Dearing considered that: "*This review has given the opportunity......to make explicit the equal standing of academic, applied and vocational qualifications*" (Dearing 1996, paragraph 3.7). This also firmly established tripartism in 16-19 education and training.

Again, the 'independent' Dearing Review was hamstrung from the start: "*The terms of reference clearly envisage that the Review will adopt the present three main pathways for advanced education and training – A levels, the GNVQ and the NVQ*" (Dearing 1995, paragraph 6.1). Given those terms of reference, the final report could have been written by civil servants without the need for countless meetings of the great and good. This is similar to Summit meetings between Heads of State, where the final communiqué has to be agreed by so many Departments in both countries that all the key points must be agreed well in advance of the actual meeting.

Given his terms of reference, it was probably unnecessary for Dearing to justify his recommendations by concluding that: "*Stability is important, so the proposed national framework is based on the present qualifications.*" (Dearing 1996, paragraph 1.12)

Within a year, the importance of stability was in question. Government is very good at imposing structural change, only to find that structural change has little impact on the behaviour of teachers in the classroom:

> *It is striking that so far the teaching and learning process has stayed remarkably stable in spite of the huge structural changes of the last decade or so. We believe that, as the pressure of international competition increases and we face up to the likely demands of the 21st Century, we must expect changes in the nature of schooling* (DfEE 1997, p. 43).

Twelve years after Keith Joseph, a new word entered the Department's vocabulary – 'presumption':

> *We do not believe that any single model of grouping pupils should be imposed on secondary schools, but unless a school can demonstrate that it is getting better than expected results through a different approach, we do make the presumption that setting should be the norm in secondary schools. In some cases, it is worth considering in primary schools* (DfEE, 1997, p. 38).

'Presumption' would reappear in 2005, but is an interesting choice of words, filling a place between 'prescription' and 'preference' – although perhaps much closer to prescription. Education must, it seems, remain a national service, locally administered, regardless of the extent to which that is a façade.

1998-2006

The new millennium brought a new curriculum offer for 16-18 year olds – Curriculum 2000. This new offer had many of the features proposed by Higginson in 1988, in particular, seeking to ensure that young people studied in greater breadth, taking five subjects rather than the more traditional three. However, even in the curriculum offer it is possible to identify a tripartite response to change. Research into the implementation of Curriculum 2000 showed that in Year 12 at independent and selective institutions, students took four or more AS levels, but had: "*virtually no engagement either with AVCEs or key skills*" (Hodgson and Spours, 2001, p. 30), whilst in further education colleges a minority of students took AS levels, and then rarely as many as four, but had an entitlement to key skills and many took AVCEs. School sixth forms and sixth form colleges sat in the middle, seeking to offer a mix of academic and vocational, and key skills.

The year 2001 saw the establishment of the Learning and skills Council, which took over responsibility for further education colleges from the Further Education Funding

Council, but also took on responsibility for work-based training from the Training and Enterprise Councils, and, from 2002, for the funding of school sixth forms. Paul Mackney, general secretary of the further education college lecturers' union, described this as: '*recreating 1944 at 3ry level: tertiary grammars (6FCs), technicals (CoVES), and moderns (Gen FE)*" (cited by Ainley, 2003, p. 393), where CoVES were general further education colleges which wished to develop as Centres of Vocational Excellence.

The Labour Party Manifesto for the 2001 General Election included a commitment to transform secondary education over a decade (Labour Party, 2001, p 18). This included education up to 19, although further education's only mention was in the context of: "*As part of our reform of the vital further education sector, we will encourage the development of free-standing sixth-form colleges*" (Labour Party, 2001, p. 19).

The manifesto commitment was taken forward in a White Paper: *Schools: achieving success*, which was published in November 2001, and, in the knowledge that Curriculum 2000 had not achieved one of its central aims, announced consultation on creating a: "*coherent phase of 14-19 education […] perhaps through an overarching award*" (TSO, 2001, p. 30).

Work had begun earlier in 2001 on that consultation paper. Drafting was overseen by a group, led by the Education Department, but including staff from the LSC and QCA; I attended the majority of those meetings, and also a small number of meetings where the drafts were presented to Ministers.

The consultation document was published in February 2002, as a Government Green Paper, under the title: *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards*. As

well as setting out proposals for: "*reform of the 14-19 curriculum in our secondary schools*" (TSO, 2002, p. 4), the Green Paper also expanded the idea of an overarching award – now tentatively called the Matriculation Diploma – which:

> *…would offer a means of recognising that genuine learning can take place in a variety of ways – including general and academic programmes, mixed vocational and general study, vocational study at school and college, and achievements in modern Apprenticeships in a work-based programme* (TSO, 2002, paragraph 4.4).

The Green Paper also announced that, as every school and college would not, on its own, be able to offer the wider choice for 14-19 year olds, a series of Pathfinder projects would be established to test out ways of collaboration between schools, colleges, training providers and employers; the Learning and Skills Council pledged to match the three-year funding for the programme – making a total of £42 million – and I was asked to be the lead officer for the LSC in that work.

The Green Paper, therefore, had a number of key themes, including: blurring the academic/vocational divide; more flexibility; collaborative working; and reform. What was noticeable, however, was that the proposals were for the reform of the secondary school curriculum – which could be seen as not fully understanding the provision being made in sixth form colleges and further education colleges – and also stressed the pathways: academic/general; vocational; and work-based. Finally, the Green Paper was interesting in that, in describing a vision for the future, it devoted 11 full pages to case studies of schools and colleges that had been delivering that vision for a number of years.

There was wide consultation on the Green Paper, with around 50 conferences covering the whole of England, and attended in each case by over 100 representatives from schools, colleges, local authorities and employers; there were other events specifically for young people, parents and employers. Summary

documents were produced, including one for young people; posters were provided to be placed in schools, colleges and public places. All this publicity resulted in the biggest response the Education Department had ever had to consultation; as well as the reports from the conferences, there were formal responses to the main document from over 150 colleges, 600 schools and 150 other organisations as well as over 4000 responses to the young people's version. The Education Department made it clear that responses would be considered to be in the public domain unless the respondent indicated otherwise; so although the day I spent in London in January 2003 looking through the multiple boxes of responses might not count as 'privileged access', I understand that no one else has taken advantage of the opportunity. I asked, and failed, to get a specific question on the student questionnaire about how they would feel about attending school and college, although it was agreed that such a question would be included in the breakout sessions at the conferences.

The consultation events – one of which I attended – were marked by the enthusiastic willingness of schools and colleges (not many employers attended) to embrace this new collaborative way of working, after many years of competition. It was: "*important for children to experience different learning styles and different providers*" (Newcastle, 30 May 2002); the: "*interests of the learners are more important than the interests of institutions*" (Warrington, 22 April 2002); and: "*planning for the new agenda needs to lead to a change in institutional boundaries*" (Norfolk, 2 May 2002); leading to a: "*need to re-think what we mean by the sixth form*" (Exeter, 8 May 2002). The main concerns expressed were a:

> *danger that collaboration makes educational institutions be seen as education providers, rather than learning communities. […] If learning provision is over more than one site, the community ethos will be lost* (Warrington, 22 April 2002);

and a: "*feeling that this would change the school as a community. There is an academic advantage, but the social advantage is not so clear*" (Stockton-on-Tees, 25 April 2002). I noted down those points made most commonly; first, and unexpectedly, was that there would be costs to introduce the proposed changes, particularly collaboration. Secondly, the need for – or danger of – cultural change. Only one dissenting voice recalled Clarendon: "*[the proposals] are based on a 19th Century model of what knowledge is and how learning takes place*" (Essex, 15 May 2002).

I suppose that when I looked at the individual consultation responses, I was expecting – hoping – that the public display of unanimity between schools and colleges at the consultation events might begin to show some cracks. In practice, perhaps because it was a lengthy document and collaboration was only discussed as late as Chapter 8 in the Green Paper, there were very few comments. One sixth form college thought the proposals might endanger its ethos, another sixth form college felt that: "*these measure will encourage rivalry, not collaboration*" (DfES, 2002b). Out of over 600 responses from schools, one complained that further education colleges were: "*predatory*" (DfES, 2002b), whilst another simply stated that: "*collaboration doesn't work*" (DfES, 2002b). The "other" responses were equally quiet about collaboration, and the student questionnaire concentrated on the curriculum, not its delivery.

At around this time, in June 2002, DfES officials produced a "think-piece" to be considered at a Ministerial consultation steering group, and which I attended. A previous paper to the group had identified three broad approaches to post-16 learning: general education in schools or colleges; broad vocational and general programmes in schools and colleges; and work-based learning. The new document considered systems and arrangements in a number of other countries. Amongst the

key findings were that successful systems appeared to: be well-established and long standing; offer clear pathways to clear outcomes; and provide differentiation. There was an acceptance that all routes delivered high quality outcomes, but the document made clear that: "*This is **not** the same as parity of esteem – rather, it suggests acceptance of fitness for purpose and recognition that people may by ability or temperament be better suited for one kind of outcome rather than another*" (DfES, 2002e, original emphasis). The authors concluded that: "*Parity of esteem seems a lost cause*" and that: "*Too much choice and flexibility may be difficult to manage and be ultimately unhelpful for young people*" (DfES, 2002e).

In November 2002, a very strange article appeared on the DfES website. This was, in effect, a short essay by the Secretary of State, Charles Clarke on "Elitism". Clarke argued that: "*Elites are a fact of life.*" and that one of his greatest responsibilities as Secretary of State was to:

> *…offer every citizen the chance to be part of an elite based on merit. To do this we must provide educational opportunities to fulfil their aspirations which, as appropriate, may give them the chance to be part of the elite which is right for them* (Clarke, 2002).

In higher education, Clarke identified four categories of elites: researchers, first class medical students; entrepreneurs and top quality professionals. This article appears to be arguing that a differentiated educational system, without parity of esteem, is justified if individuals are potentially able to access all parts of that system. The article was removed from the website a couple of weeks later, and I have neither before, or since, seen anything similar. Given the convention that the contents of Green and White Papers are not leaked before publication, this appeared to me to be an attempt to prepare the ground for possible criticism of a tri-partite approach to 14-19 reform.

The Government's response to the White Paper was entitled 14-19: opportunity and excellence, and published in January 2003. This document, in effect, confirmed the 'direction of travel', with the detail to be provided by a Working Group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, a former Chief Inspector of Schools. Apart from the main Working Group, which included headteachers, principals of further education and sixth form colleges, vice-chancellors of universities, researchers/academics and employers, Mike Tomlinson established six sub-groups to advise on specialist areas, and an 'external reference group' against which to test emerging ideas; I served on three of the sub-groups (coherent programmes, young people's contact and wider activities) and the external reference group. Again, I made clear to the chairs of each of the groups that, unless told otherwise about any particular document, I would wish to use the material, where relevant, in this study, and this was agreed.

The main task of the Tomlinson Working Group was to develop the over-arching Diploma, a single qualification which would embrace the learning programmes of all 14-19 year olds, including Apprenticeship, and have currency with employers and higher education – the two intended outcomes for 19 year olds.

The Working Group was appointed in March 2003, and published a progress report in July 2003, an interim report in February 2004 and its final report in October 2004. The Government published its response in February 2005.

It is an interesting comment on the development of Government policy that the 14-19 policy debate was announced in 2001 by Secretary of State David Blunkett, the work of the Tomlinson Group was launched in 2002 by Secretary of State Estelle Morris, the Tomlinson Report was received in 2004 by Secretary of State Charles Clarke, and the Government's response published in 2005 by Secretary of State Ruth Kelly. On the other hand, the Crowther Report (Ministry of Education, 1959)

was commissioned in 1956 by David Eccles, as Secretary of State. Eccles was replaced by Lord Hailsham, who was in turn replaced by Geoffrey Lloyd, and finally, in 1959, Eccles returned to the Ministry of Education – just in time to present the Government's response to the final Crowther Report.

The interim Tomlinson Report set out, for consultation, a framework of diplomas for 14-19 learning. That framework envisaged two types of diploma, the "open" diploma, consisting of a mixed package of GCSEs and A levels, and "specialised" diplomas, which would include vocational and general programmes, but subject to rules of combination. All diplomas would be available at four levels, Entry, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. The working group was keen to "*avoid a simplistic assumption that specialised diplomas are simply a way of re-labelling vocational learning*" (DfES, 2004c, p. 26), but did explain the new framework diagrammatically in three columns, showing a continuum of outcomes at 19 from higher education to employment, corresponding to a continuum from open diplomas, specialised diplomas and apprenticeship (DfES, 2004c, p. 27).

The diagram was retained in the final report of the working group, with one amendment: the arrow which identified higher education to employment as a continuum had been removed – the common aim of all pathways was to be: "*Higher education and employment*" (DfES, 2005b, p. 27)

Independent research of the views of 14-19 year olds commissioned by the Young People's Contact sub-group of the Tomlinson Working Group identified three types of pupils: HE-bound; FE-bound; and Excluded. The HE-bound group were characterised as welcoming pressure and taking a long-term view, but finding the delivery of education flat and uninspired; the FE-bound wished constant feedback that they were making progress; and the Excluded group required 'disguised'

learning (DfES, 2003b). Sadly, when the researchers presented their findings to the sub-group, they indicated that, for the HE-bound, the most able and articulate, the only question raised about the new proposals was: '*If I pass do I get into university*' (DfES, 2003c).

The Government responded to the Tomlinson Report in February 2005, with a White Paper: 14-19 Education and Skills. The White Paper included a commitment to make available: "*the full range of curriculum choices to all young people*" (TSO, 2005, p. 76). This was to be achieved through collaboration – as no single institution would be able to provide the full range on its own. The Government wanted "*schools, colleges and training providers in each area to decide together how they will deliver the full range of 14-19 options. Each institution should be able to play to its strengths*" (TSO, 2005, p. 79); the Government is clear, however, that it would: "*look to colleges which meet the standard to provide vocational leadership for the whole system*" (TSO, 2005, p. 80).

The Government did not accept the Tomlinson proposals in full, although, crucially, those parts which were not to be taken forward immediately were not rejected, but were put on hold. One of the proposals, however, was not addressed explicitly: that the diploma framework should truly be available to 100 per cent of young people, including a personalised diploma for young people with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This omission seems regrettable, since a small group of young people, with learning difficulties or disabilities, will not be able, in spite of their very best efforts, to achieve a Foundation level diploma. Yet those young people deserve to have their efforts acknowledged by the State. Sadly, I was reminded of Plato's classification of three groups in society, with one further group of people being deemed unworthy of classification.

One interesting piece of recent research into further education, the interim results of which were published in 2002 as part of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme, looked at the cultures of 16 different learning 'sites', four in each of four further education colleges. The 'sites' covered the spectrum of offers in further education: academic and vocational; 14-16 year olds; 16-18 year olds; and adults. The initial findings of the research suggested: "*three groups of sites, characterized by differences in the extent of discussion of ideas amongst students, and the extent of negotiation of the course between students and tutor.*" (ESRC, 2002, p. 3).

In a pamphlet published to accompany his speech to the Association of Colleges in 2000, David Blunkett, the Secretary of State, identified his objective as being: "*to encourage greater specialisation and focus in the mission of colleges. That includes greater distinctiveness in 16-19 provision*" (DfEE, 2000a, p. 11); in particular, colleges should be: "*sharply focused on meeting the skills needs of employers, area by area and sector by sector*" (DfEE, 2000a, p. 4).

In his speech to the Labour Party conference in 2002, the Prime Minister said that it was time: "*to move to the post-comprehensive era, where schools keep the comprehensive principle of equality of opportunity but where we open up the system to new and different ways of education, built around the needs of the individual child*" (Blair, 2002). The Prime Minister's position now seemed very close to that of Friedrich Hayek, such an influence on Margaret Thatcher, that:

> *From the fact that people are very different, it follows that if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently* (Hayek, 1960, p. 87).

Richard Pring, in the 2004 Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture, said:

> *Perhaps we hear little today about the comprehensive **school** – indeed few such schools retain 'comprehensive' in their name […] in their place we have specialist schools, community schools, colleges of technology, academies,*

*and so on. However, readers of Government documents and political intentions may believe that the principle of comprehensive **education** lives on. […] A coherent **system** of education and training from 14-19, the aim of this Government, would belie the criticism of those who believe that comprehensive education is in terminal decline* (Pring, 2004, original emphasis).

The Prime Minister's views on post-16 education and training were becoming more focused. In his speech to the Labour Party Spring Conference in March 2004, he called for:

> *No dropping out at 16, every young person either staying on in the sixth form or on a modern apprenticeship or job-related training leading to a good career. […] So substantially more academies, specialist schools, better post-16 provision in sixth forms and sixth form colleges.*(Blair, 2004).

Stephen Twigg, Minister for School Standards, speaking to the Sixth Form Colleges Forum on 2 December 2004, reminded the audience of one of the: "*conditions that make for success in our colleges: clarity of mission*" (Twigg, 2004). The (different) Minister I interviewed in March 2005, as reported earlier, was: "*very interested*" in the idea of single-mission institutions.

Reform of higher education was not exempt from similar criticism. Charles Clarke, in his first words in Parliament as the new Secretary of State, set out his vision of: "*the great research universities, the outstanding teaching universities and those that make a dynamic, dramatic contribution to their regional and local economies*" (cited in Ainley, 2003, p. 393). The raising of fees, focusing research in a reducing number of institutions, and the growth of "Foundation degrees" – primarily through further education – could be seen as leading to a:

> *…holy trinity of researching, teaching and training universities [beneath which] a corresponding tripartism elevates academic sixth forms and SFCs over tertiary technical Centres of Vocational Excellence and what used to be called non-advanced FE. Yet the Government presents this selective system as 'opportunities for all'* (Ainley, 2005).

Following the publication of the final report from the Tomlinson Group, David Bell, the Chief Inspector of Schools (Mike Tomlinson's successor in that post) made a speech about which he was questioned subsequently by the Education and Skills Committee of the House of Commons:

> *Paul Holmes: […] you suggested that the expansion of 14 to 16 education should not be in general schools and it should not be in colleges, it should be in vocational schools, something like old secondary moderns […].*

> *Mr Bell: […] it seems to be entirely sensible for me to start to think about what that might mean or could mean in the future. In the end ministers will have to take a view on that* (House of Commons, 2005, Q14).

In response to these comments, John Brennan, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, was quoted as saying in June 2005 that:

> *Now, rather than too late, we have to be absolutely clear that here is to be no possibility that colleges become the new secondary moderns of the post-compulsory sector* (BBC, 2005a).

One issue is notable for its absence from the debate; the position of independent schools (that is, the fee paying schools rather than the new breed of independent state-funded schools such as the Academies). There have been small attempts to encourage private/state partnerships; we sought to involve independent schools in some of the 14-19 Pathfinders; and the headteacher of Marlborough College, an independent school, served on the Tomlinson Working Group, but no suggestion has been made about reform, or, indeed, abolition:

> *…what it comes down to is that Labour is ready to see the continuation of elitism in the worst sense: to tolerate selective admission to the best of our schools by cash and social position, but not by ability* (Walden, 1996, p. 94).

CONCLUSIONS

It is interesting to note the strength of feeling over such a long period, not only for the need for three different curricular offers for the same cohort of young people, but also for those curricula to be delivered in separate institutions.

The latter pressure may be simply a belief in the need to have a clear institutional mission:

> *Educating for diversity of economic and social function in pluralistic societies often involves a strengthening of the instrumental and a weakening of the expressive culture of schools....the organizational setting of the school, its focus upon individual attributes of selected pupils, its emphasis upon skills, the bureaucratization of learning, the individualizing of failure* (Bernstein et al, 1971/1966, p. 164).

I tend to the view that tripartism is, primarily, a convenient classification. Three curricula in separate institutions can be seen as offering a reasonable level of choice and diversity, even if that choice is, for many young people, not available. If tripartism was a natural, or rational, phenomenon, it would not have been the case that, at the height of its popularity: "*there were many different approaches adopted by LEAs, from outright multilateralism to straightforward tripartism, with many variants in between*" (McCulloch, 2002, p. 243).

The tripartite curriculum debate above will enable me to look for resonances with the argument I am developing in this study about the tripartite institutional delivery of the same curriculum post-16. Three features of that debate seem of particular relevance. First, the tripartite curriculum was originally a sole curriculum for a very small minority of young people, with nothing for the rest, and new types of provision being added over time; in Chapter 5, I will consider whether that is reflected in the historical development of the three post-16 institutional types. Secondly, in Chapter 5, I will look to see if, the development of the three post-16 institutional types across England seems any more natural or rational than the developments of the tripartite secondary system. Finally, I will consider the extent to which there is, or is perceived to be, a hierarchy of status – esteem – in the three post-16 institutional types as there has long been between the different curricula.

Having described in detail the questions I am seeking to address, the background to my interest in the subject, the context in which the institutions are situated, historically and currently, and the range of existing data on which I can draw, I now turn to the question of how I will conduct the research.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I want to describe the factors which shaped my approach to the research. Those factors are: the nature and purpose of educational research; a theoretical framework for research; the choice of methods and tools; data collection and analysis; and ethical issues.

In developing a methodology, I held three thoughts in mind. The first was an approach to the task of research which I had found helpful previously (Gardner, 2000). This was to think of my role as that the restorer of a Renaissance fresco in Florence: first, I would have to understand the subject, and the context in which it was created; then I could focus in on the area to be restored, which might be completely blank, or patchy; and finally, choose the tools, brushes and paints, which were appropriate. However good the restoration, it would remain my interpretation.

The second thought I kept in mind was that: "*In a perfect ratatouille, the vegetables should be well cooked, but not to a pulp, so that the individual flavour of each vegetable is clearly defined*" (Roux and Roux, 1994/1989, p. 246). To achieve this, each vegetable type is cooked for a different length of time. I took this as a warning that I should not over-analyse the data, and as reassurance that my reporting of different aspects of the research could have different word-counts.

Finally, I was determined to maintain my focus and the focus of the research. I recognized the dangers of over-elaborating in an attempt to make the study 'academic'. As the research developed, I became ever more certain that: *"A theory is the more impressive the greater the simplicity of its premises"* (Einstein, 1949, p. 31). I would also not get too "precious" about my research; not get carried away that I would find some miracle cure that would transform the world of education overnight. I later read that:

> *Empirical research shows that there is no direct positive relationship between systematic dissemination of research findings and impact on policy and practice. […] …the most significant factor affecting impact on practice in education is legislation because schools will adopt policies, whether or not they are evidence based* (Helmsley-Brown and Sharp, 2003, p. 461).

If I imagined that all I had to do was find and buy a book called "The Methodology of Educational Research", I soon realised that there are shelves full of books with variations on that title. Also, it seemed that there were as many who considered it heretical to use a particular technique as there were who considered it essential. I, along with every other researcher, was not going to find a recipe and simply copy it; I had to develop my own dish, and cook it.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING

In this section I want to look briefly at the historical development of education research as a discipline and its relationship with policy-making, before concentrating on the development of that relationship in recent times in England.

Educational research is commonly referred to as one of the social sciences, which in turn have been described as: "*the study of society and the manner in which people behave and impact on the world around us*" (ESRC, 2005).

In 2001, I heard Anne Edwards refine this, describing educational research as: "*an engaged social science*", quite different from her previous experiences in: "*the peaceful archives*" of historical research or as a social psychologist, where: "*we seemed preoccupied with merely demonstrating our cleverness to each other*" (Edwards, 2001).

There has been, and continues to be, a robust debate about the nature of educational research. Lagemann (2000), from an American perspective, suggests

that education research developed in the late nineteenth century as a hybrid of the established disciplines of psychology and philosophy, building on the work in those fields of Edward Thorndike and John Dewey. She suggests a conflict between education researchers and schoolteachers, with the former undertaking critical analysis of situations and testing hypotheses and the latter being primarily interested in new teaching techniques guaranteed to have immediate impact. And yet it is this very attempt by education researchers to ensure that their outputs are of practical value that, in Lagemann's view, leads to education research being in relative "*isolation {…] from other branches of university scholarship*" (Lagemann, 2000, p. 232).

Bulmer (1982, 1986) describes the developing relationship between social research and social policy in Britain through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and agrees with Finch (1986) that this relationship was at its strongest in the 1960s.

The late 1960s was a period of great turmoil in universities, beginning in Paris, but spreading rapidly across Europe. In England, that turmoil led to demonstrations and "sit-ins" (in my own case, in 1969 at Trent Hall, the administrative block of the University of Nottingham). One particular concern in England was the increasing involvement of industry with University research, including funding. The mood of the times – for young people at least – saw profit-making as wicked, and the thought that industry might benefit sullied the "purity" of academic research. The events of that period are described in *Warwick University Ltd* (Thompson, 1970), where the title itself describes the mood.

That turmoil might be seen as helping to lead to the founding, in 1974, of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) by a group of researchers who were concerned that:

> *The study of education has manifestly suffered from subordination to disparate modes of approach and methodologies deriving from fields other than education which have simply been transferred into the educational sphere* (Simon, 1977a, p. 6).

David Hargreaves, giving the annual lecture to the Teacher Training Agency in 1996, prompted a debate which is still running. Hargreaves considered that educational research had "*gone badly wrong*" and called for: "*the re-direction of educational research towards the improvement of practice*" (Hargreaves, 1996) and more research by teachers themselves. Hargreaves also criticised the lack of cumulative research in education, comparing the situation – unfavourably – with that of medical research. That theme was taken up by many others including Tooley, Blunkett and Charles Clarke, and led to heated exchanges. The situation has been caricatured as being that: "*researchers are lost in thought while teachers are missing in action*" (Desforges, 2001, p. 2). I think it is worth a short description of that debate, in order to provide a context for my research, and for the description later in this study of the development of 14-19 curriculum policy.

Ministers' frustration with research was expressed most clearly when a study suggested that homework did not impact on the performance of children:

> *some researchers are so obsessed with 'critique', so out of touch with reality that they churn out findings which no-one with the slightest common sense could take seriously* (Daily Mail, 1999).

Blunkett expanded on this theme later, making clear what his requirements were of research:

> *We cannot always know where research will lead, and what its outcomes will be. And that means that there must be room for research with no immediate short-term value – but which may lead to significant economic and cultural benefits in the long term* (Blunkett, 2000b, paragraph 46).

Hargreaves (1996), even with his significant reservations, agreed with this point. The difficulty with this formulation is that it suggests that to justify research a case

would have to be made for potential benefits; that case may be spurious. Indeed, at a seminar for doctoral students at the University of Sheffield in March 2003, I asked the students to make out an economic case for spending £100 million repainting in primrose yellow all the white-line road markings on motorways in England; primrose yellow being less harsh on the eye. It took just a few minutes for them to identify the massive savings resulting from a reduction in such things as road rage, accidents, injuries, deaths, insurance and medical treatment – far exceeding the £100 million cost. There must surely be a place for educational research – such as classroom observation – which may not be <u>guaranteed</u> to reveal something on <u>every</u> occasion.

Goldstein found the debate: "*really rather depressing*", and expressing the view that, whilst there was: "*a great deal of second and third rate research slopping around*", there was also much that was good, but that the most important and immediate issue to be addressed was not the quality of evidence, but finding: "*better ways of using all the evidence we have currently about what does and doesn't work*" (Goldstein, 1996). In 1998, the DfEE commissioned a study from the Institute for Education and Employment: "*in order to produce recommendations for the development and pursuit of excellence in research relating to schools*" (DfEE, 1998d, p. 1). The study – led by Jim Hillage and commonly referred to as the Hillage Report – concluded that research was having little impact on policy-making, for a number of reasons: much research was small scale and not easily generalizable; too much emphasis by Government-sponsored research on evaluation, leading to research which was backward-looking: "*following policy not prompting it*" (DfEE, 1998d, p. 1); and research was being presented in a form which was not accessible outside the academic community. Eight years later, I am not sure how far that has changed. Certainly, the DfES still undertakes a significant amount of evaluation of its many initiatives, and its Research Reports are lengthy tomes, usually accompanied by a rather inadequate four-page summary. In

fairness, however, account must also be taken of the pressures from the Treasury on Government Departments to justify retaining – or increasing – their budgets.

Charles Clarke, writing in 1998 as minister with responsibility for research in DfEE, talked of the need to: "*demonstrate a commitment to developing evidence-based policy and practice.*" (Clarke, 1998, p. 9). By the time this developed into an action plan, it was described by a DfES official as: "*evidence-informed policy and practice. […] Informing needs distinguishing from using as it implies a process of transformation which takes account of contextual factors.*" (BERA, 1999, pp. 19, 20, original emphasis).

Indeed, so great and sustained were the attacks on education research and educational researchers that, in his presidential address to the BERA conference in 1999, Peter Mortimore explicitly considered the question: would we miss it if it didn't exist. His arguments for ceasing educational research were that: policy-makers did not make much use of the findings; there was an increasing amount of data and inspection evidence – often seen as a substitute for research evidence – and that the resources – albeit small – devoted to educational research could be used to supplement teaching. The reasons for retaining educational research included that: data and inspection evidence are not research, which is the analysis and reflection on those data; someone had to challenge inspection evidence and government policy; someone had to make fair comparisons of schools, as opposed to league tables. Mortimore concluded that: "*on balance – my view is that if educational research did not exist, there would be less knowledge about learning generated and society would be the poorer*" (Mortimore, 1999) – but only "*on balance*".

In undertaking my research, therefore, I kept these issues in mind, and in particular the work of Tooley and Darby who, in looking in detail at 41 articles published in four

highly-regarded educational research journals identified four main themes which caused him concern: partisan researching and reporting; methodological issues; non-empirical research; and focus (Tooley and Darby, 1998). Tooley and Darby considered that many of the articles misinterpreted data to support their hypothesis, leaving aside contra-indications; the majority of empirical research did not include basic features of sample size and selection; many articles introduced controversial propositions from other researchers without challenge. They did have one positive comment, reporting that most of the articles he looked at had a clear focus and relevance to practice. I intended to test my final thesis against these four themes.

Whilst the headlines were about the debate on relevance, Hargreaves had also made suggestions to improve the position, one of which was taken forward with the establishment in 1999 of a National Educational Research Forum, established by, but independent of, Government, with a remit to develop a national strategy for educational research. In 2004 the DfES agreed to sponsor the Learning and Skills Research Centre, to focus solely on post-16 learning. The aims of the Centre reflect the debate, including commitments to: enhance the impact of research on policy and practice; build on existing knowledge from research and practice; and, encouragingly, engage in 'blue skies' studies.

A further clue as to whether or not policy follows evidence is given in the Department for Education and Skills research strategy, which begins with the sentence: "*The DfES undertakes research to help it achieve its strategic priorities.*" (DfES, 2002c, paragraph 1). This clearly suggests that the strategic priorities are decided first. An OECD review team was impressed by that DfES strategy, and in particular found: "*a refreshing lack of ideology in the discussions of research.*" (OECD, 2002, p. 7). One commentator, reading the OECD report, described DfES evaluation as: "*a polite way of saying: finding out why a policy which has potentially*

affected millions was misconceived." (Kingston, 2003), or, as another has put it: "*a post-hoc justification for what is already emerging in practice*" (Pring, 2003, p. 6). Charles Clarke, whom I quoted earlier in his capacity in 1998 as the DfEE Minister with responsibility for research, in 2004 felt that, in respect of the Government's programme to establish 200 schools as Academies, independent of their local authority:

> *a proper scientific assessment of the impact of academies could not meaningfully take place for two or three years at least, probably six or seven years […] If I am asked should we just stop everything and come back to it in six or seven years' time, you just cannot operate in that way.* (House of Commons, 2004b, answer to Q50).

This general approach to policy-making is also apparent in the development of policy in relation to school sixth forms. In an answer to a Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State: "*what evidence his Department has evaluated which demonstrates public support for new school sixth forms, as proposed in the Five Year Plan*", the Minister of State, Dr Kim Howells, replied: "*We are not aware of any formal study of community preferences for school sixth forms*" (Hansard, 2004b, column 1164W).

However, it should also be noted that the DfES was very supportive of the development of a Master of Arts in Post-16 Education and Training Policy at the University of Sheffield in the late 1990s; indeed, it was that course that brought me back into learning. At one stage, the demand from DfES officials to follow the course was such that it was provided by video conference between Sheffield and DfES in London. It is encouraging that the DfES was supporting the study of the theory of policy-making by those officials who were likely to be responsible for developing, and implementing, those policies.

There are many practitioners who claim not only that the Government has too many policies, but also that those policies often appear to be inconsistent, or even in direct conflict. Others acknowledge that such diversity sometimes makes it possible to justify any course of action. The grant letter from the Secretary of State to the Learning and Skills Council in 2004, for example, asked that the LSC should: "*encourage further collaboration between schools, colleges, training providers, universities and employers*" whilst "*running competitions for new 16-19 provision […] and encouraging new providers to enter the market*" (Clarke, 2004, p. 1). Whilst I hope that my work will demonstrate some of the contradictions which help determine policy-making in England, I cannot hope that I can resolve them. I am not, therefore, treating policy-making as a science, but as a suitable subject for investigation and, in particular, set clearly within its historical, social and economic context.

Some of the contradictions which I hope will be manifest in my study are contradictions:

> *between a curriculum and pedagogy concerned with critical consciousness and a curriculum and pedagogy concerned with domestication; between a curriculum for achieving 'within-the-system' successes and a curriculum for 'against-the-system' resistances* (Grace, 1984, p. 40).

I found the theory of "political space" of particular interest and resonance. Building on the notion of a policy triangle, where interventions can take place at any of the three stages of influence, text production and implementation (Bowe et al, 1992), Hodgson and Spours have proposed setting the triangle within two additional dimensions: political eras and phases of Government; and the education state (Hodgson and Spours, 2004), and contend that only by understanding the current state of those dimensions can a researcher – or politician – make an effective intervention. They give as an example the development of Curriculum 2000, where, because Ministers had made it clear that A levels were not to be reformed, there

was very little space for any policy intervention or change. Ironically, the A level crisis in 2002, which, they argue, resulted in part from lack of political space in 2000, opened up the opportunity for a more radical approach.

Ozga has described how: "*models of policy-making (and their associated theoretical frameworks) change in relation to broader social, economic and political change*" (Ozga, 2005, p. 6). Of particular interest to this study, she notes the difference between 'policy analysis', which is concerned with understanding how best to implement agreed broad policy, and 'critical policy sociology', which seeks to explain and understand policy. I found this a particularly useful description of the work in which I was involved, where Ministers determined the broad outline – the 'direction of travel' – and the various agencies worked out the detailed proposals.

Over the past five years, I have straddled the two communities of academic research and Government policy-making, and have often tried to justify the one to the other. I think this study reflects that tension; I didn't know whether I would find anything, but if I did, it might play a small part in improving the educational experiences and achievements of young people. I have been very disappointed by the lack of engagement by policy-makers with researchers and by the apparent reluctance of many researchers to engage in policy-making. Of course, there are exceptions in both camps, but that, in some ways, makes it harder, as I have seen the great value that educational research has added, particularly in the form of "policy memory". It does, sadly, seem that: "*In Britain, the debate on education is not an educated debate*" (Walden, 1996, p. 14).

All the above demonstrates clearly that, as Ozga put it, policy research in educational settings is, indeed: '*contested terrain*' (Ozga, 2000, title page).

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

I looked at a number of possible theoretical frameworks for this study, but only two seemed likely to me to offer a firm enough base: grounded theory and critical theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) set out the case for grounded theory, which has been taken forward by others (e.g. Turner, 1981; Edwards and Talbot, 1997). Others (Bulmer, 1979; Bryman, 2000) have questioned the approach.

Fundamentally, the approach of "grounded theory" means that, rather than seeking to prove a hypothesis, the researcher looks to see what emerges from the data collection and analysis, and undertakes a continual recursive exercise to develop and retest theories and hypotheses.

This approach had initial appeal in a situation where I believed myself to be genuinely unsure what would emerge from the research; indeed there are some who believe that in every case: "*Theory should not precede research, but follow it*" (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 23). Grounded theory research in education may, for example, begin in the classroom, with the researcher simply observing, then codifying behaviour, in a number of different settings, before analysing the data to see if any patterns emerge. Ethnographic research can also be treated in this way, in situations where the researcher is listening to or perhaps participating in, but not directing, the discussion. One piece of research of this type which has grown on me over the years is George Riseborough's account of a day in the lives of a group of Youth Training Scheme students, hoping to work in the construction industry. The account is reminiscent of a radio broadcast, with Riseborough describing the scene: "*Wing-nut arrives back with a broken pallet, lays it down where a fork-lift truck cannot operate and begins work*" (Riseborough, 1993, p. 168), but leaving the overwhelming majority of the account to the words of the students. The account

ends with the words of the students, and with no interpretation or comment by Riseborough. Initially bemused, I have since gone back to that account a number of times, as I began to see different things in the account, rather than relying on Riseborough's interpretation.

However, I began to feel uncomfortable with the idea of using grounded theory for this study – whilst recognising that it might be ideal in other circumstances. I had chosen my research topic because I was interested in it, and because I thought that I might find something. The very design of the research question implies some form of discrimination on my part. Why that question and not another? Indeed, the research question is framed as a hypothesis. I felt that if my basic framework was not solid, I would ultimately be in difficulty.

Critical theory has been described as:

> *…examining and interrogating: the relationships between school and society – how schools perpetuate or reduce inequality; the social construction of knowledge and curricula, who defines worthwhile knowledge, what ideological interests this serves, and how this reproduces inequality in society; how power is produced and reproduced through education; whose interests are served by education and how legitimate these are* (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 28).

This seemed to describe in remarkable detail – and far greater eloquence – what I was hoping to research. The critical theory approach relies heavily on both quantitative and qualitative data – both of which would be available to me. Traditionally, such an approach has been seen as placing the researcher between the Scylla of positivism and the Charybdis of interpretation, with the physical scientist at one end seeking clear cause and effect relationships, and the social scientist at the other extreme describing reality as a human construct. However, there is now a general acceptance that: "*… methods can and should be mixed.*" (Wellington, 2000, p. 17), and that:

> *We must recognise that absolute certainty is not available about anything, and that attempts to produce absolutely certain knowledge by appeal to serve data, or to serve anything else are doomed to failure* (Hammersley, 1995, pp. 17-18).

I was, therefore, looking for a: *"view of educational research that is both 'interpretive' and scientific"* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 118). Critical theory provides that view, and fundamentally relates theory to practice. One of the key requirements of critical theory is that:

> *…it must be concerned to identify and expose those aspects of the existing social order which frustrate the pursuit of rational goals and must be able to offer theoretical accounts which make teachers aware of how they may be eliminated or overcome* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 130).

This approach had appeal because I wished, in part, to consider whether the Government's "radical reform" of 14-19 education was indeed seeking to challenge the existing social order, or to reinforce it. In considering the 14-19 reform proposals in which I was involved from 2000, I found it interesting to think how our work might be viewed in 30, 40 or 50 years – if it was remembered at all. I found the critiques of the Butler Education Act of 1944 fascinating in this respect. For some education historians: *"The Butler 1944 Act was essentially a Conservative reform, making the existing system more efficient without disturbing the public school privileges and without encouraging people to think of education in a genuinely democratic way"* (Lawton, 2005, p. 45). Simon saw the Act as: *"the old order in new clothes"* (Simon, 1986, p. 43), but McCulloch has set out in detail how the Butler Act has been viewed over time, identifying three distinct phases: initial celebration, followed by criticism in the 1970s and 1980s, then nostalgia in the 1990s (McCulloch, 1994, pp. 43-72). Simon, interestingly, also saw the intentions of the 1902 Education Act to be primarily not, as stated, bringing order to a chaotic system, but as responding to a significant threat to the established order, imposing: *"first, a rigid structure based on class differences, and secondly a particular concept of secondary education of a literary/classical character"* (Simon, 1977b, p. 14).

I was keen to avoid history passing the same judgement on the work in which I had been involved – which we also referred to as "radical".

Because of the perceived importance of linking theory and practice, critical educational research is often undertaken by practitioners – "action research". I am clearly not in that position when looking at the institutions, and must recognise the limitations that places on my research. Nevertheless, if I am unable to identify different characteristics of institutions which appear to impact on student experience, I could hope that practitioners would wish to take that work forward. However, when I consider the development of education policy, I think I can justifiably describe myself as an action researcher.

THE CHOICE OF METHODS AND TOOLS

The three main sources of data I chose to use were institution-level case studies (involving a student questionnaire), interviews and documentary sources (the latter comprising both re-evaluation of published material – including value-added analysis of examination performance – and the use of unpublished material).

Institution-level case studies

Case studies are a very important and useful tool in social science research in general, and in educational research in particular. This is because:

> *…teaching and learning are incredibly complex, interactive and reflexive processes, which are inherently social, cultural and contextual […] there is no credible science of teaching and learning because analytically isolating variables misses this essential point* (Hodkinson, 2001, p. 18).

Stake has suggested that the purpose of a case study is not to represent the world, but to present the case (Stake, 1995). He considers that: "*the more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness of the*

epistemological rationale" (Stake, 1998, p. 88), enabling a link between data from a case study to a theory, and also recommends the 'collective' case study, inquiring into a phenomenon in a variety of locations, in order to give a better understanding of what is likely to be found in other similar locations.

However, the use of a case study approach is not without its difficulties. Hodkinson and Hodkinson identify six strengths of a case study approach in educational research, concluding that: "*…case studies are fertile grounds for conceptual and theoretical development*" (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001, p. 8). However, they then go on to identify eight limitations, including that they are not generalizable, and are not able to answer a large number of relevant questions. This latter concern, I felt, would be overcome because I was not relying fully on the case studies. I was encouraged that Hodkinson and Hodkinson concluded that there was a place for a case study approach, as long as it was set alongside other approaches, and as long as it was borne in mind that:

> *…judging the worth of case study research demands some understanding and careful thinking on the part of the reader. Do the stories 'ring true'? Do they seem well supported by evidence and argument? Does the study tell us something new and/or different, that is of value in some sort of way?* (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001, p. 12).

That, then, was my challenge in this part of my research.

Whilst much had been written, or said, about the different ethos and culture of the three types of institutions, and about how students responded to those differences, no attempt appears to have been made to analyse or codify those differences. I felt that there was merit in attempting such an exercise, borrowing the notion of "cultural geography" which had been developed by Smyth and Hattam (2002).

Smyth and Hattam investigated the reasons given by 209 young Australians for leaving, or struggling to stay in, the post compulsory phase of high school. They found that:

> *…three archetypes of school culture seemed to keep presenting themselves to us throughout the project […]:*
>
> - *the "progressive" school culture;*
> - *the "passive" school culture; and*
> - *the "active" school culture.*
>
> *Aspects of each could exist simultaneously in any one school, faculty or class* (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 380).

The original research looked at differences between high schools in Australia; I borrowed this typology to help consider comments about the three types of post compulsory institution in England.

I wanted to be able to compare the experience of students at three different types of institutions. A starting point had, therefore, to be to determine whether that comparison could be undertaken by re-evaluation of secondary data, or whether it would be necessary to collect new source material. The advantage of the first approach would be that it would remove, or at least reduce substantially, the time spent on data collection.

I was unable to find any previous comparative study of these three types of institution, or indeed comparative studies of any pair of them. There was a small number of studies of individual institutional types, but even there, insufficient of the data were common – rarely had the same, or strongly similar, questions been used in those separate studies. It was clear that, in order to compare such things as perception and culture, I would need to collect new data.

I decided to use a combination of questionnaire and interview at a mix of institutions. Such an approach has been described as:

> *… an empirical enquiry that investigates a temporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used* (Yin, 1994, p. 23).

Having decided that data collection was necessary, I had then to decide on a sample size. My sample would have to be large enough to have validity, but small enough to be manageable.

Gorard (2001, p. 18) shows graphically that the reduction in sample error (i.e. increased confidence which can be placed in results) slows with sample size, and suggests a sample size of at least 60 "*…for each group in the main analysis*" (Gorard, 2001, p. 17). However, "*Sending questionnaires out is one thing; getting them back is quite another*" (Gillham, 2000, p. 45). Because I intended to work through institutions, asking the school or college to administer the questionnaire and return it, rather than sending out to individuals, I felt reasonably confident of a very high return rate – hopefully 100%. I did, however, factor in allowances for a lower return rate and for non-completion of individual questions. I worked, therefore, on an assumption of 80 questionnaires resulting in 60 valid responses. To obtain my minimum sample size, I then multiply 60 by the number of hypotheses I wish to test.

At an early stage of the research, I had considered using a staff questionnaire, and undertaking interviews with staff – primarily to see whether there were differences between staff perceptions and those of the students. However, the purpose of the study is to consider differences between <u>student</u> perceptions, and extending it to include wider considerations, as an aside to the main study, could only be justified if that extension was achieved easily. In practice, it would clearly be difficult to

achieve sample sizes of 60 staff at each type of institution – equivalent to the entire teaching staff of many sixth form colleges.

Two hundred questionnaires, whilst representing a significant data collection and analysis exercise, is nevertheless a small sample from a population of perhaps 300,000. This meant that I had to be very careful in undertaking only so much analysis as the sample size justified, and, therefore, ensuring that analysis was of the most relevance to my main research questions.

My central hypothesis was whether there were differences in responses between types of institution. I was clear that I needed to undertake two analyses – firstly whether there were significant differences in responses between type of institution, and secondly whether any such differences are more marked between the different institutional types than between institutions of the same type.

I also wished to consider differences in responses by gender, and to consider whether student's early expectations of institutions are confirmed, by considering differences by stage of study (i.e. between Year 12 and Year 13).

I concluded, for the reasons set out below, that the scale of the study would not enable consideration of differences in responses in terms of ethnicity, of course of study or of prior attainment. All three of those factors, however, may be of interest.

In the case of ethnicity, studies do not consider differences between "white" and "non-white", but between a range of ethnic groups; in order to get a sample size of 60 for each of those ethnic groups would require a very much larger questionnaire than I could hope to achieve.

In the case of the course of study, I did consider that there might be differences between young people pursuing academic courses and those on vocational courses, but recognised that very few such students would be in schools or sixth form colleges. I considered including a question about the GCSE results of the individuals, in order to enable an analysis of whether previous levels of success impacted on current levels of satisfaction. I concluded that, whilst I might reasonably ask a school or college to administer the questionnaire to 20 male and 20 female students in each of Years 12 and 13, I could not expect them also to ensure that there was a balance between those with very good GCSE results and those with less good results.

I was left, therefore, with four main analyses, looking for differences in responses: between the different type of institution; between institutions of the same type; between male and female students; and between students in Year 11 and Year 12. Thus, the student questionnaire would be directed at those studying GCE AS/A level only, with a balance between male/female and Year 12/13. A minimum of 320 (80 x 4) questionnaires would be sent out, with the intention of at least 240 (60 x 4) being returned.

In selecting the case study institutions, I looked for areas of England which appeared to be reasonably similar in terms of the numbers of young people in the 16-19 cohort and in the educational participation and attainment of those young people (DfES, 2002d). In particular, I looked for areas where the post-16 system was reasonably "choice-free"; by which I mean that young people in the area looking to progress to "A" level courses at 16 did not have a range of institutional types from which to choose.

I make no special claims for this selection of case study areas. Whilst the six areas had two similarities – of my choice – they will certainly have many more differences. I did not, for example, take into account the economic circumstances of the six areas, where it may be that participation post-16 is dependent on the availability of an employment alternative. So I must acknowledge the limitations of this, small, study. However, if measurable differences do appear between institution types in this study, others may wish to repeat the study with institutions in rural areas, or in "mixed-economy" areas, where school sixth forms co-exist with sixth form or tertiary colleges.

The major benefit of this approach was to decide which six of the 150 local authority areas in England would best satisfy my criteria. Using the DfES Performance Table data for 2000, six unitary authorities were identified. Those six authorities had broadly the same number of students in Year 11; and similar proportions of those students had attained five higher level passes at GCSE. Two of the authorities had schools sixth forms; two had sixth form colleges; and two had tertiary colleges. In each case there was a dominant type of provision – so that for most of the students in year 12 and 13, whilst they had chosen to continue in education, they had not had any real choice between types of institution.

Responses to questionnaires would be sought from 60 students in each of the six areas, giving a total sample size of 360 (i.e. above the minimum of 320); this was simply because 320 was not divisible by 6.

Sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges typically have 16-18 cohorts of over 1000 full-time students, whereas most school sixth forms are much smaller. I was confident of a high response from the colleges, but less confident of 60 responses from a single school, and decided to approach one college in each relevant area

(indeed in some of them there is only one college), but three schools, each of which would have a sixth form of over 200.

For each tertiary and sixth form college, therefore, 60 students would be asked to complete the questionnaire, with 15 male and 15 female in each of Year 12 and Year 13. In each of the six schools, 20 students would be asked to complete the questionnaire, with five male and five female in each of Year 12 and Year 13. The questionnaire would provide both quantitative and qualitative responses.

For the quantitative responses, I decided initially that the scale should not include the neutral – both to force a judgement and, on a purely practical level, to ease the analysis. A four-point scale was adopted for most of the quantitative responses: strongly agree; tend to agree; tend to disagree; strongly disagree. One of the outcomes of the initial trialling was that a final option of "not sure/don't know" would also be offered.

For one series of questions, I considered that a wider range of responses might be appropriate. I considered the use of visual analogue scales (Smith, 2002), but decided instead to adopt the Likert scale, as more familiar and accessible to those working in the field of education and educational research.

One concern I had was that the ordering of the Likert scale might influence the responses. I considered, therefore, whether around a quarter of the questions should be presented in the negative, in order to enable analysis of whether the pattern of responses for those questions differed; as with the consideration of visual analogue scales, I concluded that such an approach was perhaps more likely to confuse respondents than to improve the quality of responses.

In developing the actual questions, I was reminded of David Hargreaves' recommendation that educational research should be seen as cumulative (Hargreaves, 1996), and concluded that there might be interest and value in repeating some questions from earlier studies, albeit that those studies were of individual institutional types. The first section of the questionnaire asked for personal information, simply the name of the institution, gender of the student and year of study. In section 2 questions were asked about reasons for continuing in full-time education: those questions were drawn from a wider 1997 study of over 2,500 Year 11 students in one local education authority area (Cumbria, 1997). The third section asked about how satisfied young people were with various aspects of their post-16 education: the induction into the course, the course itself, and the facilities. Those questions repeated those from a survey of students, including adults, undertaken by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA, 1999). Section 4 comprised 15 questions covering a range of aspects of post-16 education provision; these were the same questions as were being used by the Office for Standards in Education when inspecting school sixth forms (Ofsted, 2001a). The final section was drawn from work by Smyth and Hattam (2002) on what they termed 'cultural geography'. They had identified eight 'dimensions' of a school culture, under each of which they identified characteristics of an 'aggressive', 'passive', or 'active' culture. Using those dimensions and characteristics, I developed a set of statements which could be answered using a Likert scale. Finally, I looked to three previous published studies where the actual questions had not been included, or had been addressed to staff rather than students, in order to see if there were, nevertheless, similarities in the findings reported (Taylor et al, 1974; Macfarlane, 1978; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997).

I considered that it was essential that the questionnaire was "user-friendly", in order to maximise the response rate and to maintain interest throughout the questionnaire.

I knew from my own experience that whilst I was happy to complete a very short questionnaire, anything too long and I either did not begin it, or gave shorter and shorter answers as I proceeded. For this reason I intended to ensure that the questionnaire did not exceed four sides of A4 paper, and could be presented as a single A3, folded, sheet. The amended student questionnaire is attached as the Appendix.

The data were to be subjected to two separate forms of analysis. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) enables consideration of differences between institution types, and a chi-square analysis enables consideration of differences in responses to the individual statements. This approach means that it would be possible to identify differences in overall perceptions, as well as determining more subtle variations within broad headings; either approach on its own would not be satisfactory. For example, a finding of significant differences between institutions might be affected by highly significant differences on one or two statements, whereas, equally, a finding of no significant differences overall might hide some important differences on key statements, which might balance out in the overall assessment. Looking solely at the responses to individual statements, however, would not enable an understanding of whether different opinions about aspects built into an overall dissatisfaction.

My choice of these two methods was influenced by my previous experience as a secondary school Mathematics teacher, which included teaching Statistics, and, in particular, these methods. Whilst there are numerous statistical packages available where the student simply inputs data and the package provides the answer, I was keen to use a method which I could explain if I subsequently disseminated the results of the study. Both methods are fairly straightforward, and do not provide a 'multi-variate' analysis. I considered such an approach, but concluded that the

simpler approach was justified, as I did not, in fact, have many variables to compare. In practice, I discovered an additional technique which could be applied to the chi-square analysis – "the nature of association" (Fentem, 1996, p. 343). This technique provides an indication of the nature, and relative strengths of individual responses; thus if there was a significant differences to the response to a particular question, I could identify whether this was because students in school were particularly positive or negative, the same for students in a sixth form or tertiary college, or whether it was a combination of factors.

These techniques are described in detail in the Student Questionnaire chapter.

Interviews

I was aware from personal experience – of interviewing and of being interviewed – of the limitations of an interview, and of the potential benefits. I was secretary to two inquiries into the governance and management of further education colleges, and was present during the interviews of over 120 individual governors, staff and students. Some wanted to get their view of events on the record, regardless of the line of questioning, some simply answered the questions to the best of their ability, and some simply wanted to tell their personal story. I have been interviewed a couple of times as part of research studies, but the majority of my interviews have been for jobs, either as an applicant or as interviewer.

However, for all that experience, it was only now that I realised that interviewing should be viewed as a very specific technique, and that there were many different and sophisticated ways of using the outcomes. I had also not envisaged the effort involved in achieving and recording an interview.

I decided to undertake two types of interview: institutional and elite. In planning for the institutional interviews I used four main sources: Halpin and Troyna (1994), and Arksey and Knight (1999) provided a theoretical background, whereas Manion et al (2000), and Gillham (2000) provided a practical guide, in Gillham's case including a checklist which I found particularly valuable. For the elite interviews, I relied on the work edited by Walford (1994), and in particular the contributions of Ball and Kogan.

Arksey and Knight note that the underlying assumption of anyone proposing social research interviewing is:

> *a constructivist view of knowledge. The claim is that perception, memory, emotion and understanding are human constructs, not objective things. Yet this construction is not a chaotic process because it takes place within cultural and sub-cultural settings* (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 3)

Thus the result of interviewing is to provide information on what people <u>feel</u>, rather than necessarily what people <u>do</u>; to give an insight into how people experience reality rather than to describe that reality. In this respect, I was particularly interested to be able to compare the views of students about the key characteristics of the school or college they attended with those of their teachers.

"*Face-to-face interviews are enormously time-consuming*" (Gillham, 2000, p. 9); Gillham notes that for an interview of one hour must be added the time for preparation, travelling, transcription (at least three times the length of the interview) and analysis. It is essential, therefore, that interviews are only conducted if they are likely to add insight to the study. I concluded that some interviews were not only justified but, indeed, necessary for this study. Four of the five interviews with the elite were arranged to take place in London, where the individuals concerned were based, and on days when I was already committed to a meeting in London, for the other elite interview I travelled to the individual's place of work.

I arranged the institutional interviews on a somewhat ad hoc basis, asking colleagues I met at the various meetings I attended. I wanted to visit two schools, one sixth form college and one tertiary college. I was extremely fortunate that the first four principals/headteachers I asked agreed without hesitation. In each case I arranged to undertake both a student and staff interview on the same day, and one of the institutions was close to my home, which meant a half-day exercise; the other three involved a whole day each simply to get between an hour and an hour and a quarter's data.

The institutional interviews were undertaken between May 2004 and December 2004, after the analysis of questionnaires, in order that I could use the questionnaires to inform the interview. Interviews were conducted at two schools, one sixth form college and one tertiary college. In each case, there were between six and eight students, from years 12 and 13, and studying for AS/A2. In three cases I also interviewed the headteacher/principal, and at the tertiary college, the director of sixth form studies.

The interviews were "semi-structured", in the sense that I sent all the institutions, about three days before the interviews, a note setting out my role and the broad areas of questioning I intended to pursue, rather than just asking them to talk, or having a very precise set of detailed questions, to which the answers would be primarily "Yes" or "No". The note also provided an assurance of anonymity, and that permission would be sought before any material was included in the final study which could be identified with an individual or institution. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Gillham (2000) was right – to undertake and transcribe one 45 minute interview involved a day and a half of work. For the group interviews with students I first made a note of their names and where they were sitting, and either asked a question by name, or, if someone else followed on, thanked them by

name. Whilst this was strange, and difficult to remember to do, it was invaluable when it came to transcription.

Researchers have also turned towards policy and the policy-making process. Ranson notes that:

> *Researchers on educational policy have generated over the past decade a burgeoning literature…the theoretical quality of the discourse has increased to an impressive level* (Ranson, 1995, p. 439).

Research about policy-making in education has been led by Kogan (1975; 1994) with research focusing on the Education Department of Government, and has been added to by others, including Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), Walker (1985), Finch (1986), Hakim (1987), Ball (1990), Halpin and Troyna (1994), Walford (1994), Robson (1993). One more recent development has been that research on education policy-making has become of significant interest to those researching policy-making in other disciplines (Robson, 1993).

Many studies include analysis of interviews with policy-makers or interviews with the 'powerful'. Those I met and spoke to, whilst senior figures in the post-16 education field, did not all naturally fall into either of those categories, and I considered that 'the elite' was a more appropriate term to use.

Whichever term is used, it is important to bear in mind that there is a huge difference between policy-making and changing the world. Indeed, of all those I interviewed, it was the headteachers and principals who were clearly having the most immediate impact on the lives of young people and on changes in provision. One constant feature of the numerous Green Papers and White Papers on education which were issued during the course of this research was the use of case studies – descriptions of schools and colleges that have, for some time, been using teaching and learning

techniques which the Government has decided to adopt as new, radical, policy. Whilst that might appear somewhat strange, perhaps such an approach is preferable to imposing a new and untried idea. So, when undertaking and analysing those interviews, it was:

> *…crucial to recognise that the analysis of […] reform and the making of national policy still begs the question about the implementation and realisation of reform in schools and classrooms* (Ball, 1990, p. 214).

One particular aspect of my research was to understand better the process of policy-making, explicitly to improve my personal contribution to future policy-making. In this, I found I was not alone:

> *Most academics research the powerful not simply because they find them interesting…In many academics' minds, one objective for the research is that they, or others with similar ideas, may be in a better position to influence future policy* (Walford, 1994, p. 3).

The interviews with national policy-makers were arranged after the questionnaire analysis and institutional interviews. This meant that the elite interviews were focused around the emerging conclusions from the research. It also meant that I was interviewing from a position of expertise. Saran (1985) notes that policy-makers are often surprisingly happy to discuss aspects of their work – even sensitive issues – with an interviewer who has evidently explored the issue thoroughly beforehand and is in a position to ask searching questions on the basis of their prior research. I was particularly pleased that all the interviewees were happy to have their responses tape-recorded.

Access is often a problem, but I hoped that approaching people I had met through my work in recent years might be more successful, even if it might be seen as imposing on a relationship. In practice, I don't think it made much difference, as the response rate was about 1 in 3. However, for those I did meet, there was, perhaps, some advantage in that they knew me, and my role.

Most of the interviewees were reluctant to stray outside their area of professional expertise; it was fortunate, therefore, that some had experience of more than one type of institution. What this did show, however, was that even senior professional figures have a limited overview of the post-16 education system, tending rather to know a part in detail, and falling back on stereotypes for other parts.

The elite interviews were undertaken between February 2005 and April 2005, once I had completed and transcribed the institutional interviews, and developed some "emerging conclusions". It was these emerging conclusions I wished to discuss with senior figures involved in the formulation and development of policy for 14-19 year olds. I wanted to achieve around half a dozen interviews; in practice I achieved five, from 12 requests.

Again, the elite interviews were "semi-structured". Interviewees were assured in advance of the guidelines on anonymity, and that permission would be sought before any material was included in the final study which could be identified with an individual. Again, a few days before the interview I sent a single page note outlining the emerging conclusions which I wished to discuss. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in their simplest form; my name and words, the interviewee's name and words. I made no attempt at conversation analysis, such as identifying in the transcription such things as emphasis, pauses before responses or rapid speech – although I can see that such an analysis can give an additional dimension to a transcription, taking the reader closer to the actual experience.

Documentary sources

Conventional wisdom is that further education is under-researched. Stanton challenges this, contending that there are many studies which might appropriately

be re-defined as being "research", and much research which might be re-defined as being about "further education". The main problems besetting further education research are, Stanton believes, that: "*the research effort lacks coherence and balance, and that research relevant to further education is widely dispersed*" (Stanton, 2000, p. 188). I found this to be the case. Libraries and bookshops devote many shelves to primary and secondary education, and to higher education, but it is not uncommon for there to be no section devoted to further education (although adult education occasionally got a mention). Yet, as I hope the bibliography to this study shows, the literature is there, just very much harder to find. I was initially surprised at how much of the literature was in journals, or conference papers which had not been published, but then realised that publishers probably know their business, and that there may not be a significant market for works on further education.

In the course of this study I was able to draw upon unpublished material, with privileged access, and to undertake evaluation of relevant published material.

Once I had informed DfES colleagues of my study, I was invited to join the internal DfES "Youth Trio". A number of such "Trios" have been established, comprising officials from the Analytical Services Division, Finance Division, and the relevant policy Division. The main purpose of each Trio is to ensure that policies are robust; primarily through the development of a "**ROAMEF**" statement in respect of each policy. Each policy must, therefore, have an agreed statement under each of the following headings: **R**ationale; **O**bjectives; **A**ssessment; **M**onitoring; **E**valuation; **F**eedback. One of the policies for which a statement is being developed is the creation of a distinct 14-19 phase of education; my colleagues on the Trio agreed that I could use the information I received as part of the study.

I was given privileged access by the DfES to the evidence resulting from the consultation on the Green Paper *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002a). This included feedback reports from some 50 local consultation events, and responses from around 150 colleges, 600 schools, 150 other organisations, and almost 4000 responses by young people. The privileged access extended only to the use of those documents for this research.

The relevant theme of the Green Paper was that collaboration between institutions was necessary in order to provide young people with a broad curriculum offer. In looking at the responses, therefore, I was interested to see whether institutions would identify unique characteristics which should be retained, or might be lost, in collaborative working. The feedback from the consultation events appeared to demonstrate the "Heisenberg" principle – with behaviour changing because of being observed (Heisenberg, 1927, p. 172). The strong impression I got (including at the consultation event I attended) was that schools and colleges were anxious to demonstrate to the visiting DfES ministers and officials how good relationships were at the local level. I was interested, therefore, to see whether there was a different emphasis in the individual written responses from schools and colleges. I looked at the questions on collaboration from all the college responses, and from around 200 of the school responses. Only three of those responses expressed any concern about loss of ethos – all three of those responses were from sixth form colleges. The impression I got was that for most schools and colleges "ethos" was for sale. Institutions would become specialists, Beacons, centres of excellence and would collaborate with anyone – if the price was right. This was summed up by one LEA officer as:" *before you can change culture, you must provide the money*" (DfES, 2002b).

From September 2001, the remit of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was widened to include inspection and reporting on 16-18 education in colleges. Until then, Ofsted had only inspected schools, and the published reports concentrated mainly on the compulsory age range (i.e. up to 16). A new inspection framework for school sixth forms was introduced, designed to be consistent with the framework for colleges, and thus enabling comparison between the different types of institution. I have included evidence from inspection reports in Chapter 2.

An interesting source of evidence about an educational institution is the prospectus. Particularly in recent years, this has been an essential part of an institution's marketing, and for those aged 16-18, is usually targeted as much at parents as the potential student. Again, I have included examples drawn from prospectuses in the relevant chapters. A favourite of mine is the dress code in the sixth form prospectus of a Midlands school, published in 2001:

> *Sixth Form Dress Guidelines*
>
> *Sixth formers do not have to wear uniform. It is important that sixth formers are allowed certain privileges which recognise that, whilst still at school, they are young adults.*
>
> *Guidelines for Boys*
>
> - *Trousers*
> - *A collared shirt with a tie must be worn*
> - *A V-necked pullover not containing advertisements or slogans or a suit, blazer or jacket* (Highfields, 2001)

A final source of data is on examination performance. There are national data available which have already been used, and could be interrogated in other ways, in order to identify differences between the three types of institutions. I initially considered collecting value-added data in respect of the case study institutions, in order to enable analysis against the questionnaire responses. However, the data from such an approach would have little value, as it would not relate directly to the

individual students completing the questionnaire, and would be time-consuming to collect. This is even more relevant when large-scale data are available, with ease of analysis.

In 1995 the Secretary of State requested the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) to commission a value-added national project, the objective of which was:

> *To advise the Secretary of State on the development of a national system of value added reporting for schools based on prior attainment, which will be statistically valid and correctly understood* (FitzGibbon and Timms, 1995, p. 31)

There are three main issues in the use of value-added measures: what input data should be used; how the data should be analysed; and what level of reliability should be attached to the results.

There are also three dominant forms of value-added analysis: CEM's Advanced Level Information Service (ALIS); the DfES pilots; and Greenhead College's A Level Performance System (ALPS). I have included in Chapter 8 a detailed comparison of these three alternatives.

Of those three methods, that adopted by the DfES is by far the simplest mathematically, reflecting the conclusion that

> *The development of value added measures for use in practice necessarily involves a balance between two pressures. On the one hand, if too much attention is paid to the technical niceties, the calculations can become complex and result in a bewildering array of indicators. The alternative, of relaxing the rigour of the approach […] enables summary measures to be derived* (DfEE, 1995b, p. 7).

The published DfES value-added analysis does discriminate between school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and general further education colleges, but does not provide data for tertiary colleges, as these do not have a separate statutory

existence. The DfES, whilst wishing to be helpful to me, were not able to undertake additional analysis which was – to them – of no value. However, after a number of requests, and after assurances that the data would be used only for the purposes of this study, the DfES gave me the GCSE points scores and individual GCE and AVCE results for all young people in England who took at least two GCEs or equivalent in summer 2003, together with an indicator identifying the institution they attended. This enabled me to identify students at tertiary colleges, and undertake the value-added analysis myself. I decided to analyse the data using the DfES method, for three reasons: both the other methods (ALIS and ALPS) involve data input into a commercial system, which was not available to me; neither ALIS nor ALPS had 100% coverage of schools or colleges; and neither ALIS nor ALPS published comparative data on institutional types.

Triangulation

Because the study is concerned with comparison of different types of institution, and using data from a variety of sources, it is following an approach termed as "triangulation": it is, however, important to note that "triangulation" in this context does not mean "three", just "more than one".

The term "triangulation" has its origins in mapmaking, and has been adopted for social science research in order to: "*..map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint…*" (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 112).

Denzin (1970) developed a typology for triangulation, suggesting six categories, four of which are commonly used in educational research: data; investigator; theory; and methodological triangulation. Two of those four types are appropriate for this study. Data triangulation is achieved by the use of three different types of institution, and

methodological triangulation is achieved by the use of questionnaire, interview and documentary sources.

Those who support the use of triangulation argue that reliance upon a single approach can lead to results which are a construct of the approach, as much as they are an interpretation of the data (Cohen et al, 2000; Smith, 1975; Lin, 1976). Those who query the use of triangulation argue that it is, by its very origins, positivistic, and that the use of triangulation in interpretive research must inevitably result in differing responses (Silverman, 1985; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). One of the clearest critiques of triangulation was presented by Massey (1999), who argued that the use of triangulation in sociological research bore no resemblance to its use in surveying, and identified seven common errors made by researchers. In broad terms, even though two very different methods would produce different forms of result, some researchers would identify similarities in the results, and take those as proof of the validity of both methods. In other cases, Massey suggested that researchers used triangulation in order that the strengths of one approach offset the weaknesses of the other(s).

I was fortunate, in March 2003, to be invited to a seminar of the Lifelong Learning Research Group based at the University of the West of England. The seminar was entitled: "Methodological Challenges in Researching Lifelong Learning", and a number of papers from educational researchers around the country were presented and discussed. One of the papers looked at the challenges of linking quantitative and qualitative evidence in research, and described in some detail the different cultures of quantitative and qualitative researchers (Hamilton, 2003). For Hamilton, quantitative researchers are more able to separate cleanly the phases of data collection and data analysis, to separate themselves from the data, to be anonymous, to be clear about timescales, whereas the qualitative researcher is

more likely to have a personal involvement with the data – particularly if interviewing – and to be more reliant on the goodwill of others. Hamilton, working in a team of researchers drawn from both cultures, posed the challenge as being to:

> *ensure that multi-method research facilitates understanding and interaction between the different traditions it brings together rather than simply working along parallel – or conflicting – tracks*" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 2).

If that was a challenge for a mixed group of researchers, it was likely to be more so for an individual using multiple methods.

I am comfortable that my use of triangulation has provided a better picture of the three types of institution I am looking at than use of a single technique, and, I feel, presents a better picture of the broad field of 16-19 education than previous studies, although I take Massey's caution not to consider that my picture is perfect. If, as Silverman and others suggest, some of my findings appear to point in different directions, that is perhaps because each of the types of institution has strengths and weaknesses – if any single type was better at everything, perhaps it would have come to dominate by now. I am, however, mindful of the potential danger of only reporting on those aspects of the study which show discrimination between the institutions, by which I mean that I must consider the impact on the students of features which are present in one or two types only. Examples are the large number of adults, part-time students and vocational courses in tertiary colleges, which are not features of the other types, and the very intense focus of the sixth form college.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Educational research has been described as: *"systematic enquiry made public"* (Stenhouse, 1979, p. 7): my enquiry was, and indeed had to be, very public to those I met and worked with.

I was subject to a number of formal ethical guidelines. I decided that I should view these as providing a solid framework for my research, rather than a straitjacket.

First, my research was undertaken at the Institute of Education, University of London, and I was subject to the University regulations and to the Institute's ethical framework. Secondly, the research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which had its own regulations. Thirdly, my research is being supported by my employer, the Learning and Skills Council, which has its own Code of Corporate Responsibility. As if this were not enough, I was a member of the British Educational Research Association, and was thus subject to yet more ethical guidelines. In practice, those various regulations and guidelines were extremely useful, and not at all restrictive: for example, in writing to schools and developing the questionnaire, they indicated the sort of assurances I should include about confidentiality and usage of material.

There is a significant potential for conflict between the ethics of my employment and the ethics of the educational research bodies. As a researcher, I must report faithfully my findings. The Learning and Skills Council is a Non-Departmental Government Body (commonly referred to as a "quango"), operating under a remit letter from the Secretary of State and annual guidance letters. In effect, this means that the LSC's main task is to implement Government policy. The LSC is also asked to advise on policy development and implementation, but is not expected to criticise publicly – or challenge publicly – Government policy: such discussions are held behind closed doors. I was confident that such conflict would not arise, particularly as over recent decades Governments have not adopted any preferred form of post-16 organisation, and neither has the LSC.

Two experiences helped develop my understanding of the boundaries which my dual role as researcher and employee placed upon me. In 2003, I was invited to give evidence in person to the Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform. This invitation was on a personal basis, in part because of my long and deep involvement with the 14-19 agenda and in part because it was known that I was researching in this broad area. When I was later asked to prepare a draft response to the interim report from the Working Group, I was teased by some of those present at the meeting for retreating to "Civil Service speak": saying the same things, but much less forcefully. Then in early 2005, a colleague and I were asked to write "think-pieces" to be offered to the educational press as the first two of an intended series of contributions from the LSC to the debate on 14-19 reform. My piece considered the apparent propensity of Ministers to adopt United States reform proposals around 10 years after they had been introduced in the United States; it was entitled: "A Big Apple for Mike Tomlinson". I am pleased that the Communications team wished to use the piece as an example of jargon-free and good writing, but within the space of two weeks the article went from being an LSC think piece, to a piece written in a personal capacity and not to be taken as representing the views of the LSC, to being dropped. I likened it at the time to a fledgling, sitting on the edge of the nest, getting ready to fly, but not quite ready to go. The Civil Service has certainly changed over the 25 years since Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, becoming increasingly politicised, visible, subject to written codes of conduct and accountable to challenging performance targets (Harris, 2002); but it remains a key feature that a Civil servant should be "sound", should know: "*what is done and what is not done in different circumstances*" (Chapman, 1997, p. 31).

My research study related very closely to my employment. I made clear, where relevant, that I would wish to draw upon privileged access in developing my study, subject to ethical considerations. No objections or (except in one case) reservations

were raised, and indeed, new opportunities were made available to me because my special interest was known. The single case where I was politely told that a document I would receive could not be quoted, as it related to advice to Ministers. As I knew the document existed, I could have requested a copy under the Freedom of Information Act; however, had I done so, I would probably have found that the document in question was exempt, I would <u>certainly</u> have found doors closing rather than opening – and it was not that exciting in the first place!

With those numerous potential restraints on my work, I had nevertheless to retain the determination to report honestly what I had observed. I recalled Bernard Woolley, a high-flying civil servant in the television series *Yes Minister*, when being asked to enthuse about a policy in which he did not believe, anxiously asking his Permanent Secretary if he would end up a moral vacuum; the answer was "*I hope so […] If you work hard enough*" (Lynn and Jay, 1984, p. 456).

Issues of access

As Senior Policy Manager for 14-19 education for the LSC, I was already well-placed at the centre of policy development in this area. For example, I took the lead on preparing the LSC's response to the Government's Green Paper *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards*. This involved preparing an initial draft for consideration by all 47 local LSCs and the Young People's Learning Committee (a statutory committee whose members are appointed by the Secretary of State to advise the LSC on matters of interest to young people). The draft had then to be amended in the light of comments received, before being approved by the LSC National Council.

I have represented the LSC on related DfES working groups, whose various remits were to: oversee the arrangements for consultation on the Green Paper; provide

regular (fortnightly) briefings for Ministers on the development of 14-19 policies; choose and oversee the Pathfinder projects relating to flexibility in post-16 education and training; and choose and oversee pilot projects for the introduction of post-16 Citizenship. I also represented the LSC on issues involving the development of the Connexions Service (a strategy bringing together agencies involved with young people aged 13-19, including advice, guidance and support). I served on three of the sub-groups established to support the Working Group on 14-19 Reform, chaired by (Sir) Mike Tomlinson, prepared the LSC response to the Tomlinson final report in 2004, and, at the time of writing, represent the LSC on a variety of groups working to implement the resulting proposals from the Government for the introduction of specialised diplomas.

After completing the analysis of the questionnaire, I visited two schools, a sixth form college and a tertiary college to conduct interviews with a senior member of staff and a group of students. In each case, I had met the headteacher or principal previously as members of different DfES working groups, and had been invited to visit the school or college. The fact that, in each case, the principal or headteacher had been invited to serve on a national departmental working group suggests that their work had been brought to the attention of officials. The fact that they invited me to visit suggests that they were proud of what they were doing. I began the visits, and the interviews, therefore, knowing that this was not, and could not be, a representative sample, but would give "colour" to the emerging picture. Three of the four institutions were in the middle of major building projects; the fourth had recently completed an even bigger project – either a sign of the times, or, perhaps, another sign of a successful leader.

I used the questionnaire analysis to help form the questions I would ask. In each case, I read the most recent inspection report from the Office of Standards in

Education (Ofsted), and visited the institution's website, before the visit. I also had, on each occasion, a guided tour of the institution. After completing those visits, I began to frame the conclusions I was beginning to draw, and tested those emerging conclusions out with a number of senior figures – the elite – with a national perspective on post-16 education.

A senior member of staff in each institution was interviewed, in each case before the interview with students. In three cases this was the head of the institution, two headteachers and a sixth form college principal; in the tertiary college the interviewee was a Director of Learning, and member of the senior management team.

Other than an introductory question, on the previous experience of the interviewee, and a final opportunity for the interviewee to give any additional comments, the questioning pursued three broad themes:

- the approach to recruiting and the induction programme
- the key characteristics of the institution, its dominant pedagogy, the tutorial system, freedom outside classroom time, the range of provision
- facilities and opportunities for young people outside the classroom.

Group interviews with four groups of students were held between May 2004 and November 2004. The interviews were at two schools, a sixth form college and a tertiary college. In one school, a tutor asked to sit in, and did so, with the agreement of the students – who warned him that they would still tell the truth.

The students were all following A level courses, so had probably had a good experience of education pre-16. They had volunteered to be interviewed, and were supportive of the institution they attended.

As with the questionnaires, the sample was restricted to Year 12 and Year 13 students, pursuing mainly A level courses. The interview questions were derived from the questionnaire responses, and covered the broad areas of:

- why the student chose the institution – did they have realistic choice, did they look elsewhere, how did they find out what was on offer, what sort of induction programme was there

- how the students saw the institution – its key characteristics, teaching style, freedom outside classroom teaching time

- what the facilities were like – computers, ICT, sports hall, cafeteria, library, opportunities outside the classroom.

In the relevant chapters I provide a selection of comments made. Clearly, the number of students involved is small, compared to the 400,000 or so young people in Years 11 and 12 in England who were studying A levels at the time, but the comments do resonate with those in the questionnaire responses, and with those in previous studies.

Each interview lasted between 25 and 35 minutes. The names of the students are changed, but gender, age group, type of institution and, where appropriate, ethnicity, retained. School sixth forms, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges are identified by SC, SFC and TC respectively, so that, typically, a female year 13 student in a tertiary college would be identified as Sally (F13TC).

I followed the same approach with the elite interviews, giving prior notice of the broad lines of questioning, and assuring confidentiality. Rather than use names, I considered a variety of ways of identifying the individuals. At first, I used a single

letter. However, I found myself going back to remember to whom this referred, and so chose instead a brief description – 'teacher representative'; 'Minister' and so on.

CONCLUSIONS

I found the on-going debate about the value of educational research of considerable benefit in deciding how I would conduct my research, as at each stage I was able to come to a view about whether my proposed approach could be subject to the sort of criticisms being made about others.

I indicated in Chapter 1 that the scope of the study was restricted both in terms of the curriculum being followed by the students (GCE Advanced Level only) and in terms of the institutions (excluding "mixed-economy" FE colleges): I also explained my reasons. Those reasons were, primarily, pragmatic; to have included the whole range of post-16 courses available would have doubled the size of the fieldwork, and an additional institution type would have added a further 25 per cent. As a part-time student in full-time employment, that would have been unmanageable with the sample sizes I considered to be the minimum acceptable. The study does, however, look at the experiences which may be shared in part by some 500,000 young people aged 16-19 (derived from DfES, 2004a, pp. 12,13).

The institution-level questionnaire could be criticised for its choice of questions and sample size. Again, I feel I have a robust defence to any such criticism, in that I used questions which had already been used and reported on, and which gave me the ability to compare my results with previous findings. I have also defended the sample size, not least by resisting the temptation to over-analyse data.

I also decided to restrict the number of interviews with staff, students and the "elite". Again, this decision was pragmatic; a balance between the time involved in further interviews and the value such additional interviews would add to the reported study. I would, of course, have the option to seek further interviews if necessary. Clearly, in reporting on over eight hours of interviews I would have to select which quotations to use. To avoid bias, I would seek to ensure that those quotations were representative of the views expressed, and would provide my supervisor with a full transcript of each interview.

Where I feel least open to criticism is on my use of documentary sources. I Interpreted "literature" very broadly, had privileged access to unpublished material from within the DfES, and the value-added analysis of examination performance is an original analysis of the complete data set. The one possible criticism could be that the analysis is of one year only, and does not show whether that was a singularity or not.

For someone working in the field they are researching, and involved closely in policy-making, access – to institutions, individuals and documents – is probably going to be easier than for an external researcher. That does, however, mean that ethical issues are more likely to arise, both in terms of access and reporting. I am content that the first of those issues can be addressed by open and honest approach on my part, making it clear that in general I would feel free to use whatever relevant data were available to me, but that equally I would respect confidentiality if asked. For the second, my experience in writing and drafting reports, including published work on investigations into the governance and management of colleges, gives me confidence that my reporting will be firmly evidence based.

Overall, I feel that I have at my disposal a range of researching tools, sufficient for me to investigate my research question, and diverse enough to support the triangulation approach I have adopted.

At the core of this study are three types of institution, which have developed in the particular educational, social and economic circumstances of England. The next chapter seeks to describe those institutions in detail, in order to better understand the pressures – real or imagined – which might explain the behaviours and attitudes of those institutions which are described in the rest of the study.

CHAPTER 5

THE CASE STUDY INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I want to provide a brief history of the establishment and development of the three types of institution which form the basis of my research: school sixth forms; sixth form colleges; and tertiary colleges. Inevitably, with respective histories of around 600 years, 40 years and 30 years, there is more to say about schools.

THE SCHOOL SIXTH FORM

The school sixth form traces its origins back to the foundation of the Winchester College, the earliest public school in England, in 1382.

In its early days, pupils at Winchester College were taught in seven classes or 'books', with the most senior pupils being in the seventh book. By 1647, the most senior book at Winchester College was the sixth.

The pattern established at Winchester College was followed in broad terms by other public schools as they were founded. By the end of the 18th century, the highest form in most schools was called the "sixth form", although even today, some public schools have "seventh" or even "eighth" forms. It has been suggested that the term 'form' derived from the benches on which the students sat (Robinson and Burke, 1996, p. 6).

The sixth form as we know it today, of course, is not a <u>year</u> of study, but a <u>stage</u> comprising two or possibly three years of study. The development of the unique identity of the sixth form, and its separate development from the rest of the school, is credited normally to the work of Samuel Butler, head of Shrewsbury School from 1798 to 1836, and Thomas Arnold, head of Rugby School from 1828 to 1842. Life at Rugby School in Arnold's time was immortalised by Hughes in "Tom Brown's Schooldays".

Both Butler and Arnold saw the sixth form as essentially different from the rest of the school. For Butler, the sixth form was reserved for the intellectual elite; for Arnold, sixth formers had a social responsibility to and for younger members of the school. In practice, Butler and Arnold merely placed emphasis on different aspects of what were broadly similar sixth forms.

Arnold saw the sixth former as a part of the whole student body, but somehow standing outside that body; to him, the question – and the answer – was:

> *…how there can be infused into a society of boys such elements as, without being too dissimilar as to coalesce with the rest, shall yet be so superior as to raise the character of the whole. […] I am convinced that in the peculiar relation of the highest form to the rest of the boys […] is to be found the best means of answering it.* (Stanley, 1858, pp. 97, 98)

Sixth forms were not developed in the state school sector until the early part of the 20th century, following the Balfour Education Act of 1902. Those new sixth forms were encouraged to follow the tradition of the public schools. Through to the 1960s, sixth forms in state schools were characterised by pursuit of academic and sporting excellence, and a prefectorial system, under which sixth-formers took responsibility for the behaviour of younger pupils, and were rewarded with clear privileges. Sixth forms were also small by modern standards: "*It seems likely that the minimum economic size of a sixth form is not less than 40 pupils. On this basis […] there is still a long way to go*" (Ministry of Education, 1959, p. 249, paragraph 366).

The Department for Education and Science Circular 10/65 requested local education authorities "*if they have not already done so, to prepare and submit […] plans for reorganising secondary education in their areas on comprehensive lines*" (DES, 1965, p. 1). Typically, at this time, around 25 per cent of 11 year olds were admitted to 11-18 grammar schools, with the rest going to secondary moderns or, in a few areas, technical schools: if all schools in an area were to be 11-18 comprehensives,

either the schools would be very large, or the sixth form very small. The circular described six main forms of comprehensive organization (DES, 1965, p. 2), which may be summarised as:

(i)   11-18 comprehensive

(ii) 11-13/14 junior comprehensive and 13/14-18 senior comprehensive

(iii) 11-15 junior comprehensive and 13/14-18 senior comprehensive

(iv) 11-13/14 junior comprehensive and 13/14-15 or 13/14-18 senior comprehensive

(v)   11-16 comprehensives and sixth form colleges

(vi) 8/9-12/13 middle schools and 12/13-18 comprehensives.

Note that, at this time, the school leaving age was 15.

The first act of the Conservative Government elected in 1970 was to withdraw Circular 10/65. However, it was too late; most local authorities: *"were too far down the road of comprehensivisation to want to turn back"* (Campbell, 2001, p. 223) and there was a policy conflict – the minimum school leaving age was to be raised to 16, which would be likely to result in pressure for post-16 provision in the secondary modern and technical schools. In her three years an eight months as Secretary of State, Margaret Thatcher: *"to her subsequent chagrin […] rejected only 326 out of 3,612 schemes which were submitted to her"* (Campbell, 2001, pp. 223,224).

By the late 1980s, a range of factors came into play which resulted in, or at least accelerated, change in schools sixth forms. First, the introduction of GCSEs in 1986, with grades awarded on the basis of "criteria referencing" resulted in a significant year-on-year improvement in the number of 16-year olds gaining the 'traditional' entry requirements for school sixth forms. At the same time, the

Secretary of State allowed schools to offer vocational courses post-16. From 1988, schools and further education colleges were funded under schemes of "local management", where funding was dictated largely on the basis of student numbers, and thus encouraged competition for students. Finally, societal changes emphasised individualism and competition, rather than collectivism and responsibility for others – Thatcher's "there is no such thing as society".

Sixth forms had to adapt to meet those changes. Whereas:

> *The traditional sixth form was visibly a part of the school to which it belonged. Sixth formers usually wore the same uniform as the rest of the school […] some were appointed as prefects, and given a role in maintaining discipline among the younger pupils. More recently, the desire to encourage a broader group of young people to stay at school […] has led some sixth forms to relax their rules and become more 'college-like'. […] a self-contained quasi-college which has little to do with the main school* (Schagen et al, 1996, p. 24).

In 2004/05, the largest sixth form in the maintained sector in England, at Beauchamp College in Leicestershire, had over 960 students, whilst the smallest, at Chatham South School in Kent had just six. Beauchamp College is a 14-18 school, Chatham South an 11-17 school in a selective system; but there are 11-18 schools, 13-18 schools and even, following the Education Act 2002, 16-18 schools – sixth form colleges in the schools sector. The governance arrangements of the schools vary too; there are about 300 schools which are under the control of bodies other than the local authority (mainly faith schools, most of which are Roman Catholic, but also including Church of England, Jewish and Muslim), grammar schools which select their students, single sex schools, specialist schools, beacon schools, leading schools and Academies – independent schools funded directly by the Department for Education and Skills. In total, over 300,000 young people are enrolled in the sixth forms of around 1,800 maintained secondary schools in England. The number of students in those sixth forms in January 2004 was:

Table 3.1: Size of school sixth forms, January 2004

Size	Up to 50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-250	251-300	Over 300
Number	81	245	359	370	302	210	205
Cum %	5%	18%	39%	60%	77%	88%	100%

(derived from DfES, 2004a, p. 45)

The performance of school sixth forms is closely related to their size, as a response to a Parliamentary Question demonstrated, setting out the average GCE/VCE A/AS points score per candidate in school sixth forms in 2002 to 2004 (Hansard, 2004c, column 368W):

Table 3.2: Average points score per candidate in school sixth forms, 2002 to 2004

Number of students in sixth form	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04 (provisional)
Less than 50	227.1	224.1	242.6
51-100	239.3	244.4	250.0
101-150	258.6	253.1	259.2
151-200	278.4	278.3	278.3
201-250	291.0	293.1	292.0
More than 250	296.4	299.8	303.3
Total	280.9	282.8	286.1

Schools have not had to publish "success rates" – a measure of the number of young people starting a particular course who complete it successfully – so there are no publicly available data on drop-out from sixth forms. However, there were

179,909 young people aged 16 in maintained schools in England in September 2003 (DfES, 2003e, p. 33), and 140,970 young people aged 17 in September 2004 (DfES, 2004a, p. 33), which is a fall of 21.6%.

THE COLLEGES

Before going into a detailed consideration of sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges, it may be helpful to give a brief overview of the development, to date, of further education in England. This is only a summary, for, as Helena Kennedy QC has said: "*Defining further education exhaustively would be God's own challenge*" (FEFC, 1997, p. 1)

Whilst there has been vocational education in England since the Middle Ages, the introduction of 'organised' further education in England for the general public is credited usually to George Birkbeck, and the establishment in London in 1823 of a Mechanics Institute. By the middle of the 19th Century there were over 600,000 people attending 610 Mechanics Institutes in England, Scotland and Wales (Hall, 1994, p. 3). In the 1890s, local authorities were empowered, but not required, to provide technical education, and in the Education Act 1944, clauses were included to require all young people to continue in some form of education or training until they were 18; those clauses were never enacted.

Local authorities established provision to meet the perceived needs of the local area. Some established specialist provision for art or agriculture, and the cities and most larger towns had one or more technical colleges. However: "*…in the absence of any form of major regional or national planning, […] a patchwork quilt of further education establishments developed after the war*" (Cantor and Roberts, 1990/1986, p. 112).

Whilst the Labour Government's publication in 1965 of Circular 10/65 led to the establishment of sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges, that was not its purpose; its purpose was the establishment of comprehensive schools. The Education Reform Act of 1988 gave delegated budgets to schools and to colleges. That Act also assured schools which sought to opt out of local authority control that they would be funded at a level equal to the higher of their current funding or the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) – the figure which the Government assumed, but did not require, each local authority to spend on its pupils. It was naturally in the interests of every local authority to ensure that they funded schools at least at SSA, giving rise, in effect, to a national funding system for schools. Whilst colleges had delegation, they did not have the same funding changes; those came after colleges were removed from local authority control in 1993.

From April 1993, sixth form colleges and general and tertiary colleges were to be funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The FEFC was seen as, and described as, a funding body, with no reference to planning. The main focus of the FEFC was in the introduction of a national funding system for further education, with the same course funded at the same rate throughout England (with weightings to reflect differing costs, particularly in London). There was, however, no planning – other than by the colleges themselves – of what courses were offered, or where they were offered. The range of colleges inherited by the FEFC was amazing, from adult residential colleges such as Ruskin and Plater, specialist art colleges, a college of dance, a college of music and – my favourite – The Marine Society College of the Sea. I describe the latter as my favourite not because of its specialised curriculum, or any inherent feature of the college – in fact, I have never visited it – but because of its quirkiness: a college of the sea, based in a building in central London; with no students in England (all students are serving in the Royal Navy, merchant navy or the fishing fleet and study by distance learning); and with more governors than

students (around 400 governors to 245 students. Individuals become a governor by paying a membership fee, but the day-to-day operation of the college is under the control of a council, comprising some 30 governors and up to 15 co-opted members). Perhaps what surprises me most is – it works; at its last inspection in May 2000, the college was awarded a grade 2 (good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses); the inspection was also unique, as the inspectors did not see any of the students, but collected their views by e-mail and telephone (FEFC, 2000).

It was only in 1998, when the Government accepted the recommendations of the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT) for a set of targets for participation and achievement (DfEE, 1998a), that any element of planning of post-16 provision came into place. In 2001, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) succeeded the FEFC, with a statutory duty to fund and plan post-16 education and training in England – including school sixth forms and adult education, but excluding higher education.

One of the first acts of the LSC was to begin Strategic Area Reviews (StARs) in each of its 47 local areas, in order to identify what provision was already being made, what were the needs of the local area, and where there was over-provision or under-provision. The assumption being that, once the StARs process was concluded, there would be redistribution of funding, and possibly restrictions on what individual colleges, and schools, can provide.

Sixth form colleges

Sir William Alexander is credited with making the first proposal for a sixth form college in 1943, when he suggested that Sheffield Education Committee consider: "*centralizing its sixth form provision*" (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 27). It was to be over a

quarter of a century before that vision was realised, but not in Sheffield, which went for a tertiary model before, eventually, a sixth form college was opened in 2003.

The first institution in England which had the characteristics of a sixth form college was Welbeck College, established by the Ministry of Defence in 1953: "*to provide a two-year education in preparation for Sandhurst for boys wishing to serve in the technical corps of the Army*" (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 29). In 1964, Mexborough Grammar School in South Yorkshire began to describe its sixth form, which was large (300 students) and housed in a separate building from the main school, as 'Mexborough Sixth-Form College' (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 32). Neither of these institutions were sixth form colleges in any legal sense.

Three models for sixth form colleges were suggested in Circular 10/65: a separate establishment catering for the educational needs of all young people staying on at school beyond the age of 16; the same model, but with entry restricted on the basis of examination performance; or a sixth form attached to an 11-16 school, but providing for a number of other schools.

The Circular rehearses arguments for and against sixth form colleges. Against such establishments are: loss of contact of younger pupils with senior pupils; drain of talented and specialist teachers from 11-16 schools; and teachers may find unattractive the lack of advanced work in 11-16 schools.

The arguments in favour were: concentration of specialist staff in sixth form colleges ensuring economic use; greater opportunities for leadership by younger pupils in 11-16 schools; and improved status and freedom for those pupils in the sixth form college.

The economic use of specialist teachers is said to be *"a point of particular importance while the present teacher shortages continues"* (DES, 1965, p. 7).

The Circular concludes that:

> *In this country there is so far little experience on which to base final judgements on the merits of sixth form colleges. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State believes that the issues have been sufficiently debated to justify a limited number of experiments.* (DES, 1965, pp. 7/8).

The first sixth form college was established in Luton in 1969 and by 1994 there were around 110 sixth-form colleges in England, although very few of those had been established after 1988, when the Education Reform Act gave schools the right to 'opt out' of local authority control and become what was known as Grant Maintained; many of those that did so were either protecting their sixth form against actual or perceived threat or, in some cases, were 11-16 schools seeking to regain a sixth form.

Sixth form colleges are not found uniformly throughout England; in 2004, there were 104 sixth form colleges, with 22 in the North West and 21 in the South East, but just 4 in the East Midlands and two in the South West (SFCF, 2004, p. 2).

Sixth form colleges were, legally, schools, and governed by schools regulations. Teachers had to have qualified teacher status and were still subject to schoolteachers pay and conditions of service. Students were aged 16 to 18 and attended full-time. Although, from 1988, it was possible for schools to enrol adult students to in-fill classes, but the schools would not receive funding from the local authority for those students. Very few schools or sixth form colleges took up this option; although in a number of cases, the premises were used in the evening and at weekends by the local authority for adult education classes.

Following the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, sixth form colleges were removed from the local authority sector and taken in to the newly established further education sector, even though a survey for the Association of Metropolitan Authorities found that: "*more than two-thirds of sixth form college governors and principals [have] said they would regret being amputated from their local education authority*" (Education, 1991, p. 224). Most of the sixth form colleges were 'incorporated' – that is, the governing body was established as an independent corporate body, able to employ its own staff and own its own property. Around 30 of the sixth form colleges were not under the control of the local authority, having been established by voluntary bodies, which still owned the property (all but four of these had been established by the Roman Catholic Church); these colleges were left under the control of their trustees, although in 2002 the governing bodies were given some limited independence.

The proposed removal of the sixth form colleges from the schools sector caused considerable debate in both Houses of Parliament, primarily because of a concern that the colleges would no longer be required to provide religious education, and that there may be a threat to the denominational character of some colleges. Lord Belstead, for the Government, gave a commitment to the House of Lords that this would not be allowed, in what became known as the "Belstead undertaking".

From April 1993, therefore, sixth form colleges were independent of local authorities, and no longer subject to schools regulations or schoolteachers conditions of service. The sixth form colleges could set their own pay rates, could recruit teachers without qualified teacher status, and could enrol part-time and adult students, funded by the new Further Education Funding Council. There were predictions that, because of their size when compared to general further education colleges, most if not all of the sixth form colleges would have to merge with the local general further education

college within a very short time: some did, but of 109 sixth form colleges in the sector in 1993, there were still over 100 in 2006, and, indeed, new sixth form colleges had being established, in some cases by reversing previous mergers.

The sixth form colleges decided collectively to try to retain their focus and mission. The colleges established their own national representative bodies to recommend pay rates and to lobby Government on behalf of the sixth form colleges, and succeeded in maintaining a very high level of staff with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and pay rises broadly in line with those achieved by schools; they also persuaded the Education Department to allow staff with Qualified Teacher status to undertake their probation period in a sixth form college. Many sixth form colleges took advantage of the opportunity to recruit part-time and adult students, but tended to put on that provision in the evening or at weekends. The Winter programme for adults at Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College, for example, offered 100 courses, of which 80 were provided in the evening or on Saturday (Cheadle and Marple, 2005). A number of sixth form colleges sought to change their name, dropping the term Sixth Form, to reflect a changed focus and mission, ironically at the same time as a number of schools began to describe their post-16 provision as a "sixth form college". In 2002, Brooke House sixth form college was established in Hackney, with 500 students aged 16-18. By October 2004, it had grown to 1,500. Brooke House was established primarily to re-vitalise post-16 provision in the borough with the poorest retention and achievement post-16 in England, and was very different in that it made significant provision at levels 1 and 2, rather than the traditional GCE A level offer, as the principal has said: "*Last year, just 36 per cent of our intake had five GCSEs*" (TES, 2004b, p. 1).

By 2004, there were 104 sixth form colleges in England. The largest was Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College, which resulted from the merger of three colleges

and had almost 3,000 students aged 16-18 and over 6,000 adult students; the smallest was Ludlow College, with around 350 students aged 16-18 and 1,800 adult students. A small number of sixth form colleges, such as Greenhead College in Huddersfield, had not entered the part-time or adult market.

Tertiary colleges

Circular 10/65 did not provide, as an example of a comprehensive system, one where the local further education college provided all post-16 education and training, and no schools had sixth forms; however, this was the form of organisation that some local authorities favoured, describing this new type of institution as a "tertiary" college. The first tertiary college, in Exeter, was established in 1970. Others followed, notably in Lancashire and Hampshire. In some cases, a small number of schools, usually voluntary aided, retained their sixth forms; the Tertiary Colleges Network, established in 1993, accepted colleges in such circumstances into membership as predominantly "sole" providers. By 1993, some 50 or so colleges considered themselves to be tertiary colleges, and a small number were created subsequently by the merger of general further education and sixth form colleges. None of the tertiary colleges had been established by, or under the control of, faith or other bodies.

In November 1980, David Terry was appointed principal designate of Halesowen College, a proposed new tertiary college in Dudley, West Midlands, to be established by the removal of sixth forms from four local secondary schools and the enlargement of Halesowen FE College. Terry provides a very detailed and readable account of the establishment of the college – but he had plenty of time, as the Secretary of State rejected the proposal, and it was not until September 1982 that the tertiary college opened. Options considered, and rejected, included a sixth form college (there were only 300 GCE A level students in the schools) and a consortium.

For Terry, there were four tests of the sincerity of a consortium: a common timetable; common times of day; the number of A level subjects being ceased in some schools in order to provide cost effective provision; and the number of young people who actually study in more than one school. Only one existing consortium met those criteria – in Cambridge – and even there it was considered: "*to be ending its useful life, and the authority was planning to reorganise its colleges and schools so as to make it unnecessary*" (Terry, 1987, p. 12).

Terry backed his support for tertiary reorganisation with research in 1981 in four areas of the country which had reorganised its post-16 provision recently; two with sixth form colleges and two with tertiary colleges. Three of the reorganisations had been undertaken between 1972 and 1974, the final one was in its first year of operation; the benefit of this was that many staff could still remember the previous arrangements, and were able to offer a comparison. Terry – an advocate of tertiary colleges – considered that his research had shown that sixth form colleges only offered a studious atmosphere for academically able young people, which was not: "*to denigrate the work of existing sixth-form colleges but rather to maintain that there is no good general reason for founding new ones*" (Terry, 1987, p. 28). Tertiary colleges, in contrast, enabled a student to combine the theoretical and the applicable, and to encourage a sense of working together for a common purpose, thus, uniquely, bridging the two divides which had: "*greatly disadvantaged our country and go a long way to accounting for our national decline in the last forty years*" (Terry, 1987, p. 28).

Very few of the tertiary colleges included the term in their official name, but the removal of colleges from local authority control in 1993 resulted in a few local authorities wishing to regain some measure of control over post-16 education, and this, together with the increasing number of Grant Maintained schools seeking to

establish sixth forms, meant that tertiary colleges, for the first time, faced competition for students. For some, this led to marketing of their 16-18 provision as a Sixth Form Centre; this usually reflected the reality of the way in which the college was organised already, rather than any internal reorganisation of provision.

By 2004, there were 56 colleges as members of the Tertiary Colleges Network, ranging from Sheffield College, with nearly 6,000 students aged 16-18 and over 21,000 adult students, to Penwith College in Cornwall, with under 500 students aged 16-18 and 5,500 adult students.

Retention rates in further education colleges in England are calculated at qualification level, rather than at a student level, and the retention rate is: "*the number of qualifications completed divided by the number of starts*" (LSC, 2005, p. 7). Retention rates in tertiary colleges are not identified separately from general further education colleges, but in the academic year 2003/04, the retention rate for 16-18 year olds in general further education colleges was 77%, and in sixth form colleges was 89% (LSC, 2005, p. 11).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that each of the terms 'school sixth form', 'sixth form college' and 'tertiary college' describes a wide range of institutions, in size and culture. Nevertheless, the make-up of the student body in each type of institution, with 16-19 year olds being in the minority in schools and in tertiary colleges, but forming almost the entire day-time population in sixth form colleges, does mean that each has a strong and distinctive character.

I commented in Chapter 3 that the tripartite curriculum had begun as a single offer for the minority, then developing to a wider cohort. Similarly, full-time provision for 16-19 year olds was, for 600 years, the preserve of schools, with sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges only being created in the last 40 years. In addition, the original driver for the establishment of sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges appears to have been concerns that comprehensive reorganisation following Circular 10/65 would result in schools which would generate viable sixth form numbers, rather than from any educational philosophy. It is interesting to note that, as the numbers of young people staying in learning after 16 has risen, the original driver may have receded, but there are now keen advocates of, in particular, the sixth form college as a preferred option.

Having looked in detail at how the institutions from outside, in the next Chapter I report on the views of staff and students inside those institutions as expressed when I interviewed them.

CHAPTER 6

"*IT'S ALRIGHT*"

INSTITUTIONAL INTERVIEWS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I report on the interviews I had with staff and students at the four schools and colleges I visited between May and December 2004.

I indicated in the Methodology Chapter that I saw interviewing as providing information about what people <u>feel</u>, rather than what they <u>do</u>: to give an insight into how people experience reality, rather than to describe that reality. I was also looking to compare the views of students with those of their teachers.

I begin with the schools; staff, and then the students. Initially, I presented the data separately for the two schools, the sixth form college and the tertiary college. Because there were two schools, this gave a rather unbalanced feel to the reporting, and I decided instead to report the responses from the two colleges together. In all cases I report the data against three broad themes: recruitment and induction; key characteristics of the institution; and activity out of the classroom.

In reporting the voice of the learner, and that of their teachers, it is important to bear in mind the limitations of such interviews. Those being interviewed all volunteered – and may, therefore, be minded to present their institution in a good light. The interviewees may be inclined to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear, and it may be that: "*young people are already incorporated by the practices of what is cool or customary*" (Fielding, 2004, p. 296). Hargreaves notes that: "*Policymakers repeatedly ignore the voices of teachers in the reform process*" (Hargreaves, 1996, p 12), and so I am pleased that I did interview teachers, and can report their comments. However, I am aware, in reporting those comments, that I must avoid speaking: "*not of **a** teacher's voice as an indefinite article, but of **the** teacher's voice as a very definite and generically representative one*" (Hargreaves, 1996, p 13); the

comments I report are those of four individuals, and represent their individual views, not those of the teaching profession.

Finally, from something approaching six hours of interviews I have had to select which quotations to use. I have sought to ensure that those quotations are representative of the views expressed and give a flavour of the interviews.

SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

School staff interviews – recruitment and induction

The first school I visited had been founded nearly 400 years previously. It was a former grammar school, now comprehensive, in a county town, and by every measure being used currently, highly successful. The headteacher had been in post for 10 years, having served previously as deputy headteacher in a different school, and head of department in two other schools.

The school had an admissions policy which allowed it to recruit up to 30 students to the sixth form from other schools, but:

> *We don't actually actively recruit: we invite to an open evening advertised in the local paper for entry in the following September. We don't do any other advertising or publicity or attempt to lure people into the school. It's all done, if at all, by word of mouth*.

To gain a place in the sixth form students had to have achieved at least five GCSEs passes at grade C or above: the headteacher felt that some schools which appeared to achieve better results at A level did so because they imposed a higher threshold for entry to the sixth form.

Students in Year 11 who were considering staying on in the school had a personal interview with the headteacher, a deputy headteacher, the head of sixth form or the deputy head of sixth form. The students identified their preferences, the school

drew up a timetable in order to best meet those preferences, and after GCSE examinations had finished, an induction day was held. When the students returned in September, they finalised their choice of course, and signed a contract with the school about expectations of life in the sixth form. I asked if that was a two-way contract:

> *Not really, to be honest with you. Our responsibilities to them are pretty well spelt out inasmuch as, you know, giving them the highest quality teaching as we can and putting on as much for them, is unwritten.*

The second school I visited was opened in the 1970s as a comprehensive school. On the outskirts of a major city, the school's examination performance had improved significantly in recent years; it was a specialist language college; part of a local collaborative partnership involving other schools and a further education college; and was involved in a number of national innovative schemes. The headteacher had joined the school as headteacher from a post as Deputy Director of TVEI (the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative). He had previously served as a deputy headteacher in a different, inner-city, school.

The headteacher thought that, as part of the partnership: "*over the last three to four years, increasingly, we've been doing joint recruitment – we tend not to use the term 'recruitment' – but I suppose that's what it is*". However, when asked how many students joined from other schools he replied: "*Not many*". The school did, however, have seven or eight students on roll from different European countries. Very few students changed their course of study after joining the sixth form, which the headteacher attributed to the time spent during Year 11, starting in October/November, and continuing right through to August, after GCSE examination results came out. This lengthy preparation also meant that there was no necessity for formal induction time. Increasingly, the headteacher felt, students in Year 10

considered that they were embarking on a four-year programme, with the break at 16 being played down by the school.

School staff interviews – key characteristics

The headteacher of the first school I visited described the school as having a: "*strong ethos*", and: "*a recognition within the community that this is a good place to be*". That ethos was reflected in a policy for a uniform throughout the school, including the sixth form, where the school: "*nurtured*" the young people: "*to develop the young adult, trying to give them that little extra freedom, give it to them gradually over an 18-month period*". The headteacher did not think sixth formers objected to wearing a uniform, and indeed felt that they were proud to wear it, although there were: "*some, you know what they're like, think they're being rebellious if they have the top button undone*"; they would not go so far as to wear white socks – that would be: "*tacky*".

The dominant pedagogy, in the headteacher's view, would be traditional, although he felt that this resulted in part from the post-16 curriculum being: "*more and more content-driven*". The expectation that many Year 12 students would take four AS subjects, and a funding methodology which encouraged that, meant that class sizes had risen, which, again, the headteacher thought would encourage more traditional teaching approaches. Each student in the sixth form was in a tutor group, which met first thing every morning; the tutorial programme was: "*quite heavily geared towards university entrance*", but also included leadership training, mentoring of younger students, prefect duties, and a requirement that every member of the tutor group gave a formal presentation to the group. Key skills were delivered through the curriculum, not through the tutor group. The headteacher thought that most of the sixth form used their free time well, the girls more so than the boys; in Year 13,

students were allowed off-site if they had no lessons. The school was in its second year as a specialist languages college, but the specialism had been introduced in Year 9, and had not yet impacted on the sixth form. The curriculum in the sixth form was based around A levels.   The headteacher described the local post-16 arrangement as: "*very good [...] sensible and cost-effective*"; the local further education college did not offer A levels, but did offer: "*a huge range of GNVQs and vocational stuff*", the school offered a little bit of GNVQ, but had: "*always found it difficult to get viable numbers*". No students had a mixed programme, or went to the college for part of their time; in the headteacher's view it had: "*always been clear-cut, actually, people have either wanted to be in school or not in school*".

At the second school, the headteacher suggested that different groups might describe the school in different ways: students; parents; staff. For him, however, key characteristics were:

> *…an openness to development and change. […] A high quality series of relationships between staff and between staff and students is something I think people notice when they come in. Obviously a lot of curriculum development is going on, so you would see a different type of curriculum emerging*.

I wondered how the school managed so much development in what is generally regarded as an already over-crowded curriculum, and for this headteacher it was:

> *…partly a mind-set, I think, that actually if you take a particular view that things are possible, you can find some of the space. That isn't to say that there aren't restrictions that we'd prefer not to have. It's partly confidence; it's also partly a continuation of the way I've been working for a number of years.*

The dominant approach to teaching in the sixth form was discussion.   The headteacher had strong views about pedagogy; he didn't think that:

> *…in the English system, we pay enough attention to it. I think we talk about it a lot – talk about teaching and learning a lot – but we actually don't understand it well enough in practice. […] I also think our primary colleagues have a greater understanding of this. I don't want to be disparaging about this, but secondaries still tend to teach their subject.*

Over half of the teaching staff in this school had timetabled free time in which they were carrying out educational research; some enrolled formally with the local University, others simply researching their own teaching. When I asked how this was managed, the headteacher said simply that, because they considered it important, staff research time was timetabled first, and the lessons fitted in. There was a dual tutorial system in this school; each student was a member of a tutor group, but they also had a "personal challenge" tutor who would support the student in Year 12 in an individualised piece of work. The school operated a six-term year, and students in the sixth form were not allowed off-site at all in the first term, but were from then on, if the school was confident that the additional freedom would not be abused. In practice, the headteacher said, most students in the sixth form had very little free time. The school was a specialist language college, and had been for a number of years. Because the school was part of a collaborative partnership, they could choose from upwards of 50 courses, including A levels, AVCE, GNVQ and BTEC, on offer at partner schools or the local further education college. This was not just theoretical; with 170 students nominally on roll in the school sixth form, the school saw over 100 students spending part of the week in another school or the college, and a similar number joining the school for part of the week. Each centre had its own minibus, and the school was piloting the use of video-conferencing. The only reservation was that the school did not: "*encourage youngsters to do too many courses in other places – we then tend to say you would be better based there*"; indeed, the headteacher preferred to refer to each of the partners as a student's "home base", rather than a centre.

School staff interviews – out of the classroom

The first school I visited was in the middle of a major building project, to provide a separate sixth form centre; that centre would have its own IT room, but no cafeteria provision – sixth formers could use the main school cafeteria, which was open in the

morning only. The sixth form centre would not include a library, because: "*we want the sixth form to be an integral part of the school. You can't make them feel part of it […] if they are a separate entity*". Outside the classroom, there was: "*a lot going on for students, a lot of extra-curricular activity […] very strong rugby, very strong soccer, very strong hockey, very strong athletics – those sort of things*". The headteacher thought that very few students would not be involved in something, with perhaps half of the sixth form having: "*very, very busy lives because of school*" and only 10% or 20% who didn't get involved in much. Over 90% of the sixth form had part-time jobs, which was a concern to the school, as it felt that the jobs impacted on the learning of some students, particularly boys.

The second school I visited was very well-equipped, with a major building project under way to provide a sports hall which would also be open to the community. Outside the classroom, the school ran a "buddy" scheme where sixth formers worked with younger pupils who feared they might be bullied, and had a specific training programme for the sixth formers involved. As all the partners had agreed to set aside Wednesday afternoon for activities:

> *The partnership has its own league for rugby teams, football teams, joint productions, joint orchestras, and because we've got about 750 students in the partnership schools – and the college – we were keen that individual home bases, or schools, could put on their own thing and there would also be joint activities.*

Activity on Wednesday afternoon was compulsory: "*they're all involved in something*".

School student interviews – recruitment and induction

Hayley (F13SC) helped me improve my interview technique; my very first question was: "*Why did you come here – did you have any realistic choice?*", to which she replied: "*Not really, our teacher asked us to at the end of the lesson*". I rephrased the question from then on.

For Hayley, and for most of those in school sixth forms, there appeared to be no serious consideration of other places to go after Year 11. For Tracy (F13SC) it was: "*just convenient basically*", and for Carl (M13SC) it was: "familiar surroundings and things like that". Sarah (F12SC) said that she had looked at a local college, but: "*just the booklet*", not a visit. Only Lisa (F12SC) had given serious consideration to alternatives, and had received two offers of places at local colleges, but::

> *decided that the standard of education had to have been much higher for me to travel there as it would have put at least two hours on to my day at school, so I thought:: 'Well, I can get out of bed and come here in five minutes', so – there's no point.*

Matt (M12SC) relied on the fact that his: "*brother and sister came to this school and got very good grades, so I didn't really think of anything else.*".

The two schools had different arrangements for induction. At one, induction into the sixth form took place during Year 11, with a sixth form fair in January and discussion with tutors after the GCSE exams; when students came back in September, they could: "bargain" if they had not got the grades they expected. The other school had an interview in September with their tutor, and a formal induction week which included an activity day outside school: "*to, like, grow friendships*" (Matt, M12SC). None of the students in either school had changed their courses; Lisa (F12SC) wanted to do both Art and Music, but they clashed; she wanted to do Religious Studies and Textiles – but they clashed; this was not enough to persuade her to look elsewhere, because, in her view: "*you get that anywhere, because it's, like, laid out in columns*".

School student interviews – key characteristics

The first school I visited was very traditional; a former grammar school, students in the sixth form wore the same uniform as the lower school, except that:

> *…you get a different tie, which is more important than you would think, because it marks you out as being part of the sixth form, and that's an important difference.* (Chris, M12SC).

For Chris, the sixth form was:

> *…an extension of the school, for a start, because it is, it's part of the school, you're with the same teachers, using the same buildings and resources, but you'd just mention that it's so different because of the way you are treated and the fact that you get to choose your courses.*

Both Michael (M13SC) and Hayley (F13SC) considered that a key difference from Year 11 was that they felt that members of staff were: "*not looking down on you*". Carl (M13SC) felt the sixth formers were treated: "*more like adults*", and were even allowed off the premises when they didn't have a lesson. Tracy (F13SC) went so far as to say: "*They seem to like us*". I asked what the consequences would be if a sixth former skipped a lesson to go into town with friends, to which Chris replied: "*It never happens*".

Laura (F12SC), Carl and Michael all commented on the "respect" sixth formers were shown by the lower school, although Michael could not recall paying much attention to the sixth form when he was in Year 11; for him, a key feature was that he could: "*like, skip the tuck queue*". The students saw the teaching style as more informal, more discussion than in the lower school, and were being taught in classes of four (Maths), six (PE) or, the biggest, psychology (15); teachers were called "Sir" or "Miss".

The second school was very different; eyes firmly on the future. For Matt (M12SC), the key characteristic was: "*Freedom. You're not being watched as much, you can go off-site, you can chat informally to teachers – or not as formally, anyway*". Jade (F13SC) and Holly (F13SC) agreed that the informality was important, and that being: "*left to your own devices a little bit more*" (Holly) was a useful preparation for university or work. Only Lisa (F12SC) expressed any reservations; she: "*got on

very, very well with my teachers in Year 10 and Year 11 anyway, so the way that they actually treat me is near enough the same". Lisa, therefore, found the teachers the same, but the work different, she found it: "*difficult in post-16 because there isn't as much structure as there was in Year 10 and Year 11 – and I find that difficult sometimes*". None of the students in this school described the difference as being treated more as adults.

There was no uniform in this school, but a dress code: "*No extremes of fashion*". Students could leave the site if they hadn't got a lesson; if they wanted to leave the site when they had a lesson, Lisa would go: "*but then you'd get done for it*".

Teachers in this school's sixth form involved students in discussion, which the students all found stimulating. Jade found that discussion: "*builds up your confidence more. Whereas I think some people are embarrassed to talk in front of 30, most of my classes are really small – under 10 people*". Lisa, again, had reservations; she had the same teachers as she had in Year 11:

> *…so their teaching style hasn't changed, but the way they deliver it is different – my RS (Religious Studies) teacher still stands at the front of the class with the board and writes down everybody's ideas, but she is more accepting.*

In Lisa's school, teachers were called "Sir" or Miss".

School student interviews – out of the classroom

In both schools, the students felt that they could access a computer more or less any time. In neither school was there any criticism of the facilities, and Carl (M13SC) thought: "*there's loads of rooms, like you've got the library, and the whole IT block*", which I found a little surprising, because the school was in the middle of a major building programme to provide a dedicated sixth form centre, and the school sports hall was a community facility, so charged students out of school hours.

Beyond their learning programme, few of the school students were involved in school-organised activity. Chris (M12SC) was taking the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award, and Tracy (F13SC) had done the Bronze and Silver Awards in Year 12; Tracy was the only student in either school who took part in any sporting activity, doing: "*netball and hockey – I play hockey for the school*". One of the schools required students to undertake a personal research study as part of their learning programme, and for some of the students this had taken them into the community, for others, it involved "buddying" with students lower down the school. However, all of this activity was undertaken in Year 12, and the students concentrated on their examinations throughout Year 13. All the students had part-time jobs.

School interviews – conclusions

What strikes me most strongly about the school sixth form is that, as a "brand", it is embedded so firmly in English culture as the route of first preference for 16 year olds. Moreover, this pre-eminent position has been retained in spite of aggressive advertising by sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges. Indeed, the school sixth form may be a classic example of the benefits of <u>not</u> advertising; if the public are happy, advertising might be harmful. I say that because it is clear from my research that the public perception of a school sixth form is based on an idealised image which does not now exist, and may never have existed as reality.

Nevertheless, the continued existence of school sixth forms has been a constant subject of debate in the education press – at times giving all the impression of being a useful fall-back "sensational" headline story in the absence of anything more topical. Interestingly, the perceived threat to school sixth forms appears to have been as strong under Conservative Governments as under Labour – though for perhaps different reasons. A brief headline scan of the *Times Educational Supplement* from 1994 to 2001 provides:

"*Sixth forms do better, says results survey*" (TES, 1995a, p. 2)

"*Small sixth forms may be too narrow for vocational track*" (TES, 1995b, p. 23)

"*Colleges to take over sixth forms*" (TES, 1997, p. 35)

"*Small sixth forms cost country £500 million*" (TES, 1998b, p. 1)

"*Just feel the quality of sixth forms in schools*" (TES, 1998c, p. 16)

"*Sixth form classes too small, says minister*" (TES, 1999a, p. 2)

"*Blair intervenes to save sixth forms*" (TES, 1999b, p. 1)

"*Call to close sixth forms*" (TES, 2000a, p. III)

"*Poor results threat to small sixth forms*" (TES, 2000b, p. I)

"*Schools face losing sixth forms*" (TES, 2000c, p. 2)

"*Sixth form colleges top progress league*" (TES, 2000d, p. 2)

"*Sixth forms 'wasteful and patchy' says Ofsted*" (TES, 2001a, p. 29)

"*Beginning of the end for inner-city sixth forms?*" (TES, 2001b, p 11)

"*Sixth formers need variety*" (TES, 2001c, p. 19).

Over that period, the number of school sixth forms grew, and no new sixth form colleges or tertiary colleges were created – other than as a result of the merger of existing colleges.

The school sixth form appears to be seeking to prepare young people for progression to higher education and, through prefect or similar schemes, for being in charge of others; but certainly not for employment. Indeed, a young person has a statutory right to work related learning when they are 14 and 15, and most have two weeks' work experience at that age; no similar rights exist for the sixth former. Ironically, all the students I saw had part-time jobs, but neither school made any use of that experience.

If I am right about the two main aims of the sixth form, I should also consider the extent to which they are achieved. If the stereotype of a school sixth form is not valid, the same is probably true of a University; and there is likely to be considerable variation in styles of teaching and learning between courses within a single University. I have, however, not yet encountered a University where students are required to wear a uniform – as an undergraduate in the 1970s I felt obliged to grow my hair long, have a beard, and wear jeans and a kaftan like everyone else, but that was not official University policy.

The school is, of course, constrained severely in the way it works with sixth formers; having had five years to prepare them for GCSE, there are five terms before they have to be ready for A level. It is also difficult to see how radically different approaches could be adopted for 11-15 year olds and the sixth former in the same institution – hence the sixth former calls the teacher "Sir" or "Miss". The sixth form timetable cannot be devised alone, it forms part of the whole school timetable, and in the vast majority of schools, the sixth form is much smaller than the main school.

I suspect that many schoolteachers have a limited understanding of university life in 2006, and that few university admissions tutors have spent time recently in a school classroom: when a school talks of preparing students for higher education, therefore, that might amount to no more than getting them through their examinations.

What was clear at both schools was that the responsibilities given to sixth formers for younger students were different from those envisaged by Arnold. Even when referred to as 'prefects', the sixth formers were expected to play more of a mentoring role, rather than the disciplinary role of Foucault's 'prefecteur'.

In both schools, the students reported significantly less activity outside the classroom than did the headteachers; indeed, I came away from the headteacher interviews with a feeling that I had just had the hard sell that a parent would get. However, I also wondered whether some of the students under-reported their activity in front of their peers, in case it was not 'cool'. It was very clear, however, that much less was expected in Year 13, and that the introduction of AS levels had impacted on activity in Year 12.

The reasons young people choose whether, and where, to continue in education post-16 are many and complex. However, for a number of the young people I spoke to, it is not clear that staying on in the sixth form represented a positive decision or choice, but rather that the sixth form was going to be good enough, so why bother looking. Payne concluded that:

> *…in schools that have sixth forms, the choice between school sixth form and college appears to be based on a combination of pragmatism and dislike of school* (Payne, 2002, p. 19).

Again, the Ofsted inspection evidence suggests that this might be an attitude that schools with sixth forms were less likely to challenge than those without a sixth form. There was some resonance with the findings of Glanville's study, where many of the students chose to stay in school, or chose a college near their home, first, and then decide on their course of study; in the words of one of those interviewed, Joanne: "*I thought it would be easier to carry on with the teachers I know, rather than have a whole new way of teaching*" (Glanville, 1999, p. 13).

The two schools were very different: one forward-looking, involved in a multiplicity of initiatives, and constantly looking for new opportunities; the second, whilst aware of, and involved in, current developments, had a very long and proud tradition. Both

schools were seen by Ofsted as "excellent". One thing that struck me was that most of the students in the more formal school commented on being treated differently by the staff when in the sixth form – I was impressed by the realism they showed, qualifying the comments so that they felt they were treated "*more like adults*". At the first school, where, as an outsider, I felt the students were treated <u>much</u> more like adults, none of the students mentioned that as a characteristic of the sixth form.

A final surprise was that neither school had a whole-school pedagogy. Whilst I appreciate that different subjects lend themselves more easily to different teaching techniques, pedagogy was seen as being entirely subject-based or departmental-based, rather than working in a whole-school structure, however loosely that was defined.

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS

College staff interviews – recruitment and induction

The Principal of the sixth form college had been there for six years, having previously served as Principal of a smaller sixth form college and Vice-Principal of another sixth form college; he began his career as a teacher in an 11-18 school.

The college was part of a "collegiate", which included another sixth form college, a general further education college and two 11-18 schools. There was a common application process, with common application forms and a joint approach to marketing opportunities post-16, as opposed to marketing individual institutions. The Principal said that there was: "*very little marketing in the schools, in fact, none, really. […] Recruitment is done on the back of reputation, a little bit of advertising open evenings, and the open evenings themselves*". The induction process:

> …*varied each year, because there's a subtle balance between wanting to, particularly with AS levels, charge straight into the course because time is*

> *tight and wanting still to give an opportunity at the last minute for somebody to say: 'well actually this isn't what I wanted to do'.*

Around 150 of the 900 students who joined the college would ask to change their choices in the first couple of weeks, and most of those changes could be accommodated.

The Director of Learning at the tertiary college had a varied career background – originally teaching juniors, then youth and community, before going into FE, teaching management courses in FE. The college was in a highly populated area, with students being able relatively easily to travel to institutions in other local authority areas. Many of the staff had previously been teachers in the sixth form of local schools, and joined the college when those sixth forms closed, some 20 years previously.

The tertiary college was a 'recruiter'. The Director, curriculum managers and senior managers: "*all 'own' high schools. […] I'm the link person for two high schools […] I do initial presentations to them, I do revision skills and study skills, and what we call 'keeping warm'.*" The college had no real local competition – just a Roman Catholic, sixth form college, although this meant, for some students, a 45 minute bus journey each way. The college began its relationship with schools in Year 9, with: "*a massive amount of high school liaison, we have a massive school liaison team*". The college had a formal induction on the first day of term, when students were given their timetable, student handbook, advice on health and safety, and undertook an initial assessment exercise to pick up any basic skills needs. There then was a more extended "induction phase", during which students might change course.

College staff interviews – key characteristics

The Director of Learning at the tertiary college was clear that the college was student-centred. She thought the college was: "*a learner-centred college and that we are a listening college, we're flexible, and if we haven't provided anything, we don't maintain the status quo. […] If I can do, I really will try to do for the students*". Teaching style depended on the subject: "*The more traditional the subject, the more talk and chalk […], some incorporation of ICT, but not so as you'd notice*". The tutorial system was intended to ensure that students had the same tutor in both Years 12 and 13, and was a mix of group, and individual tutorials.

The college had a wide range of courses on offer, but, whilst some students mixed traditional academic with vocational: "*they're not in the majority*".

The Principal of the sixth form college thought that the college was: "*a high-quality college where, by and large, students will come and do as well as, or better, than expected*". For him: "*different disciplines have different pedagogies*", although the college had introduced research-based learning for the staff. The tutorial system was a mix of group and individual meetings:

> *…within the tutorial programme, we deliver a series of learning experiences from which the student can profitably take the General Studies AS paper over two years […] which knackers your success rates – but it's best for them*.

The tutorial system provided a group tutorial and an individual tutorial for each student every five or six weeks. Students' free time was free, with no structured activities, although most departments put on voluntary "surgeries". The provision was mainly AS/A2, with: "*a range of AVCE, in standard sixth form college areas*". The Principal was frustrated by the way in which the college's performance was measured and reported: "*We shouldn't be deflected by the way we're measured; what really matters is the substance of what we deliver*". The college had a small

adult education programme – about 5% of the total provision – but no provision above level 3, because the Principal did not think the college should: "*try to get into a market where others are doing it perfectly well already. Why get into other people's markets that are very peripheral to your core business?*".

The Principal of the sixth form college felt that it was:

> *…about people, is education. So the buildings – although they're not chronic, and I have seen worse – what they look like from the outside is one thing, what matters to students is are they comfortable to be in, a pleasant internal environment, have they got the right resources. […] The question is the quality of teaching and learning, really*.

College staff interviews – out of the classroom

All Year 12 students at the sixth form college were required to choose, and attend, options from a general education programme; Year 13 students: "*have the option, but tend to do less*".

At the tertiary college, all students were required to identify five hours of "enrichment", but:

> *I'll be honest here; when they come, because they're still in the mind-set of being at school, they think if they don't appear for all those five hours, they're going to get shouted at. And as soon as they realise...*

The facilities for 16-18 year olds at the tertiary college had been built within the last five years, and were close to, but separate from, the main college. The provision for 16-18 year olds had been provided previously on a separate site, the former boys' grammar school. Outside the classroom, the Director felt that: "*They've got lots of opportunities. [...] netball, hockey, football, rugby, we've got lots of sports. We've also got a pre-driving school. At some time, I would say, must be 80% take advantage of that*".

College student interviews – recruitment and induction

The students at the sixth form college did have genuine choice, between two sixth forms, a general further education college and two local schools which had sixth forms. In practice, the choice was between the two sixth form colleges, as none of the students wanted to transfer from an 11-16 school into the sixth form of an 11-18 school, and the further education college offered a limited range of A levels. Most of the students had attended Open Days at both colleges, and all were very clear why they had made their final choice. For most, it was a combination of atmosphere and the experience of their siblings. Nadine (F12SFC) had one brother who attended the college she chose, and another who had been to the other college, and had told her: "*it was too pushy*". Julie (F12SFC) had her: "*heart set on*" the other college, because her sister: "*had gone there and done really well, but it was like a jail inside.*" Kirsty (F13SFC) agreed that the college was: "*more laid back*", but added that: "*And you can still get the grades, because my sister came here and got an A.*".

Induction for the sixth form college students included "taster" lessons, a talk from the Principal and then into the timetable itself, with a synopsis of each course. None of the students I talked to in schools or the tertiary college had changed their course after starting in the sixth, but at the sixth form college three of the six had done so, which for Kirsty (F13SFC) meant:

> *I dropped English Language within a month and took up (indistinguishable), but I didn't get on with that either so they let me get on with the three, and then I dropped one of them at the end of the year and took up another*.

College student interviews – key characteristics

Hannah (F12SFC) found life in a sixth form college very different from her 11-16 school, where: "*In Year 11, you're, like, at the top, and you've gone from being the oldest, and with duties like being a prefect and stuff, to being the youngest ones and*

lots more people". The big difference from school for Kirsty (F13SFC) was that: "*Year 11 you had to wear uniform, and you had to go to lessons – which you should do here – but it's a lot more freedom*". There was no uniform, or dress code, in college. Chloe (F12SFC): "*found, since coming to college, you're tret* (sic) *much more like an adult. At school we were looked down on, talked down to*". Nadine (F12SFC) agreed; she had noticed the behaviour of students had changed suddenly when they joined the college, and agreed that, because teachers in Year 11 expected students to behave as children, they did, whereas at college the teachers expected them to behave as adults – so they did. Only Julie (F12SFC) disagreed; she had enjoyed her 11-16 school, and had a very good relationship with her teachers, so did not notice to the same extent a more relaxed atmosphere in the college. However, Julie (F13SFC) recognized that her school experience was different than for the others. Her mother taught at the school, and she was used to meeting teachers in a social setting; she knew most of the teachers, and was used to calling them by their first names – but not when in school.

When asked how they would describe the college, most of the students talked about the teachers: Chloe (F12SFC) felt she had: "*a bond with the teachers*"; Yvette found them friendly, and with: "*lots of different styles to teach you*"; and Julie (F12SFC) thought: "*The teachers are so good, like, personal problems, they're there for you if you need it. It's great*". The students saw the main teaching style in the sixth form college as discussion, rather than just sitting down and listening. Julie (F12SFC) was pleased that:: "*You get opportunities to do presentations, which increase your confidence, and there's lots of communication skills, and you don't have to put your hand up to ask a question – obviously you don't talk over people*". Teachers, including the Principal, were called by their first names.

College student interviews – out of the classroom

The sixth form college was also in the midst of a major building programme, including a new sports hall. The students did not complain about the facilities, and seemed content that, if the buildings were elderly, the computers were new and so were the books in the well-stocked library.

On the question of out of classroom activity: "*We did that last year. There are clubs and things, but I've got exams*" said Kirsty (F13SFC). It wasn't just the pressure of Year 13 though, Chloe (F12SFC), in Year 12: "*used to use the gym. The facilities are good compared to other schools. The teachers are supposed to be good*"; Chloe's enthusiasm for the gym had not survived the first term.

The tertiary college students had all considered other options, and, indeed, had been encouraged by their schools to indicate second and third preferences. However, the reasons for the final choice of college as first option were, again, convenience and, for Ryan (M12TC): "*all my mates came and the right course was available for me.*". Ryan found the prospectus complicated: "*with all the entrance qualifications*", but was helped to make his decision by an open evening. Waseem (M13TC) also commented on the usefulness of the open evening, but also: "*knew some people who came here, my cousins.*". Induction for these students was simple: "*just, like, what was going to be on the course.*" (Ryan, M12TC).

Simone (F12TC) liked the tertiary college: "*because you meet lots of people instead of being in one class*", whilst for others it was because teachers: "*treat you more like adults*" Annette (F13TC) or: "*treat you like adults, more than at school*" Adam (M13TC). There was no uniform, and the students were not aware of any dress code. The students didn't think there would be repercussions if they missed a

lesson, although Michelle (F12TC) thought that: "*if you began to miss a lot they might phone home*". Asked to sum up the college in a few words, Jenny (F13TC) thought for a while, then said, without enthusiasm: "*It's alright*".

The tertiary college students saw the teaching style as: "*more individual, more relaxed, more like a discussion*" (Jenny, F13TC), with class sizes of 15 or 16 for most courses. For Michelle (F12TC), joining the college had, initially, excited her: "*because it was a new experience, like: 'college', but the more it's gone on it's like getting through the year*". Teachers were called by their first names.

The tertiary college had two main sites, one of which, newly built within the last five years, was solely for the day-time use of 16-18 year olds and referred to as the Sixth Form Centre. Students did not think there were sufficient computers, although Michelle (F12TC) had worked out that: "*it depends on the time of day; sometimes it will be really packed and you won't get a computer for a couple of hours*".

None of the tertiary college students was involved in any college-organised activity outside their learning programme, and only one made any use of the college facilities – to play badminton. All had part-time jobs, including Annette (F13TC), who worked during the day on Tuesdays, as she had no lessons timetabled for that day.

College interviews – conclusions

As with the schools, the students appreciated that they were being treated "more" like an adult, but there were clear differences. Few of the college students would have been considered as dressed appropriately for the school sixth forms, the college students were clearly more relaxed (when I met one of the headteachers a few months after the interviews at an unconnected meeting, he mentioned how the

students had found the interview interesting – because he had asked them), the college students had far greater choice, and far more opportunity to change their initial choices, and the college students had far greater freedom during their free time, to the extent of having a day-time job.

One impression I came away with from both colleges was that they were far 'busier' than the schools. I can suggest three possible explanations for this: first, colleges responded to the reduction in funding in the late 1990s by both increasing their student numbers and reducing as far as possible their floor-space; secondly, unlike a school, where only the sixth form – perhaps no more than one in six of the students – had free lessons, all those in the college would have some free time; and finally, that colleges, because of the numbers of 16-19 year olds they enrol, may have a greater capacity to deliver a broader learning offer – what has been described as: "*institutional capacity adjustment*" (Hodgson and Spours, 2003, p. 47).

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectorate undertook a national survey of enrichment between October 1994 and April 1995, drawing evidence from 207 colleges. The findings of that survey broadly reinforce the comments from the students I met. The FEFC report, helpfully for this study, separated the tertiary colleges as a distinct group, and found that 72 per cent of sixth form colleges stated that full-time students were required to take part in the enrichment programme, at least in their first year, as compared to 10 per cent of the general further education colleges and 20 per cent of the tertiary colleges. Where enrichment was optional, the proportion of students participating ranged from 10 per cent to 70 per cent, but, in most cases, was between 25 per cent and 30 per cent. Enrichment varied between one and five hours, but was most commonly between two and three hours. The inspectorate also found enrichment activities played: "*an important part in college marketing, particularly where there is strong competition for school leavers.*

They are a factor which influences students and their parents in their choice of institution" (FEFC, 1996, p. 4).

The 'efficiency savings' which colleges had to make throughout the late 1990s led to increased class sizes and reduced teaching time (Lucas, 1998, p 301); it seems likely that, together with a funding methodology which emphasised qualifications, and the lack of a robust audit of enrichment activity, this would impact adversely on enrichment activity, although no further study has been undertaken.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important that I do not draw any generalised conclusions from interviews in two schools, one sixth form college and one tertiary college.

There were three very different types of recruitment: the schools had, in effect been recruiting internally for five years, and benefit from inertia – they do not pay great attention to external recruitment. The sixth form college was in a well-established consortium, and was very successful and popular, making recruitment important, but not a significant issue. For the tertiary college, however, there was significant competition, and it had developed close relationships, and was in regular contact, with its potential feeder schools. Whilst the schools' and sixth form college's experience is probably typical for that type of institution, there are a number of tertiary colleges which face very little competition.

Induction for the schools was a minor issue. The vast majority of their post-16 students had been there for five years, knew the school and knew the staff, and the school staff knew them. It is also worth noting that, in one school at least, any significant issues arising in induction – such as a change of mind over the courses chosen – could probably not be accommodated. For the colleges, induction was

important. The students did not know the college buildings or staff, and the staff did not know them. Because of the size of the colleges, the timetable was more flexible, and a number of students had chosen, within the first few weeks or even later in the term, to change course.

There was a clear hierarchy in the way the students saw their institutions, with more freedom at the sixth form college than at the schools, and significantly more freedom at the tertiary college. The tertiary college may have suffered additionally from being close to the centre of the town, but that is not uncommon for tertiary colleges, having to cater for a much wider range of students, including adults and part-time students on release from employment.

The hierarchy of freedom was reflected in the out of classroom activity, with staff in the schools reporting much greater activity than staff in the sixth form college, who in turn reported greater activity than in the tertiary college. In all three types of institution the students reported much less activity than the staff. My feeling was that this was a mixture of staff 'selling' the school, so over-reporting, and students under-reporting, especially in front of their peers.

As the heads of the institutions had agreed to me visiting and interviewing, I was not surprised that, in every case, they were proud of their institution and its achievements. I felt there was equal pride in the views of the students in the schools and the sixth form college, and a shared view of the ethos and values of those institutions. I did not come away with the same strength of feeling from the students in the tertiary college, which I felt might result from the far wider student body, including a large number of 16-19 year olds on courses other than A/AS Level.

As a result of the interviews, I felt that there were clear differences between the three types of institution I had visited, reflecting, perhaps, that: "*there are three types of convict*" (Foucault, 1991/1975, p. 253). I was interested, therefore, to compare the interview responses with the responses from the student questionnaire.

CHAPTER 7

"I *WANTED TO PULL CHICKS*"

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an analysis of the responses to the student questionnaire. A characteristic of the questionnaire was that the different sections of questions provided for different types of analysis.

The detailed discussion which follows focuses on those questions where there was a significant difference between the responses from students in the three different types of institution.

In writing this chapter, I have been guided by two principles: first, that Dickens avoided including tables in his writing, because it interrupted the flow of the argument – I hope that the tables and charts I use will aid the flow of the argument. Secondly, a quotation widely used, but attributed originally to Andrew Lang (1844-1912), that statistics were used: "*as a drunken man uses a lamppost – more for support than for illumination*" (Rees, 1997, p. 343). That simile is, in fact, a shortened version. The full version begins "*Problems arise when people consider that…*"; which is precisely why the reporting of educational research has been so criticised. My use of the data <u>is</u> to illuminate. Indeed, one of the main purposes of the questionnaire was to inform the questions to be used in interviews; what follows is not presented as statistical (and therefore incontestable) evidence, but as a view of the research question from one, quantitative, perspective.

The sample, and potential sampling bias

I initially approached six schools, two sixth form colleges and two tertiary colleges to undertake the questionnaire. In practice, whilst all four of the colleges I wrote to agreed to help, only four schools agreed, even after I approached additional schools in the area.

In order to get a balanced sample, four schools were asked to return 32 questionnaires each (8 male and 8 female from each of years 12 and 13), and two sixth form colleges and two tertiary colleges were asked to return 60 questionnaires each (15 male and 15 female from each of years 12 and 13). There was, therefore, a maximum of 328 questionnaires to be returned.

In some cases, reminders, both written and by telephone, were required, but over a period of a month, a total of 273 questionnaires were returned, from three schools, two sixth form colleges and two tertiary colleges:

Table 7.1: Number of questionnaire responses

	Female		Male		Total
	Year 12	Year 13	Year 12	Year 13	
School	32	20	22	31	105
Sixth Form College	23	22	18	27	90
Tertiary College	29	14	20	15	78
Totals	84	56	60	73	273

There were 144 returns from Year 12 students and 129 from Year 13 students, 140 from female and 133 from male.

Those numbers broadly satisfied my aim that each analysis should consist of groups of at least 40 students, with the exception of the tertiary colleges, with only 35 males and 29 in year 13.

There were 67 questions in the main analysis, and only in five of those questions were there more than five responses which I discounted. Those responses were where no answer was given, or more than one answer was given. Only for one question were more than 10 responses discounted; that question asked about satisfaction with work experience, and 29 responses either did not answer or wrote

"n/a". In a very small number of cases, a student gave the same response (eg "2") to all questions in a section; I did not discount these, as they are valid responses, and to have discounted them would have meant that I was "selecting" the data.

I was acutely aware of the criticisms over recent years (Tooley and Darby, 1998; Gorard, 2001) that educational researchers did not sufficiently describe their samples and did not caution against over-reliance on the outcomes of analysis. Only by being very clear about those issues can any claim for generalisation be made.

First, this is a sample of 273 drawn from around 400,000 young people in England (DfES, 2003e) who were, in autumn 2003, studying for AS/A2 examinations. I did not select the individual students, and was not present when the questionnaire was administered; as such, I am relying on the institutions involved to have undertaken that task in the manner requested.

The schools and colleges involved had agreed to participate, as did the students; it may be, therefore, that the responses would be more positive than from a truly random sample.

When looking to the statistical analysis, as post-16 education is voluntary, the students completing the questionnaires have chosen to remain in education: as they are studying AS/A2, it is likely that they have been "successful" in their previous experience of education. Thus, regardless of any impact of the institution they attend, the responses from this group are likely to be more positive about post-16 education than would the responses from a truly random sample of the age cohort.

In fact, the overall "satisfaction ratings" from the three types of institution were:

Table 7.2: Overall satisfaction ratings

Institution	Mean	Standard deviation	Range (responses within one standard deviation of the mean)
Schools	68%	19.5%	48.5% - 87.5%
Sixth form college	77%	19.6%	57.4% - 96.6%
Tertiary college	76%	18.9%	57.1% - 94.9%

What this means is that the responses are not drawn from the full range of possible responses (0% to 100%), but from a much narrower range: this may result in over-exaggeration of differences.

Finally, the institutions chosen for this sample were all in geographical areas where there was no significant choice of institution for young people wishing to remain in full-time education. It is unlikely that any of the young people in this sample would have experienced post-16 student life in the other types of institution.   Their responses, therefore, may be, to some extent, based on perception.   The subsequent interviews with students – who would be from different schools and colleges to those completing the questionnaires – would first seek to determine if there was an assumption that sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges are more generously equipped.

The approach to analysis

The student questionnaire was in five sections, with Section 3 subdivided into three.

The first section sought only to identify whether the student was in Year 12 or Year 13, female or male.

The second section did not seek judgement about the institution, but asked for reasons for choosing to stay in full-time education. This was quite deliberate, in order to "ease-in" those completing the questionnaires. The construction of this section, therefore, was about individuals, not institutions. The respondents were not being asked to make a choice, or give a judgement, and could give multiple answers, so the responses to this section are provided simply as the proportion of respondents who indicated each reason. The statements used were the top ten responses to a survey of over 2,500 school sixth form students by Cumbria local education authority (Cumbria, 1997), and the proportionate responses to that survey are provided for comparison.

In the third and fourth sections – a total of 59 questions – students were being asked to give a satisfaction rating about aspects of the institution they attended. Thus, for example, on a question where students could answer on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 "very satisfied"), the number and proportion of students giving a rating of 1 or 2 were measured. Responses from the three schools were combined, as were the responses from the sixth form colleges and from the tertiary colleges.

I chose to use two statistical techniques to analyse the data: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and chi-square. Both of these techniques are considered to be "*legitimate*" (Cohen et al, 2000, pp. 80-81); both are techniques with which I am familiar, and comfortable.

Analysis of Variance was applied to the overall questions. First, this considered whether there were differences between the responses from schools, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges; then, it was used to consider whether there were differences in the responses between schools and sixth form colleges; schools and tertiary colleges; and sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges.

.A chi-square analysis was then applied to the 59 individual statements. This approach meant that it was possible to identify differences in overall perceptions, as well as determining more subtle variations within broad headings. It was considered that either approach on its own would not be satisfactory. For example, on the question of student satisfaction, an overall finding of significant differences between institutions might be affected by highly significant differences on one or two statements, whereas, equally, an overall finding of no significant differences overall might hide some important differences on key statements, which might balance out in the overall assessment. Looking solely at the responses to individual statements, however, would not enable an understanding of whether different opinions about aspects of provision built into an overall dissatisfaction.

Differences that occur with a probability of less than 0.05 per cent – that is, less than a 1 in 20 chance of being random – are considered to be "significant". It is important to note here, therefore, that in an analysis of 59 individual statements, if three were to show differences, that would not be "significant".

The final section asked respondents to indicate, on a Likert scale from 1 to 9, their perceptions about the institution against eight statements. These statements were derived from research about the "*cultural geography*" of schools in New Zealand (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 381). Responses in the range 1-3 they describe as archetypal of an "Aggressive" culture, 4-6 as "Passive" and 7-9 as "Active". Because I was looking to identify which of these three characteristics each type of institution demonstrated, the Likert scale had to be a multiple of three. I considered that a six-point scale would not allow a response that placed the institution firmly in the centre of a particular category.

Because of the nature of the responses to this question, analysis was by a chi-square analysis of all three types, followed by analysis by pairs.

The more different ways in which the data are analysed, the more times a "difference" will be shown. It was important, therefore, to resist the temptation to over-analyse. Some further analysis was undertaken, and is reported at the end of this section, considering whether there were differences between, for example: the responses from the three schools; the age of the students; the gender of the students.

Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA)

The basic logic of ANOVA is to consider the variability of two or more groups of data. If the variability between groups is much greater than the variability within the groups, an effect has been demonstrated.

For a given set of data, the following statistics are calculated:

SS(total) – the sum of the squares of deviations of all observations from the overall mean.

SS(group) – the sum of the squared deviations of group means from the overall mean. This provides a measure of the differences between groups.

SS (error) – the sum of the squared deviations within each group. That is, the difference between the above two: SS(total) – SS(group).

Degrees of freedom (df) – statistically this is one less than the number of observations or groups, with df(error) = df(total)-df(group).

MS (group) – is simply SS(group)/df(group), or total or error .

The calculation of these measures enables a final calculation, that of the F-value. The F-value is calculated as:

$$F = \frac{MS(group)}{MS(error)}$$

If F is greater than 1, this shows an effect. The significance of that effect can be determined from tables, which provide the probability for any given F, taking account of the degrees of freedom.

Chi-square analysis

A chi-square analysis was applied to each individual question to determine whether the lower satisfaction levels expressed by students in schools represented a general response, or was related to particular questions.

The purpose of a chi-square analysis is to determine differences between expected frequencies of responses and the actual frequencies. The analysis tests the null hypothesis that the responses will be the same.

For example, for the first question on the questionnaire, positive responses (score 1 and 2) were added together, as were neutral/negative responses (score 3,4 and 5). This resulted in the table below:

	1/2	3/4/5	Total
School	75	30	105
SFC	77	13	90
Tertiary	70	8	78
Total	222	51	273

The expected values are calculated as follows: School, with 105 out of the total of 273 responses, should have provided 105/273 of the 222 positive responses, that is, 85.38

The expected values would have been:

	1/2	3/4/5	Total
School	85.38	19.62	105
SFC	73.19	16.81	90
Tertiary	63.43	14.57	78
Total	222	51	273

For each cell, the difference between the observed and expected values is squared, then divided by the expected value. Thus the first cell provides a result of $(75 - 85.38)^2/85.38 = 1.26$.

The full result would be:

	1/2	3/4/5
School	1.26	5.50
SFC	0.20	0.86
Tertiary	0.68	2.96

The total of the cells provides the chi-square score: in this case,11.47.

With three rows and two columns, the degrees of freedom applicable to this analysis is 2, and tables of chi-square show a probability for this chi-square of 0.0031.

Having found that there is a significant difference, we now wish to identify the reason for the difference. This can be simply because one institution has scored differently from the other two – but it can be more complex. We can identify the reason for that difference by a simple process which involves no further calculation – a process described as the "*nature of association*" (Fentem, 1996, p. 343).

In the case of the school, the observed value (75) was lower than the expected (85.38). So the calculation "observed minus expected" would be negative. That negative value is lost when the difference is squared. However, replacing the sign in all cells in the table above results in:

	1/2	3/4/5
School	-1.26	5.50
SFC	0.20	-0.86
Tertiary	0.68	-2.96

The relative values in this table show the contribution to the overall chi-square score of each element of the table. This shows clearly that the reason for the significant difference is primarily because of a higher number of negative responses given by school students than expected, but also because of a lower number of negative responses from the tertiary college students.

It is interesting to note that, whilst a higher number of negative responses from the school than expected must mean a lower number of positive responses, the values given are not necessarily the same (5.50 and -1.26 in the example above). That is because, in this example, school students made 75 positive responses and 30 negative responses; so although ten fewer positive responses means ten more

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negative responses, a reduction from 85 to 75 is less marked than an increase from 20 to 30.

As the responses from all institutions were generally favourable, it is to be expected, therefore, that differences in this study will most commonly result from a higher number of negative responses than expected.

SECTION 2 OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A total of ten statements were provided, with two lines blank for students to add in other reasons, if appropriate. Only five students entered anything in the blank lines.

Students could indicate as many reasons as they wished, so totals do not add up to 100%. The table below shows the reason, with the proportion of students in schools, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges indicating that reason. The final column gives, for comparison, the responses to the Cumbria survey in 1997 from which the reasons were derived.

Table 7.3: Reasons given for staying on at 16

Reason	School	SFC	Tertiary	Cumbria
Improve job chances	70	80	75	88
University	73	81	76	62
Job-specific qualifications	32	34	33	56
Didn't think would get a job if left	8	19	14	50
Parents/guardians wanted me to	36	46	41	44
Needed time to decide what to do	27	31	29	42
Teachers encouraged me to stay	20	21	23	37
Enjoy studying	27	30	22	21
Nothing better to do	8	17	13	16
All friends staying on	25	22	16	13

There is much literature and research about young people's reasons for choosing to stay on, and it was not the purpose of this research to investigate that further.

However, it is interesting to note that the responses from the institutions in this study were broadly similar. The differences between these institutions in 2003 and Cumbria in 1997 might, perhaps reflect different economic circumstances and a higher expectation of post-16 study leading to higher education.

The "other reasons" given included: "*new challenge, new people, new atmosphere*" and, from a year 13 female in a school sixth form: "*I thought it would be better than college and I'd work more*".

One Year 12 male gave as an additional reason for entering his sixth form college: "*I wanted to pull chicks*". His general dissatisfaction with most other aspects of the college suggested that, as yet, that particular ambition had been unsuccessful.

SECTIONS 3 AND 4 OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questions in section 3 were drawn from a study in 1999 by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA, 1999); those in section 4 were taken from the Ofsted handbook for the inspection of school sixth forms (Ofsted, 2001a)

As FEDA was not comparing institutions, its analysis consisted of ranking the responses by level of satisfaction.

Whilst not the principal analysis of these data, it is perhaps of interest that five statements appeared in the top ten places for each institution, and seven statements in the bottom ten. Those statements were:

In the highest ten satisfaction levels:

Range of options available
Help getting started on the course
Friendliness of teachers(*)
Helpfulness of teachers(*)
Quality of teaching(*)
(* these statements also appeared in the highest ten satisfaction ratings in the FEDA study)

and in the lowest ten:

Help in getting to university
Opportunities to work at own pace
Opportunities for self assessment (*)
Work experience placement
Bookshop
Welfare service (*)
Financial assistance from the institution (*).

(* these statements also appeared in the lowest ten satisfaction ratings in the FEDA study).

Clearly there are factors which are likely to impact on satisfaction levels, primarily exposure to that aspect of school or college life. As the survey was conducted in late October/early November, none of the students would have begun detailed preparation for application to higher education, and only a small proportion of students would have accessed the welfare services or sought financial assistance.

However, three points are worth noting. First, all institutions might take some pride in the ratings given to the friendliness and helpfulness of staff, and to the quality of teaching. Secondly, work experience, whilst not compulsory for students aged 14-16, is secured by schools for almost all students of that age. The responses in this study to satisfaction with work experience placement were not about the quality of the placement, but its absence. Finally, "the range of options available" is the only statement which appeared in the lowest ten places in the FEDA study, but the highest ten in this study.

Moving to the main analysis. The first analysis was to compare the overall responses from all three institutions using ANOVA. This resulted in an F-value of 5.6047, the probability of which is 0.0042. There was, therefore, a very significant difference between the responses.

A further three analyses were undertaken, comparing pairs of institutions. The outcome of those analyses were:

School and Sixth Form College: probability = 0.0021

School and Tertiary College: probability = 0.0118

Sixth Form College and Tertiary College: probability = 0.6413.

What these analyses demonstrate is a significant difference in the satisfaction levels expressed by students in school as compared with both sixth form college and tertiary college, with the response from the sixth form college and tertiary college being similar.

The reason for the difference was that students at schools recorded lower satisfaction levels.

Table 7.4: Overall satisfaction ratings

Institution	School	Sixth Form College	Tertiary College
Mean	68%	77%	76%

However much I had intended to remain detached, neutral, unbiased, these results came as something of a surprise. I realised that, subconsciously, I had expected the responses from schools and sixth form colleges to be similar, and more positive than the tertiary colleges.

Remembering from above that a probability of 0.05 means that we should expect 3 of the questions to show differences in the responses, in practice, 25 of the 59 questions showed significant differences.

In 17 of the questions the difference arose primarily from the responses from the schools, in five questions from the responses from sixth form colleges, and in three questions, from tertiary colleges.

Details of the individual questions which resulted in significantly different responses are given below. These are shown by subsection of the questionnaire. Also shown are the primary reason for the difference and, except where the primary reason is at least twice as large as any other, the secondary reason.

Getting started

The mean responses to the questions in this subsection were:

School 74%   Sixth Form College 83%   Tertiary College 82%

There were seven questions in this section, with significant differences showing in the responses to four questions:

Pre-enrolment information   (p = 0.0031) (high negative response from schools, low negative response from tertiary)

Range of options available (p = 0.0230) (high negative response from schools, low negative response from sixth form college)

Help in choosing the correct course (p = 0.0409) (low negative response from sixth form college)

Induction programme (p = 0.0051) (high negative response from schools).

The negative responses from the schools are, perhaps, unsurprising. Recruitment to school sixth forms is, primarily, from the Year 11 in the school; very few students join school sixth forms from other schools; schools do not, therefore, <u>feel</u> they have the same need for an induction programme, nor the need to recruit students through a prospectus, advertising, or interviewing.

It is clear that the range of options available in schools is lower than that in sixth form colleges, and much lower than that in tertiary colleges (RCU, 2003, p 17); what is interesting is that the students in the school sixth forms realised this, and still chose the school.

The final question showing a difference suggests that students in sixth form colleges were more satisfied with the initial guidance they received. It may be that, first, students applying to sixth form colleges receive more initial guidance than those in schools and secondly, that because the student body in a sixth form college is more homogeneous – in terms of course choice – than that in a tertiary college, guidance is more focused in the sixth form college. Again, this is an issue which was pursued in subsequent discussion with headteachers and principals.

The course

The mean responses to the questions in this subsection were:

School 71%   Sixth Form College 78%   Tertiary College 76%

There were 23 questions in this section, with significant differences in the response to seven questions:

Respect with which treated (p = 0.0398) (high negative response from schools, low negative response from tertiary)

Effect on self-confidence (p = 0.0186) (high negative response from schools, low negative response from sixth form college)

Quality of handouts (p = 0.0152) (low negative response from sixth form college, high negative response from school)

Personal tutorials (p = 0.0138) (high negative response from school, low negative response from sixth form college)

Group work (p = 0.0094) (high negative response from school, low negative response from tertiary)

Opportunities for self-assessment (p = 0.0051) (high negative response from school, low negative response from sixth form college)

Progress on the course (p = 0.0221) (low negative response from sixth form college, high negative response from school).

Whilst receiving a 71% positive rating, the schools still came over, in this section, as being more authoritarian and traditional than the sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges. Students in sixth form colleges, however, thought they had good handouts, good personal tutorials, good opportunities for self-assessment, and were

happy with the progress they are making on the course. Those in tertiary colleges were more positive about group work, and the respect with which they were treated. This may be in part because the wider range of courses, including vocational, requires staff in tertiary colleges to teach in a variety of styles, and also because of the inclusion, within tertiary colleges in general, and within individual classes, of adult students.

Facilities

The mean responses to the questions in this subsection were:

School 62%   Sixth Form College 72%   Tertiary College 76%

There were 14 questions in this section, with significant differences in responses to eight questions:

General ($p < 0.0001$) (high negative response from school)

Library ($p = 0.0007$) (high negative response from school, low negative response from sixth form college)

Private study ($p < 0.0001$) (low negative response from sixth form college, low positive response from school)

Bookshop ($p = 0.0003$) (low positive response from school)

Refectory/cafeteria ($p = 0.0443$) (low negative response from tertiary)

Computers/IT ($p < 0.0001$) (high negative response from school)

Financial assistance from the institution ($p = 0.0200$) (low positive response from school)

Comfort of surroundings ($p = 0.0099$) (high negative response from schools, low negative response from tertiary).

In a small sample, these questions are very much dependant on the circumstances at the individual institutions, such as, for example, if one of the tertiary colleges had

invested heavily in a "sixth form centre".   In effect, these questions are more about the physical circumstances of a random selection of three schools from 3,000; two sixth form colleges from 100; and two tertiary colleges from 30.

However, some of the responses are worth pursuing in interviews with headteachers, principals and students.   It may be that the library for post-16 students in a sixth form college will be larger than that in a school, and more focused than that in a tertiary college.   With the substantially larger numbers of students, 16-19 and adults, in a tertiary college, the refectory/cafeteria may be able to offer a wider choice, and longer opening hours, than that in a school or sixth form college.

Section 4 of the questionnaire

The mean responses to these questions were:

School 67%   Sixth Form College 77%   Tertiary College 73%

This section provided the same questions as in the Ofsted handbook for inspecting school sixth forms (Ofsted, 2001a). There were 15 statements, asking students how strongly they agreed with each statement.   There were significant differences in response to six statements:

The choice of courses allows me to follow a programme suited to my talents and career aspirations ($p = 0.0083$) (low negative response from tertiary, high negative response from school)

I was given helpful and constructive advice on what I should do ($p = 0.0178$) (high negative response from school, low negative response from sixth form college)

My work is thoroughly assessed so that I can see how to improve it (p = 0.0245) (high negative response from tertiary, low negative response from sixth form college)

Outside my main subjects, the school provides a good range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses (p = 0.0004) (high negative response from school)

I feel I am treated as a responsible young adult (p < 0.0001) (high negative response from school)

I enjoy being here and would advise other students to join (p = 0.0091) (high negative response from school).

Young people in school sixth forms are – comparatively – unhappy. Again, there comes through the feeling of the sixth form as authoritarian and traditional. The answers to these questions confirm the previous view of more choice at tertiary college; more effective and focused advice at sixth form college. It is interesting, however, that students in tertiary colleges are least positive about the way in which their work is assessed.

SECTION 5 OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This section was looking at school culture, drawn from Smyth and Hattam (2002).

There were eight statements, with response requested on a Likert scale from 1-9.

Scores 1-3 were grouped as representing an "aggressive" culture, scores 4-6 as "passive", and 7-9 as "active".

There were eight statements. The overall responses were as follows:

Table 7.5: Overall responses – culture

	"Aggressive"	"Passive"	"Active"
School	21%	45%	34%
Sixth Form College	16%	44%	39%
Tertiary College	9%	44%	47%

A chi-square analysis of the overall responses does not show any significant differences (p = 0.1425). However, analysis of the individual statements shows significant differences in the responses to three statements:

Respect (range from "treated like children" to "treated like adults") (p < 0.0001) (high aggressive response from school)

Problems (range from "keep your problems out of the classroom" to "Do you want to talk about it") (p = 0.0412) (low aggressive response from tertiary, high aggressive response from school)

Flexible timetabling (range from "timetable is set and never changes" to "if there is a good reason, and staff and students agree") (p < 0.0001) (high active response from tertiary, high aggressive response from school).

These responses are unsurprising, and are consistent with previous responses. Because of their nature, with the majority of students being adult, and part-time, tertiary colleges provide a more adult environment, and have greater flexibility in timetabling. Schools with sixth forms often have as many, if not more, 11 year olds on site as they do 16 year olds, and are much smaller.

One question asked about "teaching style", with a range from 1 ("very traditional –
sit in rows, copy down from the board") to 9 ("Stimulating – staff really seem to want
to get our interest").   Three students – one in each type of institution – wrote
comments next to that question:

"Chemistry 6, Sociology, Biology 9" (female, Year 13, Tertiary College)

"2 and 8 – different teachers" (male, year 13, Sixth Form College)

"5 – depends on teachers" (male, Year 12, School).

The clear intention of the questionnaire was for students to give only one response
to this question, so it is unsurprising that so few gave this type of response.
However, these few comments are consistent with the findings of others (Prosser,
1999; Smyth and Hattam, 2002) that whilst there may be a dominant culture to the
institution, there are often strong sub-cultures between departments, cliques of
teachers, or even individual teachers.

Further analysis

I have indicated earlier the dangers of over-analysis of data.   However, I had left
open the possibility of further analysis by asking those completing the questionnaire
to indicate whether they were male or female, in Year 12 or Year 13.   That the initial
institution-level analysis showed significant differences in responses to so many of
the statements gave me the confidence to analyse the data further, to see if there
were differences in the responses between male and female, and between Year 12
and Year 13.

An ANOVA of the overall questions in sections 3 and 4 showed no significant
difference ($p = 0.4678$) in the responses between male students (mean response
72%) and female students (mean response 74%). Similarly, there was no significant

difference (p = 0.4877) between responses from Year 12 students (mean response 72%) and Year 13 students (mean response 74%).

Finally, I undertook an analysis of the differences between the responses of different institutions of the same type (for example, between the schools). This analysis involved comparing groups as low as 30, and, as indicated at the beginning of this section, is less robust than the previous analyses. The analysis showed no difference between the schools (p = 0.1907), or tertiary colleges (p = 0.4675), but a significant difference between the sixth form colleges (p = 0.0377). Nevertheless, the mean of the responses from the less positive of the sixth form colleges was in line with those of the tertiary colleges, and higher than the best of the schools:

Chart 7.1: Individual institutional satisfaction ratings
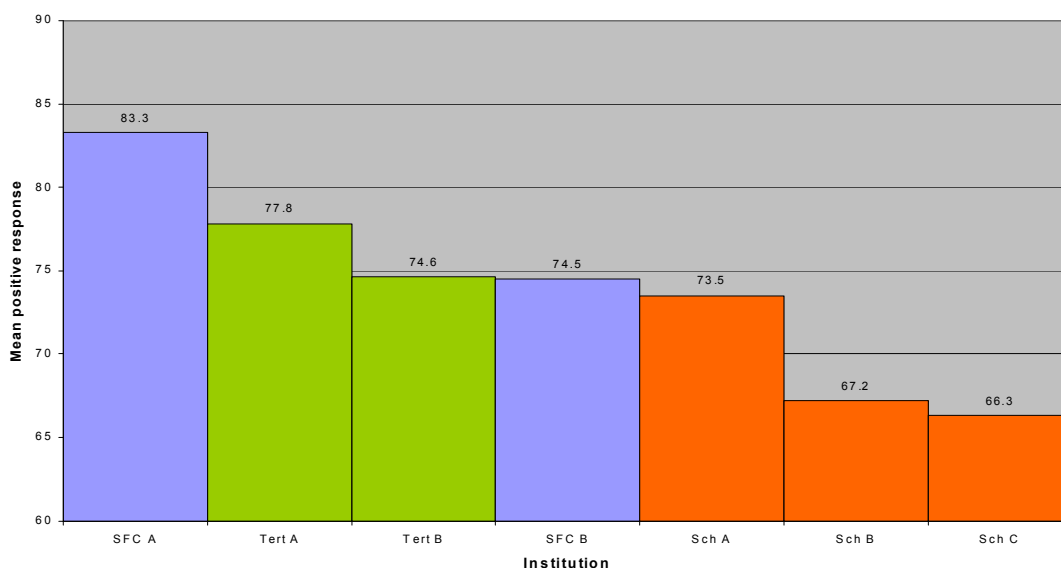
CONCLUSIONS

The responses to the individual questions should be of interest to institutions. In most cases they will not come as a surprise, as they are very similar to previous

studies, and many institutions conduct their own satisfaction surveys. One issue which does concern me, however, is that three of the statements in section 3 of the questionnaire which reported low satisfaction levels – opportunities for self-assessment; welfare service; and financial assistance from the institution – had been identified four years earlier as issues of concern. This suggests either that those concerns have not been addressed, or that they have not been addressed effectively.

It is important to bear in mind that, whilst the responses to the questionnaire from school sixth form students were less positive than those from the colleges, they were still generally positive. The explanation for the differences could include any one of, or a combination of, the following:

- school sixth formers were genuinely less satisfied than college students
- college students had some concerns about transferring to a new institution, and were relieved with the reality
- school sixth formers had high expectations of the sixth form, and were disappointed with the reality.

However, in the case of the latter two points, relief or disappointment might have been expected to have reduced with the passage of time, whereas there was no significant difference in the responses from Year 12 and Year 13 students.

The findings are consistent with the LSC National Learner Satisfaction Survey, which identified 'push' and 'pull' factors which influenced young people's decisions to go to college rather than stay in a school sixth form. The 'push' factors included: wanting a change; encouraged to leave by the school; not wanting to wear a uniform; and teachers being more strict in school. The 'pull' factors included:

reputation of the college; meet new people; a step towards university; more free periods. (LSC, 2004b, pp. 13,14):

> *…the size of classes, with often over 20 students, teaching rooms which were too small, the limited class contact hours and the overcrowded curriculum content were driving staff back to didactic methods* (Lumby et al, 2002, p. 57).

There is limited research or data on how well the different institutions prepare their students for higher education or employment. A study in 2001 of staff with responsibility for providing students with advice on applications to higher education found that 90% of those staff in colleges and 75% in schools had personal contacts with higher education establishments, in both schools and colleges, about 75% of those staff considered they knew: "*a fair amount/a lot about the courses offered by different universities*" (NFER, 2001, paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3). Whilst these figures are high, I would question whether they are high enough to ensure that young people get appropriate, up-to-date, advice.

Data from the University and Colleges Admissions Service show that students from schools and sixth form colleges are more likely to be accepted onto the course they applied for than are students from further education colleges (UCAS, 2006), but no further work has been done to investigate the possible reasons for this. There is also some evidence (HEFCE, 2005; Naylor and Smith, 2002) which suggests that students from the independent sector achieve lower degree results in higher education than would be predicted from their A level results, primarily because those students over-performed at A level. I suspect, however, that many factors affect how students perform in higher education three years after leaving school or college that the school or college effect would be difficult to identify separately. Perhaps a more useful approach would be to look at a more immediate situation – those students who drop out of University during their first year of study. There has been work on student dropout (HEFCE, 1997), but prior institution of study was not one of

the factors considered. Significantly, however, that work did conclude that there was a need for: "*Improving teachers' capacity to prepare students for independent learning and for self-management of time, resources, personal life, capacity to deal with others, seek advice from appropriate services*"(HEFCE, 1997, p. 55), which they felt were often not considered necessary for 'academic' students, and which the sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges might identify as one of their strengths when compared to school sixth forms.

I have already noted how resilient schools are to change. Gardner looks at changes in the working experience of teachers over the last 120 years and notes the: "*power of the mechanisms of internal transmission within (pedagogical) cultures*" (Gardner, 2005/1998, p. 217). Tyack and Cuban (1995, p. 135) conclude that insufficient weight is given to the resilience of schools as institutions, and that classroom reform results: "*more from internal changes created by the knowledge and expertise of teachers than from the decisions of external policy-makers*". The same authors identify the "*different, and often contradictory purposes*" (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 43) sought from schools: that children should be critical and obedient; cooperative and competitive; academic and practical.

Having considered differences in how the students viewed their institutions, I now move on to consider whether there are similar differences in their achievements.

CHAPTER 8

"*GLOSSING UP CLEAN DATA*"

VALUE-ADDED ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The term, or at least the notion, of 'value-added' has been used in economics for many years. The first discussion of value-added in the English education system appears to have been in the late 1970s, in the further and higher education sectors, and looking at the application of economic principles to education; specifically, how to measure the economic effectiveness of higher education. It was in trying to find a basis for funding levels for higher education that the notion of looking at how the resources – staffing, capital and support – provided: "*relate to the difference which the educational institution has made to the entrants […] The course's contribution, the value added by it, is precisely the difference it makes to the pupils*" (Pratt et al, 1978, pp. 160-163).

Whilst higher education did introduce some measures of value-added to their work, the Conservative Government was not convinced of the potential application to schools. In 1991, an education Minister, in responding to a suggestion that background factors might be taken into account in assessing the effectiveness of schools, rejected the idea of: "*glossing up all this clean data with educational sociology which we simply don't believe is valid*" (Fallon, 1991). The Secretary of State, Kenneth Clarke, agreed in a BBC interview in 1991 that: "*Some people argue all kinds of information should be added to it so that nobody can really understand it unless they have got a PhD in statistics. We want simple, straightforward factual information*" (BBC, 2001). In 1994, a report from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), encouraged the Government in: "*the use of value-added indicators in developing policies for school effectiveness*" (SCAA, 1994, p. 7). However, there remained deep-seated reservations about the inclusion of factors other than raw examination data. One commentator sought to undermine the potential inclusion of socio-economic factors in value-added data by describing it as: "*making allowances*" (Elkin, 1995, p. 32).

The doubters prevailed: in 1995 the Secretary of State requested the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) to commission a value-added national project, the objective of which was: "*To advise the Secretary of State on the development of a national system of value added reporting for schools based on prior attainment, which will be statistically valid and correctly understood*" (Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms, 1995, p. 31). The contract was awarded to the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre (CEM) at the University of Newcastle (and subsequently Durham).

CEM reported in 1995, but whilst fulfilling their brief of developing a system based on prior achievement, their recommendations made clear their concerns about the approach. So, whilst they recommended a value-added system based on examination data, that system should be for: "*internal school use*", and the report made clear that: "*Before there is use of value added data for public accountability*", further work should be undertaken, including: adjustments to take account of atypical school factors, such as sex composition; publication based on at least three years' data; and a value-added profile for a school, rather than a single indicator (Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms, 1995, pp. 95, 96). The Department did not take up these recommendations, deciding instead to proceed with a single indicator, based solely on examination results. Carol Fitz-Gibbon did not conceal her disappointment:

> *How could the DfEE get value added so wrong? I'm very fond of slow learners. I like to work with them and explain things 'til they 'get it'. But I'm not used to their being in control. Despair* (Fitz-Gibbon, 2000, p. 9).

One interesting feature of the debate about value-added has been that statistical validity seems often to be more important than the use made of the data. It is important to remember that: "*What value added data cannot do is <u>prove</u> anything*"

(Saunders and Rudd, 1999, p. 1), and that value-added: "*should be construed not as a science so much as a technology*" (Saunders and Rudd, 1999, p. 34).

There are three main issues in the use of value-added measures: what input data should be used; how the data should be analysed; and what level of reliability should be attached to the results.

There are also three dominant systems of value-added analysis: the DfES performance tables; CEM's Advanced Level Information System (ALIS); and Greenhead College's A Level Performance System (ALPS). I will summarise the last two of these, but will go into greater detail on the DfES measure – not because I consider it to have any greater merit, but simply because I have been fortunate enough to have been given access by DfES to the underpinning data for those tables, and have, therefore, been able to undertake additional analyses. All three of these systems satisfy Kenneth Clarke's criterion: they are simple, and take no account of any factors other than GCSE and GCE results.

As this research was being undertaken, the Learning and Skills Council was developing 'New Measures of Success', together with Ofsted, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and DfES (LSC, 2003b). Those measures are intended to provide greater information about institutional performance than is provided currently by the value-added measures, which are still, basically, a measure of progress from GCSE to A level. The New Measures are intended to be applied across the Learning and Skills sector, including colleges, work-based learning, adult learning and school sixth forms.

The measures, still being developed, are expected to cover:

Achievement and retention

Value-added and distance-travelled

Learners' satisfaction

Learners' destinations

Measures concerning teaching and lecturing staff capability and performance

Measures of employer engagement

Measures of 'value for money'.

Distance-travelled is a measure being developed to show progress for a learner where the qualification achieved does not fit currently within the value-added framework.

When I enquired about how value-added was to be calculated, I was told that: "*Our method will use multilevel modelling, since all 2-step methods such as the current DfES performance table figure and ALIS are felt to give too strong a weight to prior attainment*" (LSC, 2004a). I still have no idea what that means – perhaps Kenneth Clarke was right.

In November 2003, Professor Harvey Goldstein of the Institute of Education of the University of London wrote to the Chair of the Statistics Commission (the body which regulates the publication of government statistics), raising a number of concerns about the way in which the DfES presented its value-added data. That correspondence continued through to May 2005 (Statistics Commission, 2005), when the DfES announced that it intended to develop a more sophisticated measure – Contextual Value Added – which would take account of prior attainment together with a number of pupil and school characteristics, including gender, ethnicity and relative deprivation (DfES, 2005d), and that it would include the confidence intervals

associated with the results. DfES later agreed to include paragraphs cautioning that the reader should:

> *Note that there are other possible definitions of value added, and that while the value added measures and associated intervals here can be useful indicators, they do not directly measure the <u>impact</u> of the policies or Authorities on pupil progress.* (DfES, 2006, p. 7, original emphasis)

All these measures are <u>comparative</u> – that is, they compare the results of different institutions (or in some cases departments within those institutions). I have not come across any studies which have as a control group students who have not attended an institution, who have been self-taught, so it is not clear whether all these post-16 institutions are improving the examination performance of young people, only to different (possibly) degrees, or whether, in fact, they are actually impairing the performance of young people, but to different degrees. I discussed this with colleagues, and was advised that there are some things in life which have to be taken on trust.

Finally, before looking at the different measures and the available data, it is important to note that there are some – and notably Stephen Gorard – who argue that value-added measures are fundamentally flawed, claiming that: "*71% of the variation in school value-added scores is explicable in terms of their raw scores alone*" (Gorard, 2005). In Gorard's analysis of DfES data, he considered there to be a clear pattern of high performing schools showing high value-added, and suggests that the value-added score is more related to actual achievement than to progress. The majority of commentators, however, place some faith in value-added as <u>one</u> indicator of school performance, although not as <u>the</u> indicator.

The Advanced Level Information System (ALIS)

ALIS began in 1983, and is one of a suite of value-added measures available from CEM providing information on pupil performance from age 5 through to age 18. A key feature of the ALIS approach is that it is subject-based, not institutional, and is usually taken down to syllabus-level. A second feature is that it uses a relatively straightforward statistical technique, least squares regression, to determine, for a student's average GCSE score, their most likely grade at A level in a particular subject. Finally, ALIS provides information on the performance of institutions over a number of years. Indeed, ALIS seems very similar to the measure which CEM proposed to SCAA in 1995 and described above, with the exception of measures of atypical school factors. The use of a recognized statistical technique also allows the calculation of correlation – how strong is the association between the GCSE score and the A level score – where 1 is perfect through 0 which is no relation to -1, which is a perfect negative relationship (i.e. the better you do in GCSE, the worse at A level) . For ALIS, this is:

> *…for most subjects, between 0.5 and 0.7. We cannot reasonably be higher than this because a student's performance will also be due to teacher effects, institution effects, social effects and inevitable errors in assessment* (CEM, p. 5).

In 2003, ALIS was being used by 1,308 schools and colleges, covering the examination results of about 185,000 students (LSC, 2003a, p. 7).

CEM have done a great deal of work to show differences between the achievement of students in different subjects, which mean that an individual institution's value-added performance can be affected by the subject mix. I was present at a lecture given by Carol Fitz-Gibbon, of CEM, in 2001 where she described being invited into a school to solve a dispute between the headteacher and the head of mathematics. The headteacher thought the A level mathematics results were not good enough, the head of mathematics thought that it was harder to get high grades in

mathematics than in other subjects. FitzGibbon used ALIS to provide the wisdom of Solomon: mathematics was harder than other subjects, but the school's results were still lower than should be expected. (BERA, 2001).

A Level Performance System (ALPS)

ALPS started at Greenhead College, a sixth form college in Huddersfield, in 1988. The principle of the system is of continuous improvement, and that, for example, institutions currently at the 75th percentile for value-added should aim for results equivalent to those currently at the 25th percentile. In 2003, the basic dataset was drawn from the results of over 73,000 students in 98 sixth form colleges. A value-added index for the whole institution is achieved by dividing the overall points score at A level by the target set by the system. Given that the target is aspirational, a score of about 0.96 is average, anything over 1 is exceptional (Greenhead, 2001).

ALPS is less statistically-based than ALIS, although subject groups sizes of less than 10 are excluded, and individual subjects (but not syllabuses) are weighted to account for differences in likely achievement (LSC, 2003a, p. 8).

In 2004, the Responsive College Unit (RCU) published research it had undertaken, commissioned by the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum (SFCF), of the impact and performance of sixth form colleges compared to other forms of post-16 provision. The study focused on the 10 local authority areas in Greater Manchester, which had a mix of provision, including general further education and tertiary colleges, sixth form colleges and school sixth forms. One of the research findings was that: "*Areas with sixth form colleges are associated with a more rapid improvement between GCSE and GCE results than other areas.*" (RCU, 2004, p. 4), and this is quoted by the SFCF in its prospectus.

In reaching this conclusion, the RCU compared the proportion of Year 11 pupils in schools in the 10 local authority areas gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C with the average GCE/VCE points score achieved by the same cohort two years later. RCU also included data for five local authority areas in the North East of England and one in Yorkshire. A logarithmic line of best fit was calculated, which showed six of the Greater Manchester local authority areas with sixth form colleges above the line, and the other two below, which RCU believed: "*indicates that areas with sixth form colleges generally perform above the level that would be expected*" (RCU, 2004, p. 16).

The chart derived by RCU is reproduced below.

Chart 8.1: RCU analysis – sixth form colleges
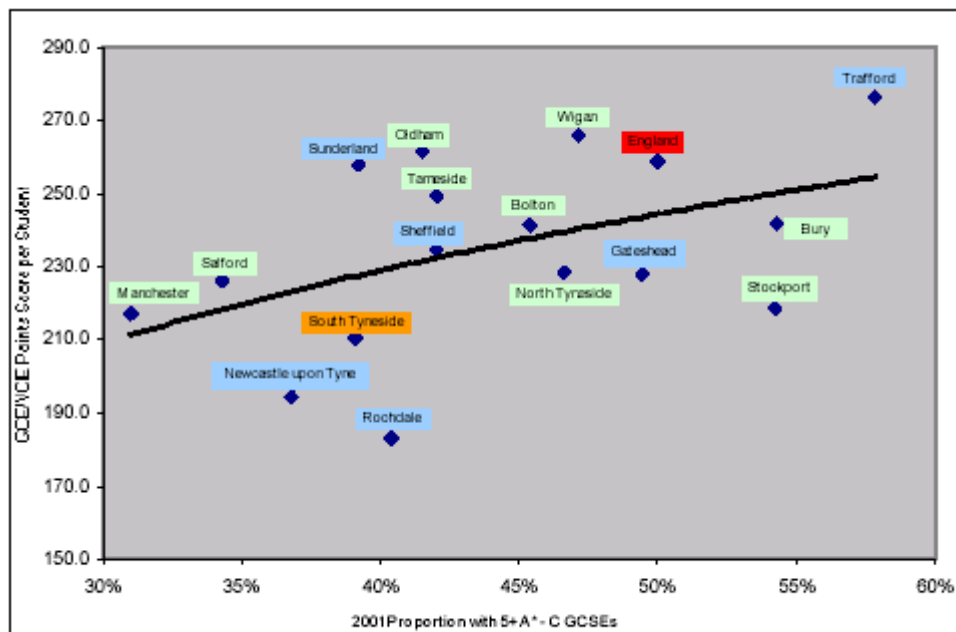
Source: www.dfes.gov.uk/performancetables

I have a number of concerns about this finding. First, no explanation, or statistical justification is given for what is a very different comparison of GCSE results and GCE/VCE results to any other which might have been available. The comparison, for example, treats a GCSE student who gains five grades C as equal to one with nine grades A*. Secondly, the analysis makes no allowance, in an urban area, for the possibility of students transferring at 16 from a school in one local authority area to a college in a different area. Thirdly, the report indicates that, of the 10 local authority areas in Greater Manchester, eight have sixth form colleges, and seven have school sixth forms, which means that at least five of the areas are mixed. Finally, whilst no justification is given for the inclusion of the six local authority areas outside Greater Manchester, the results in those areas were not comparable, and had the impact of pulling down the regression line; it is very likely that, if the analysis was restricted to the Greater Manchester local authority areas only, four areas with sixth form colleges would have been above the line, and four below.

In 2003, the Responsive College Unit published research it had undertaken, commissioned by the Tertiary College Network, into the relative performance of tertiary colleges, general further education colleges and sixth form colleges, looking at ten colleges of each type. The research concluded that: "*there is no strong evidence that the post-16 structure of an area affects the ratio of average Level 3 points to average GCSE points scores*" (RCU, 2003, p .6). However, whilst much of the data in the report were drawn from the individual records of the colleges, those data did not: "*contain sufficient evidence with which to judge value added measures. […] As a proxy, RCU used published figures on the average GCSE and A/AS/GNVQ Advanced points scores in the thirty local authority areas*" (RCU, 2003, p. 20). A scatter-graph on the same page, with a logarithmic line of best fit, shows 27 of the 30 areas close to the line, but: "*evidence of a stronger level 3 performance in three*

areas containing sixth form colleges, although two of three clearest examples of this

were areas with a relatively low staying-on rate post-16" (RCU, 2003, p. 20).

The chart derived by RCU is reproduced below:

Chart 8.2: RCU analysis – tertiary colleges
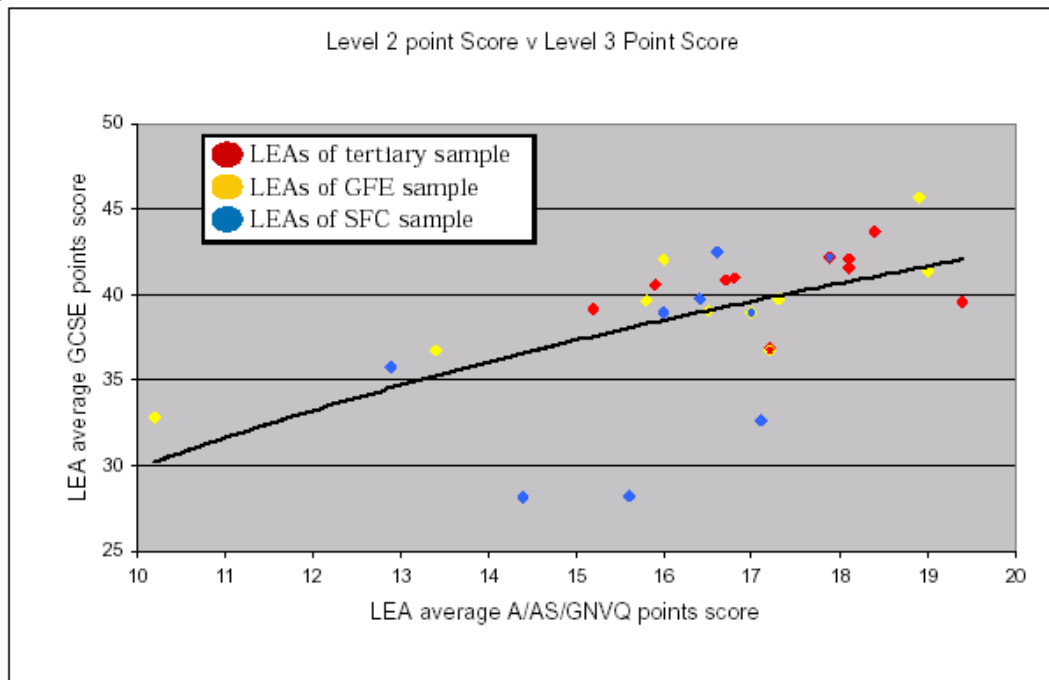
Source : *DfES*

I also have some concerns about value-added measure in this research. First, the

data are not for the colleges, but a proxy figure; as the research names the 10

tertiary colleges, this means that the results for Hampshire local authority (which

includes a number of sixth form colleges) are taken as a proxy for Brockenhurst

College, whilst Cornwall acts as a proxy for Truro College. Secondly, where the

outcomes of the analysis show clearly that three sixth form colleges out-perform all

others, an implication is made that those figures are unreliable. Nevertheless, the

research was sufficient to generate headlines: "*The Third Way: are tertiary colleges*

a brighter prospect for 16-19 year olds than more fashionable options?" (Guardian,

2003a); "*Tertiaries come first in achievemen*t" (TES, 2003, p. 39).

Department for Education and Skills

The chart below is taken from the DfES Statistical Bulletin 01/04 (DfES, 2004b, p. 36). It shows the value-added scores for all schools and colleges in England.

Chart 8.3: DfES value added analysis, 2003

Distribution of School and College VA Scores by Size within Intitution Type, England, 2003[1]
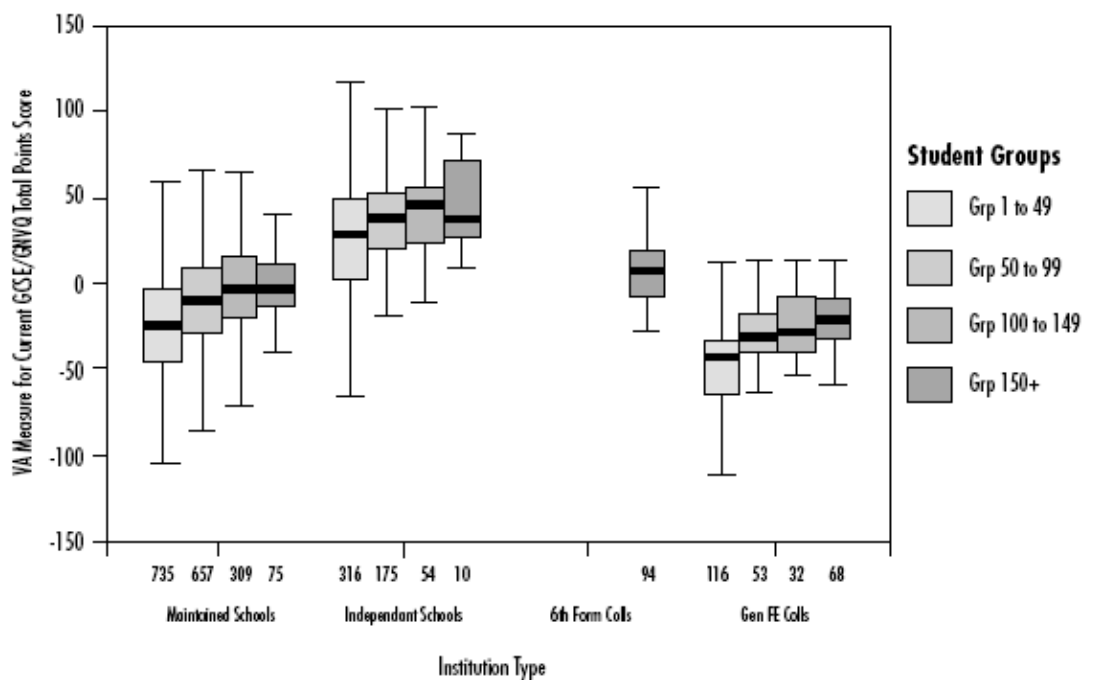
The distributions are shown as 'box-and-whisker' charts, that is to say, the solid horizontal line represents the median (50th percentile) institution, the box covers the upper and lower quartiles (75th and 25th percentiles), and the lines from the top and bottom of the box (the 'whiskers', or 'outliers') extend to the highest and lowest values.

Whilst it is not easy to look at this chart in great detail, there do appear to be some clear features. The value-added by maintained schools increases with the size of the cohort, although there does not appear to be a difference once the cohort exceeds 100. The same pattern, though less pronounced, is demonstrated in independent school sixth forms, which provide the highest value-added of any institution type. Because very few sixth form colleges have cohorts of less than 150, there is only one box, which appears to show similar, or slightly higher, value-added scores than large school sixth forms. Finally, the same pattern of value-added increasing with size of cohort is apparent in general further education colleges, which seem to offer the least value-added. Within those general conclusions, it is important to note that there is a great deal of overlap, so that, for example, there are maintained schools with sixth form cohorts of less than 50 which have higher value-added scores than some large independent schools.

The data are drawn from 1,776 school sixth forms, 102 sixth form colleges and 269 general further education colleges. The data cover 119,008 students in school sixth forms, 40,336 students in sixth form colleges and 31,461 students in general further education colleges.

One thing the chart offers no information whatsoever about is the performance of tertiary colleges.

I initially considered collecting value-added data in respect of the case study institutions, in order to enable analysis against the questionnaire responses. However, the data from such an approach would have little value, as it would not relate directly to the individual students completing the questionnaire, and would be time-consuming to collect. This is even more relevant when large-scale data are available, with ease of analysis:

The development of value added measures for use in practice necessarily involves a balance between two pressures. On the one hand, if too much attention is paid to the technical niceties, the calculations can become complex and result in a bewildering array of indicators. The alternative, of relaxing the rigour of the approach […] enables summary measures to be derived (DfEE, 1995b, p. 7).

THE VALUE ADDED BY TERTIARY COLLEGES

I approached the Analytical Services Division of the Department for Education and Skills in late 2003, seeking assistance on understanding the Department's approach to value-added. Whilst very helpful, the Department was not willing to re-analyse its data in the way I requested, namely to separate out the tertiary colleges from general further education colleges. The Department's reason for declining this request was understandable; a considerable effort would be required, and the outcomes would be of no interest or value to the Department, as tertiary colleges do not constitute a separate category of colleges in anyone's eyes – except for the tertiary colleges.

The Department did, however, agree to provide me with the source data, from which I could undertake my own analysis. This source data consisted of the GCE/VCE total score, and the corresponding GCSE/GNVQ total score, achieved by every 17 year old in England who attempted the equivalent of at least two GCE/VCE examinations in the summer examinations of 2003. This amounted to some 219,000 students, and over 600,000 examination results, from around 2400 schools and 400 colleges. I extracted the data relating to the 56 tertiary colleges and, using the same methodology as the Department, calculated the value-added score for each of those colleges, and for the sector as a whole. The DfES methodology is set out in detail in an appendix to the DfES Statistics of Education Bulletin 01/04 (DfES, 2004b, pp 33ff).

The methodology includes a number – but not all – of the examination courses followed by 16-18 year olds, such as GCSE short course, GNVQ Intermediate and Foundation, GCE AS levels, GCE A levels and VCE full and double awards. All these examinations have associated point scores, differing between qualification and grade of achievement. This is illustrated below by looking at the most common examinations taken at age 15 (GCSE) and 17 (GCE/VCE). GCSE examination passes are graded from A* to G, with corresponding points of 8 to 1, whilst GCE/VCE passes are graded from A to E, with corresponding points of 120 to 40, as shown in the table below:

Table 8.1: Points associated with GCSE/GCE grades

GCSE grade	GCSE points	GCE/VCE grade	GCE/VCE points
A*	8	A	120
A	7	B	100
B	6	C	80
C	5	D	60
D	4	E	40
E	3		
F	2		
G	1		

Thus a student who, at age 15 achieved GCSEs of three A*s, four Bs, one C and one D would have gained 57 points (3x8 + 4x6 + 5 + 4). If the same student at 17 gained GCE A levels of two Bs and one D, they would have 260 points (2x100 + 60).

The scores of individual students at GCE are then compared against the score of the median (ie 50th percentile) of all 17 year old students in England who had achieved the same GCSE points score. In the case of the example above, the GCE points score of the median of all students gaining 57 GCSE points in 2003 was 240; this student exceeded that, and thus has a value-added score of +20. The value-added score can be positive or negative.

The institutional value-added score is the arithmetical mean of the individual scores of all students who attempted the equivalent of at least two GCE A levels. Finally, the sector value-added score is the arithmetical mean of all institutions in that sector.

Tertiary colleges have long argued that this methodology disadvantages them: first, by not including a number of qualifications (such as BTEC) which they offer, and are on the National Qualifications Framework, but are much less commonly offered in schools or sixth form colleges; and secondly, by including the tertiary colleges with around 200 general further education colleges, many of which have very limited A level provision, and all of which serve areas where the most likely first choice destination for 16-18 year is a school sixth form or sixth form college.

The first of these arguments intuitively seemed likely to be true. The performance of further education colleges is measured in a number of ways, not just the A level performance tables, because of the need to report not only the performance of the 300,000 or so 16-18 year olds enrolled in colleges, but also the 3 million or more adults, taking a variety of full-time and part-time, long and short, courses. Indeed, the main measure of performance for colleges is the "success rate", being the proportion of those enrolling on a course who achieve the qualification. A college, therefore, might be more likely to enrol a student on a course in which they were likely to succeed, even if it did not contribute to the 16-18 performance table.

The second argument was the subject of my re-analysis of the DfES value-added data. I present my findings below, but should emphasise that those findings have not been verified, or endorsed, by DfES.

My analysis provided data on 9,236 students in the 56 colleges which describe themselves as tertiary colleges, which suggests that there were 22,125 students in the other 213 further education colleges.

These figures give average cohort sizes (ie Year 13 student numbers) of 67 in school sixth forms, 165 in tertiary colleges, 104 in the other general further education colleges and 395 in sixth form colleges. Those numbers exclude students who did not attempt the equivalent of at least two GCE/VCEs, which are likely to be significant in further education colleges.

The chart below is derived from the DfES table, and from my additional analysis of the raw data. I have excluded the independent schools, as these are not the subject of this study. For ease of comparison, I show the box-and-whisker chart for: schools with 100-149 in the cohort; sixth form colleges (as in the original); tertiary colleges with over 150 in the cohort (my analysis); and general further education colleges with over 150 students in the cohort (as in the original). It should be noted that 32 of the 68 general further education colleges in the chart are tertiary colleges: having produced this chart, I considered that the point was made, without necessity for the effort involved in analysing the data for general further education colleges excluding the tertiary colleges – it is clear that, had the tertiary colleges been excluded, the chart for general further education colleges would have been lower still.

Chart 8.4: Value added by school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges

Value Added from Level 2 to Level 3, England, 2003
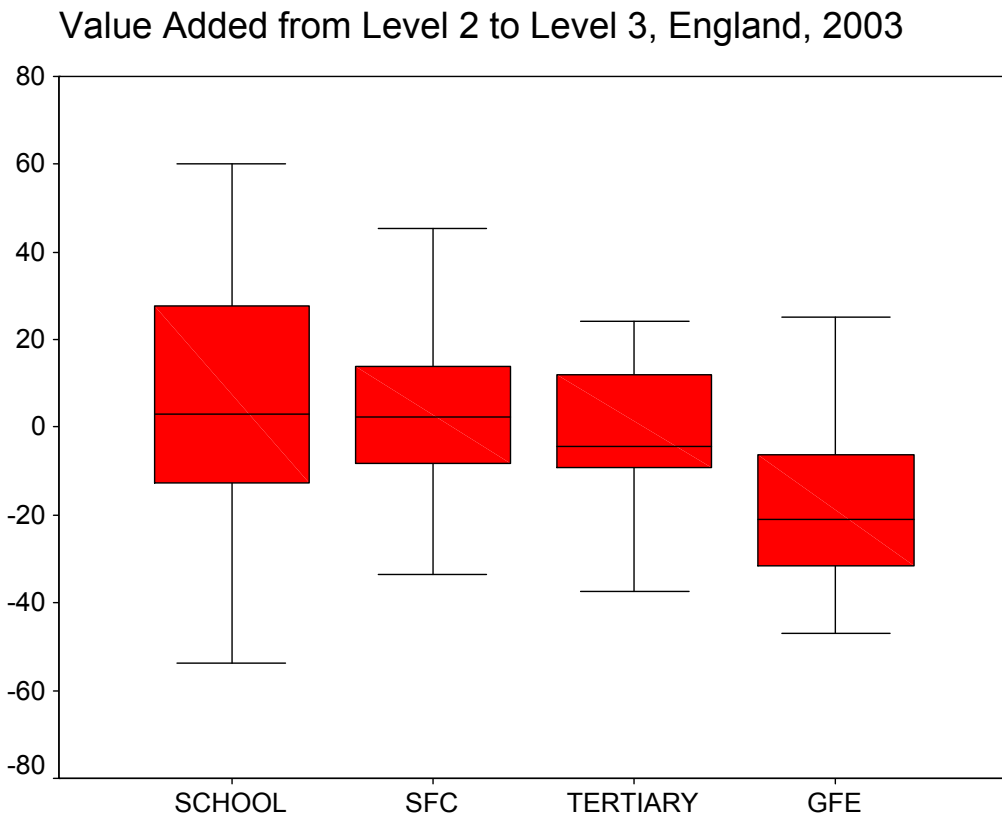
It should first be noted that on the vertical scale the increments of 20 are equivalent to one grade at GCE A level; so at the school with the highest value-added index, of 60, each student achieves an average of three grades higher than would have been expected from their GCSE results. Similarly, at the school with the lowest value-added index, of around -53, students achieve on average two and a half grades lower than might be expected.

The chart is not intended to provide detailed analysis, but to give an impression of relative performance. Looking first at the boxes, the chart suggests that the median school and sixth form college add no value and the median tertiary college a low, but negative, value-added. The spread between the 75th and 25th percentiles is very

similar in sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges, and covers a range of plus or minus half of a grade at GCE A level. In school sixth forms, the 25th percentile is slightly lower than at sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges, but the 75th percentile is significantly higher, at around one and a half grades at GCE A level.

Looking at the whiskers, students at the school with the highest value-added index achieve, on average, three GCE grades higher than would be expected, at the school with the lowest value-added index, about two and a half grades lower than expected. For the sixth form colleges, the range is from just over two grades higher to just under two grades lower; and for the tertiary colleges the range is from just over one grade higher to two grades lower. It is important not to give too much weight to the whiskers, as the second highest and second lowest values may be some distance from the highest and lowest.

The main conclusion that might be drawn from this chart is that there is little difference between the value-added scores achieved by school sixth forms, sixth form colleges or tertiary colleges. This also, of course, confirms the view of tertiary colleges that their actual performance is far better than is suggested by published data, where tertiary colleges are combined with other general further education colleges.

This conclusion applies only where there are at least 100 students in the relevant cohort – that is, those studying general subjects leading to GCE A level examinations. The DfES data suggest that schools with less than 100 in the cohort add less value, and that those with less than 50 in the cohort add less again. My analysis suggest that general further education colleges – which are located in areas where the majority of that cohort attend school sixth forms or sixth form colleges, and again have low numbers – also add less value.

I emphasised at the start of this chapter that I would resist the temptation to over-analyse the data. However, in looking at the individual performance of over 9,000 students in tertiary colleges, I was left with two impressions: first, that for most students, the GCE score they actually achieved was very close to, and often exactly, that which would be predicted from their GCSE score; and secondly, that students with low GCSE scores seemed to over-achieve at GCE, and students with high GCSE scores seemed to under-achieve at GCE. Testing those impressions was relatively straightforward, and produced the results in the chart below.

Chart 8.5: Value added by tertiary colleges

Tertiary Colleges value-added by expected UCAS point score
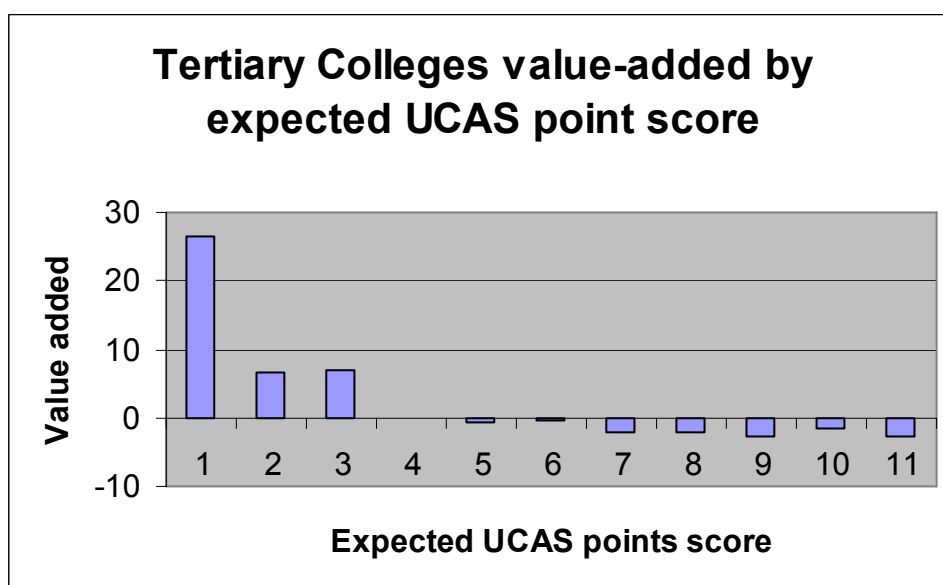
What this chart suggests is that students with low GCSE scores may achieve, on average, a little less than half a grade higher at GCE than expected, whilst those with high GCSE scores may, on average, achieve about a quarter of a grade lower than expected. It is important to keep a sense of proportion about this suggestion. In practice, of course, it is impossible for an individual student to achieve half grades.

What this means is that:

>two students with low GCSE points of 48 would be expected to achieve 160 GCE points, equivalent to two C grades each; on average, the actual results for those two students would be CC and BC

>four students with high GCSE points of 290 would be expected to achieve 400 GCE points, equivalent to grades AABD each; on average, the actual results would be AABD, AABD, AABD and ABBD.

Wider value added

I searched widely for data – qualitative or quantitative – on what young people did at school other than formal examinations. I contacted the DfES, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Sports Council and Ofsted, asking if they had any published or unpublished information. None had, although all thought it would be useful; I would have said essential. I did find one inspectorate report on "Enrichment" (FEFC, 1996) which, whilst providing some data from a survey of a small number of colleges, described an environment which pre-dated overall cuts in funding for further education and the introduction of a funding methodology which emphasised qualifications over other activity, two changes which college principals cited as being responsible for a substantial reduction in out-of-classroom activity.

There is clear recognition of the value to the young person of such activity, but diverging views on how – or whether – we are currently in an educational world where only that which is measurable has value. One area of my work over the last five years provides a good example of this issue. I was secretary to the Advisory Group on Citizenship for 16-19 year olds, under Professor (now Sir) Bernard Crick, which reported to the Secretary of State in November 2000. Whilst the final report was agreed unanimously, that was only after a considerable debate about

assessment of an experience which would essentially involve active engagement with society, through volunteering, community work or some other such activity. The Advisory Group was:

> *not looking to establish a new academic subject. […] Yet, being realistic, unless there is some link to the assessment framework, Citizenship Development may have limited currency, and become marginalised. We do not want to suggest that some voluntary activities 'count', whilst other do not, nor to enable Citizenship Development to be achieved through study only. The challenge must be to measure what is valuable, rather than to value what is easily measured* (FEFC, 2000a, p. 9).

Following the publication of the report, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority put together a scheme of work for post-16 Citizenship, and the Awarding Bodies were quick to develop qualifications, which are proving very popular.

The Working Group on 14-19 Reform chaired by Mike (now Sir Mike) Tomlinson included citizenship as part of the mandatory core of its proposals for a series of diplomas. Following the publication of the Interim Report, Tomlinson was called to give evidence to the Education and Skills Committee of the House of Commons. Reflecting on his time as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, Tomlinson said:

> *We are moving more and more to a point where what we value is what we can measure. […] I also said at the time that there were many other aspects of education that were important that were not measurable, and no-one should try to measure them either [...] for many young people they did have abilities, they did have skills, but the system was not able to identify them, nurture and develop them. Whether our system could ever do that I think is an open question* (House of Commons, 2004a, answers to Q359 and Q360).

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to bear in mind that this results from a mono-variate analysis; others, taking other factors into account, suggest, for example, that schools or colleges with a high proportion of more able students added more value than other institutions, and – perhaps not unrelated – that sixth form colleges add more value than other institutions (O'Donoghue et al, 1996; Yang and Woodhouse, 2001).

I acknowledged earlier in this chapter that there have been concerns that value-added data is of limited value, because it takes account only of prior achievement, and not the whole range of other factors which impact on a young person's achievement, and that the DfES was establishing an alternative measure – Contextual Value Added. However, those data were not available to me, and I am satisfied that the data that were available to me were superior to raw scores.

If the analysis were to be confirmed, it would show that students of similar ability studying GCE A levels would gain roughly the same results regardless of whether they studied in a larger school sixth form, a sixth form college or tertiary college. They would achieve less well if they studied in a small school sixth form, or a general further education college with a small GCE cohort. That conclusion is hardly a surprise, but I do believe that it is the first time it has been evidenced.

Armed with the evidence from my reading, the interviews with staff and students, and the analysis of the questionnaires and the value-added data, I now felt ready to discuss my emerging findings with the 'elite'.

CHAPTER 9

"FRACTURING THAT POLISHED SURFACE?"

INTERVIEWS WITH THE ELITE

INTRODUCTION

I have already described in detail in the Methodology chapter how analysis of the questionnaire and value-added data informed my interviews of students and staff in schools and colleges, and how, in turn, those interviews enabled me to form some initial – emerging – conclusions, which I would use as the basis of interviews with 'the elite'. I have also described how, even using personal contacts, only five of the 12 or so I contacted agreed to be interviewed; however, that included a Government Minister, and I was happy with the quality and experience of those that I met, including experience of teaching in a school sixth form, sixth form college, further education college and DfES policy-making.

The interviews took place between February and April 2005. I considered presenting the outcomes in two ways: by individual; or by theme, and decided on the latter approach, primarily because I felt that would enable a more immediate comparison of the interviewees' responses. In my first draft of this chapter, I presented the data chronologically, but on reading that draft, I felt that the story was not being told as well as it could, and that it would be better if I re-ordered the data to be consistent with the rest of the thesis: school sixth forms first; then sixth form colleges; further education; and policy-making at Departmental level, and finally Government. One danger of such an approach would be that my line of questioning with one interviewee would change as a result of previous interviewees. Whilst I think this was – almost inevitably – the case, I did conduct all the interviews on the basis of the same emerging conclusions, and that Ofsted inspectors would agree that in changing the order: "the strengths clearly outweigh any weaknesses".

I was aware, from an earlier experience of interviewing a former Permanent Secretary, of the need to: "*accept that the 'interview' was likely to be controlled by*

the interviewee" (Ozga, 2000, p. 127). However, I was reassured by Ozga, who, in describing her interviews with elite policy-makers in education, commented that: "*The self-conscious self-presentation of the 'public servant' was exactly what we wanted to capture for the project, so there was no need to fracture that polished surface, or disrupt the narrative offered to us*" (Ozga, 2000, p. 127). I make no apologies, therefore, for the fact that in what follows are a number of lengthy quotations: these are their words, not mine – and I feel they provide a rich testimony.

The table below sets out, in broad detail, the roles of those I interviewed. I tried a variety of ways of reporting these data, and found that a thematic approach was more coherent than an individual. This did, however, mean that I had to be able to distinguish between the interviewees and, having tried a number of approaches, including aliases and letters, I concluded that a simple description would be best. The descriptions I decided upon are in parentheses in the first column of the table.

Table 9.1: Interview schedule

INTERVIEWEES	DATE OF INTERVIEW
The Deputy General Secretary of a national teachers association ('the teacher representative')	February 2005
A member of the national Young People's Learning Committee of the Learning and Skills Council ('the YPLC member')	February 2005
A senior official in the Association of Colleges ('the college official')	April 2005
A Divisional Manager in the Department for Education and Skills ('the DfES official')	February 2005
A Government Minister in the Department for Education and Skills ('the Minister')	March 2005

Interview questions were based on the main themes arising from the literature review, questionnaire analysis and subsequent institutional interviews. A few days before the interview, I sent the interviewee a two page summary of emerging conclusions, as a guide to the areas of questioning I wished to pursue.

THE INTERVIEWS

Each person was interviewed for between 30 and 45 minutes. The questions covered the broad themes of: stereotypes and culture; value-added and added value; and Emerging conclusions and the answer to the research question.

The interviews were conducted in private on a one-to-one basis (with the exception of the Minister, whose Private Secretary sat in), and were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. All interviewees were assured that their comments would not be attributed, and would be reported in such a way as not to identify them individually.

Stereotypes and culture

This section of the interview looked at whether stereotypes of the different institutions persisted, even if no longer true, with school sixth forms with as few six students, or as many as 963, and sixth form colleges with 6,000 adult students. It also considered whether the tertiary college had actually established a unique identity, and whether the long heritage of a school sixth form could act to hold back development. In particular, it looked at the use by students of the first names of staff.

The teacher representative had experience in schools and sixth form colleges. He felt that, in a sixth form college:

> *…in truth, the experience for most students was similar to that that they would have had in a school sixth form, except that there were some cultural differences, it felt a bit different, but the actual programme and the people they were working with were very similar*.

He agreed that the strong heritage of a school sixth form might make it difficult to change, in part: "*because the policy-makers, whether that's Government or at local*

level, the person leading the school, remembers being in the sixth form with uniforms, prefects and that sort of lark".   However, he recounted from his own experience that 11-18 schools in the surrounding area of the sixth form college:

> *…changed quite markedly over a period of a decade because they were losing students to the college, so in a sense they had to follow some of the line that the sixth form college took, which some no doubt thought was bad practice driving out good thing*.

On the use by students of the first names of staff, the teacher representative recognised that this might cause difficulties in schools, except where separate sixth form centres had been developed. He did, however, point out one difficulty in an 11-18 school:

> *I mean it just is difficult for a teacher who is dealing with unruly 13 year olds, the bell goes, you walk into the next room and you've got the 17 year olds. Of course you don't treat them the same way, but it's quite hard to change your way of working totally in that period of time.*

The YPLC member had experience in schools and sixth form colleges. In his college he had no adults: "*because I inherited a site, which had been a community college, and I wanted my staff to concentrate on the core mission*". He did not agree with the idea of students using staff first names: "*there has to be a distance between staff and students*".

The YPLC member believed firmly in the need to provide a structured environment for young people: "*I never thought anything magical happened at 16. […] And you can't let 16 and 17 year olds do what they like, because very often they lack the equipment to deal with that freedom*". This was, in part at least, a reflection of the deprivation of the area from which the students were drawn; a deliberate attempt by the college to provide structure to the students' otherwise chaotic existence. He agreed that there were successful models of different approaches, but was clear that: "*I hope they think I'm affable and reasonable, but I'm not there to be their friend, nor are my staff; they are there to be their guide, shepherd, helper.*".

The college official, who had been a lecturer in a general further education college, thought that:

> …there's probably a difference between sixth forms and sixth form colleges, but not, perhaps, as great a difference as you might think, because I think until fairly recently – no I think they still are – sixth form colleges staff can be on the same conditions as school teachers, and therefore, there's a difference in the way they've been trained, so I think a lot of their ethos you'd expect to be similar.

Tertiary colleges provided a: "*more muddled picture, because I'm not quite sure what they are*", although she: "*would expect tertiary colleges to be run differently, because it would be a more mixed college and more aligned to general FE than to sixth forms.*".

Use of first names would be:

> …a bit of a mix, because some of the sixth form college principals I've come across, I suspect they'd want to run quite a tight ship. I think it's what governs young people's choices – and here I'm thinking about my daughter's experience, where she went into a school sixth form because she wanted structure.

Interestingly, even in a tertiary college use of first names was uncommon in some subject areas, particularly engineering and catering, which: "*are both potentially dangerous environments, so it is important that there is a level of control, discipline*".

The DfES official had worked in a number of different policy areas in the Education Department, and was not surprised by the variety in size of institution, putting it down largely as a mater of geography – small sixth forms in Kent, large tertiaries in cities and small tertiaries in rural areas. She did not see the heritage of schools as necessarily a problem rather that: "*Sometimes, the strength of identity will be something a good leader can build on – sometimes it may be a difficulty. It will depend on the strength of the individual leader.*"

On sixth form colleges, the DfES official noted that some had developed: "*a very strong niche market, some have been accused of "dumbing-down" by introducing vocational courses* ", whilst she agreed that the use of first names in school sixth forms, "*always seen as a right of passage*", would be easier where there were separate sixth form centres.

Colleges were the area of expertise of the Minister. Visiting sixth form colleges and talking to students, the reason they gave for being there was:

> *…because it's an exciting place to be. And when you pick apart the definition of excitement it's: lots of students; diversity; teachers and lecturers teaching them as if they are adults; and they always emphasise the break with school – that it's not like school.*

On the question of tertiary colleges failing to establish a distinct identity, the Minister confirmed my feeling:

> *I went recently to a very good one, which was very good. I don't know quite how you define a tertiary college, so I'm probably talking about the wrong category, but I've been to some very good colleges that were neither sixth form colleges nor schools*.

Value-added and added value

In this section of the interview, I wanted to explore the extent to which schools and colleges used value-added data (ie whether students achieved the A level grades their GCSE performance suggested) and information on added value (i.e. activity outside the classroom). My starting point was that sixth form colleges emphasised value-added more than did schools, and that tertiary colleges emphasized neither, concentrating instead on the range of provision.

The teacher representative made the point that in general FE colleges, there had not been an accepted measure for value-added in vocational courses, which made up a substantial proportion of their provision. His own experience had been that his sixth form college:

…stressed the value-added because the schools stressed the raw scores, because they were much more selective, so of course they were able to say to prospective students and parents: "You should come to us because we have a 95% pass rate". Mostly, they didn't go on to say: "and that college down the road that you may be thinking of only has a 90% pass rate"; although some of them actually did quite explicitly say that, but even those that didn't were saying it for that purpose.

The use of added value by schools as a marketing tool was, in the teacher representative's opinion:

…not least because they are good at doing that sort of thing. […]just about every prospectus you ever see has got a picture on the front cover of a young person playing a violin. And I mean, it is part of the offer, and it's one of the things which may not sell the institution to the student terribly well, but it does sell it to the parent, because it says, look, we've got an orchestra and a rugby team and so forth, and they think that's the sort of thing that ought to exist at this phase of education, and they're right, actually. It's a shame that there's less of that sort of thing done than there once was.

The YPLC member had a good understanding of value-added, and was involved at the time of the interview in work with ALPS, comparing the performance of schools and, primarily, sixth form colleges. That work, involving some 130 colleges and 400 schools, had shown: "*more schools proportionally in top 25% than you would expect, but also more schools proportionally in bottom 25% than you would expect.*"

On added value, the YPLC member agreed that sixth form colleges did not use the out-of-classroom experience as a marketing tool to the same extent as schools. He commented that:

Although we had "enrichment", a sixth form college is a very pressurised life, very focused. A lot of examinations, obviously – geared around examinations – so, sport in the Summer term, forget about it. And although some people would take part in activities, I don't think we would market them – they would be on offer, and vary from year to year, but I visit a number of schools and I would agree with you that there is a greater range of sporting clubs, academic clubs, social clubs on offer.

The college official had been:

…terribly disappointed when value-added was introduced and it was clear that sixth forms and sixth form colleges added more value than general FE is that potentially it's because of the different type of students, that they tend to

*be fairly high-achieving academic students and possibly can be challenged
further than they are rather than, if you go into general FE they're the ones
who are struggling and have got further to go.*

She was also disappointed that the marketing of 16-19 education was: *"usually
people sitting around, outside, socialising. But that's a totally middle-class thing,
and presumably that's what they're trying to attract."*. Even for students with a
working-class background, the marketing was based on *"aspirations"*. For her,
tertiary colleges gave less emphasis to, and offered less, wider activity because
they:

> *Can't afford it, that's the issue. All the enrichment stuff was ripped out
> around incorporation. It's also where kids are at at that age, they don't want
> to get involved in the college in terms of their social side, they want to be
> outside, unless they're particularly keen on, say, football.*

The DfES official merely confirmed my views on added value, but in terms of tertiary
colleges, did make the interesting point that, in stressing the wider range of course
on offer, the college had a responsibility to make it: *"clear what is actually available
for young people"*. She pointed out that the Secretary of State approves courses for
public funding under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, either under section 96 (for
those under 18 years old) or section 97 (for those over 18) – the reasons for some
courses being unavailable to young people being primarily on the grounds of health
and safety.

For the Minister, it was:

> *…very interesting in this context that universities very often advertise
> themselves with logos and slogans which have nothing whatsoever to do
> with what they teach, but everything to do with the attraction of the
> geographical context, for example. And I suspect that the marketing of sixth
> form colleges and of FE colleges especially has become a bit more
> thoughtful and sophisticated because they've been watching that. A lot of it
> grows out of the great rivalry that exists especially between school sixth
> forms, which generally prevent sixth form colleges or FE colleges from
> advertising. I watch very carefully as I go around the country; I'm very
> interested in this kind of iconography. I watch the adverts on the backs of
> buses, where FE colleges advertise themselves very successfully. And
> they're always glowing young people who are doing rather exciting things –*

> *hardly ever studying – which is probably a fair reflection of what they do – certainly at university. Sixth form colleges are a little more subdued, although I notice in some parts of the country they're becoming a bit more extrovert now, and they are very cheesed off with schools preventing them advertising their wares, and so I think they are becoming more aggressive.*

Whilst the Minister agreed that colleges in general offered a wider curriculum range than schools, he considered that tertiary colleges did offer a wider range of provision than sixth form colleges, pointing out that he: "*could open a new construction shed every week, and as the number of apprenticeships is expanding, they are reverting to the creatures I remember, rather than remaining as a kind of reflection of a sixth form college*".

Emerging conclusions and the answer to the research question

In the final section of the interviews, I first looked at one theme that appeared to be emerging strongly from the research. That theme I described as whether the educational experience of young people was more like the train journey from Coventry to London – functional only – or the Trans-Siberian Express – an experience in itself. I then tested out the views of my interviewees on the answer to my research question, which I phrased in terms that, whatever the range in size and nature of the different types of institution, if I were parachuted blindfold into any one of them, would I know within five minutes whether it was a school, sixth form college or tertiary college. I then asked my interviewees about my emerging view that what was, perhaps, most important was that an institution knew itself, knew what it stood for, and communicated that to its current and prospective students, before finally inviting any last comments.

For the teacher representative, there had been:

> *…a more general change, in the time that I've been in education, there's a much more instrumental view of education than there once was, and the notion of education as a good in its own right, as a liberal education and the, you know we want to be well-educated people has receded to some extent – it hasn't disappeared – but it's certainly not as prominent as it once was.*

And if you asked University students: "why are you here?", most of them will say: "because I want a job". So the same applies – they have a very focused view of what they want. And that is not surprising, because they are constantly being told by Government ministers and all sorts of opinion formers that education is for a purpose and the purpose is economic well-being of the country and the financial pay-off that it has for the individual.

As far as the research question was concerned, whilst noting that there was a wide variety in institutions of, nominally, the same type, the teacher representative nevertheless agreed that: *"if you were parachuted into one it wouldn't actually take terribly long to work out which sort it was."*. He agreed that an institution should make sure students knew what it stood for, what it was like to study there, in a variety of ways, not necessarily just in writing. For him:

One of the problems is if the identity is not consistent, if there are moves to change, disagreements between staff, and young people think: "hey, this isn't what I signed up for". And it isn't necessarily the case that those institutions which are hothouses and where students get good examination grades are preparing them to be the independent learners they will need to be at university.

The YPLC member was quite clear that:

If you had asked me 20 years ago I would have gone for the Trans-Siberian Express. Undoubtedly now I would go for the Coventry to London model. I think it is a very, very specific, functional model. That isn't to say students don't enjoy it, in fact I think they quite welcome the functionality of it – they know what it's about. Going back 20 years in schools, the Lower Sixth was a time when you spread your wings a little bit, and you enjoyed things, you did your wider reading. We taught to a syllabus, not a specification, but those days are gone. I suspect you have to go back to the advent of GCSE, I suppose. Introducing an examination for a wide range of students resulted in closer specification, and I think that's followed through to post-16. So it's Coventry to London, and there's a note of regret in that. I sit on the Council of a University, and it's a big question there too.

On the research question, the YPLC member agreed that he would quickly be able to identify which type of institution he was in, but: did not think that::

…there's any right model – I've never thought that. Things work because of the circumstances, and because the people in those circumstances have their focus right. My only concern would be that we do have a responsibility to prepare people for higher education, and higher education these days is "pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap". And we know the old arguments about if you spoon feed them up to a certain level, can they survive on their own, and I think there are issues in there. So I think part of the focus of post-16

> *education should be to produce independent learners, however you do that –*
> *so supervised free time might not produce independent learners, but might*
> *produce better grades.*

The YPLC member also agreed that it was important that an institution had a clear understanding of its identity, and communicated that to students: "*Oh yes, that's the key to it*", but, at a personal level:

> *Instinctively, if it's my son or daughter who wants to do History, Psychology*
> *and French and go on to University, I would send my son or daughter to a*
> *school sixth form or a sixth form college, not a GFE college – I simply*
> *wouldn't – just because I know they would be with students of a similar age,*
> *and with a fair amount of coherence and so on. If there was a GFE college*
> *with a distinct sixth form centre, that's a different proposition.*

If the college official had been parachuted into an institution, she expected that she: "*would pick up on tertiary quicker than I would between sixth form and sixth form college, depending on the kind of sixth form college.*" She considered that the experience of young people, in all types of institution, would vary. It was: "*as much to do with how the subjects have been delivered and how engaged the young people are in that.*" When I asked if this had changed over recent years, she replied:

> *Sadly, not. Well, I mean in terms of delivery, I'm not sure that the delivery*
> *models have changed. I think quite probably the choices young people*
> *make now are much more governed by what they think it's going to do for*
> *them than what they're interested in, and I think all the information they now*
> *receive is geared towards that, and the way in which higher education is now*
> *seen as having a pay-off in monetary terms and that when you leave you get*
> *this sort of a job. What I mean in terms of delivery, we developed a way of*
> *delivering which was much more like a course than separate subjects. The*
> *only way we did it was to have a tight team of staff, and restrain choice, so*
> *that we could do common stuff across all subjects and create space. But I*
> *have come to realise that that is an uncommon approach and that in most*
> *cases you are still in these subject silos, and I think young people can find*
> *that quite odd.*

The DfES official was unsure whether the post-16 student experience had ever been significantly different from what it was now, functional, because:

> *It is the way it's been marketed after all, that's the rationale for an increased*
> *staying on rate, better results, better employment. But actually, a lot of the*
> *criticism of Curriculum 2000 was that it didn't leave time for the fun –*

probably wrongly, but that was one of the criticisms, that they weren't having the time to do their school plays etc. Yes, the National Curriculum was part of it. The way we did it was probably the only way we could have done it at the time, although it ended up taking up more time than I think anybody thought it would.

On the research question, the DfES official agreed that tertiary colleges had a problem of having to be too many things to too many people, but queried, where an institution had a very clear identity, whether they were: "*consciously set up that way, or did it just happen, and now they are making a virtue of it?*"

The Minister agreed that there had been a trend over the last 25 years or so towards a more functional approach to post-16 education. He had been:

> *…very concerned recently, for example, about our failure to raise the number of students that other countries do for schemes like Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus and the rest of it, and I've come to the conclusion that if you are paying top-up fees, tuition fees, you take a year out to do something like that, then unless you are going to get credits, or it's going to make a material difference to the living you make at the end of it, it's extremely difficult to persuade someone to do that. On the other hand, I believe what people tell me that students work as hard as they ever did, perhaps harder, but they also play very hard.*

I pursued this line a little, looking at changes in the involvement by university students in student politics, where the Minister agreed that:

> *Politics is very little. I went to a lobby yesterday by the Association of Colleges, and they'd brought along students. […] And I noticed that the students were wearing white t-shirts which said: 'I love my college'. Now the very idea of a student doing that in 1968 is inconceivable. So they are very different creatures and I suspect that their priorities are not necessarily the ones that I might have had.*

Finally on the research question, the Minister agreed enthusiastically. He commented that:

> *This is also about this whole debate about focusing in on a single mission, and we're looking at this in the Department, and I'm very interested in this idea. It's a difficult one to get your head around, because FE colleges do such a lot, it's very wide and very varied. Sixth form colleges, in my experience, are much more narrowly focused, and that reflects in the kind or results they get; they very often know who they are taking. I visited a general FE college recently which got a terrible Ofsted inspection report, but*

has established a sixth form centre and is turning itself around – so it can be done.

CONCLUSIONS

I interviewed five people, who viewed the 16-18 field from very different viewpoints, but each from a national, informed, perspective.

The DfES official was the only interviewee who appreciated the huge variation in size and curriculum in each of the three types of institution, and was also the only one with a clear understanding of what was meant by "tertiary college". This reinforced my impression that tertiary colleges had not established for themselves a clear and distinct identity.

None of the interviewees held strong views on value added data as a measure of institutional performance, seeing it more as an element of marketing, with a suggestion that institutions would choose which data to use – value added or raw scores – depending on which painted the better picture. It was interesting to note that value added measures had been developed initially around the GCSE and A/AS examinations, and had only recently begun to be applied to vocational courses; as a result, a substantial amount of the provision at tertiary colleges had not been covered by the value added measure. On added value, all were clear that, again, this was primarily used for marketing, with the suggestion that the marketing might not exactly reflect the reality.

All agreed that provision for 16-19 year olds had become increasingly more functional, attributing that in part to changes in the examination system, but also suggesting that young people were looking for a more functional approach, with their eyes set on what came after the 16-19 phase – employment or higher education.

Finally, all were clear that, if parachuted in, they would easily distinguish between the three types of institution.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

INTRODUCTION

I began this research with a number of aims. Primarily, I wanted to achieve the degree, but in order to do so, I wanted: to apply a range of different research techniques; to answer a research question; and to "…*contribute to the maelstrom of ideas, theories, facts and judgements about education*" (Bassey, 1999, p. 51). I feel satisfied with what I have achieved, but have had many surprises along the way – not least that I have ended up asking many more questions than I have answered.

CONCLUSIONS

My research question was:

"Is there any identifiable and measurable difference in the experience of 16-18 year olds which results from whether they study in a school sixth form, a sixth form college or a tertiary college, and if there is, does that amount to 'tertiary tripartism'."

To provide an answer to that question, I asked, for 16-19 year olds in full-time education in England, studying GCE Advanced level courses in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges:

Does the type of institution attended result in differences in achievement in AS/A2 level examinations?

Are there differences in the range and time devoted to "enrichment" activities in the three types of institution?

Are there cultural differences between the three types of institution?

Are the three types of institution seen as different by each other, by students, by outside observers?

As I reported in Chapter 8, previous studies of this type have relied on proxy measures, using data at local authority level as a measure of the dominant institutional type in that area. My analysis of the data was at individual student and institutional level and, I believe, shows conclusively, and for the first time, that there is little, if any, difference in the GCE AS/A2 results of students resulting from which type of institution they attend, where there are over 100 young people in the cohort. The DfES data appear to show that schools with fewer than 100 young people in the sixth form add less value, and those with less than 50 in the cohort less value again. That is an important issue, as over 70 percent of schools have sixth form cohort sizes of less than 100. The same issue applies to the 16-18 cohort in general further education colleges, where, again, the numbers studying general subjects will be relatively low.

The logical response to this finding should be that, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as in rural areas with a low population density or where a very specific and narrow curriculum was offered, schools and colleges should not offer A/AS to cohorts of less than 100 young people. Indeed, a few further education colleges have withdrawn from such provision for that very reason. In reality, however, the school sixth form is highly prized, and currently it seems more likely that more will be created than that there will be closures.

Enrichment activities are emphasised by all three types of institution as a key marketing tool, demonstrating the wide range of sporting and artistic opportunities available. There was quite a difference in the responses from staff and students about the extent to which those opportunities were taken up, which I felt was due in part to staff over-selling their offer and in part to students not seeing participation as "cool". The reality, therefore, would be somewhere in the middle. It was, however,

clear that enrichment activities were much more likely to be accessed during Year 12, with a very strong focus in Year 13 on the examinations. The activities available outside the classroom differed: for example in sport, for the schools, there were opportunities to compete against other local schools, much less so for the colleges. The schools also provided the opportunity for young people to take leadership roles, and to work in helping, mentoring or "buddying" younger pupils – again, an opportunity not available in the colleges, who were consequently more likely to look outside the college premises for volunteering opportunities. The impression I developed was that there was a greater expectation that young people in a schools sixth form would participate in enrichment than in a sixth form college, with a lower level of expectation in the tertiary college. In respect of my research question, therefore, I do feel that there are differences in the range of, and time devoted to, enrichment activities in the three types of institution.

I found a very marked cultural difference between the school sixth form and either of the two college types, which resulted from the more "aggressive" nature of the schools. It was clear that this resulted from the staff in schools having a more disciplined approach to the 11-16 year olds, and not being able to fully "turn off" when working with the sixth form. I was surprised that there was no apparent difference in culture between the two college types, given the presence of substantial numbers of adults in tertiary colleges and few if any in sixth form colleges (other than in the evening). In practice, it seemed to me that many tertiary colleges were "dual running", with 16-19 year olds studying general subjects being taught separately from other students, and with almost a separate staff – in effect a sixth form college within a further education college. There was a very strong "collegiate" feeling in both the colleges I visited.

The young people I interviewed did not appear to have given a great deal of consideration to their options at 16; their choices being influenced by a range of factors, with inertia a key for the school sixth former. The sixth form college students did have genuine choice, and had chosen on reputation and peer comments. I think the responses I received are likely to be typical, that a "good enough" but convenient curriculum offer was more attractive than "ideal", but requiring a change of institution or a bit more effort to access. From the outside, there was a clear impression of differences. Those differences might be typified as school sixth forms having a strong identity and reputation for discipline and sixth form colleges as "A level factories". From the outside, the tertiary college does not appear to have established an identity distinct from that of the general further education college, with the result that many, having been established as a single entity, are now advertising their "sixth form centre".

Finally, I must consider whether my findings amount to tertiary tripartism, in the terms in which I have previously described the term; that is, whether the experience of 16-19 year olds studying A/AS levels is different, depending on which type of institution they attend. My research suggests that a young person in a school sixth form has a significantly different experience than his or her peers attending college, primarily as a result of a more aggressive culture. That I have not found any evidence of difference between the experience of young people in the two types of college is, in my view, because the tertiary colleges have failed to establish a unique and distinct identity, and are operating increasingly with a dual identity.

The greatest joy of undertaking the research was, of course, meeting with and talking to, young people about their experiences at school or college – they were without exception a delight. It may be that the young people I met were naturally

intelligent, well-mannered, engaged and interested, but I suspect that at least some of those characteristics had been nurtured and developed by their teachers.

But perhaps an even greater joy for me personally was the *Times Educational Supplement* on 29 October 2004, where, on page 19, the top half of the page was devoted to an article which described Mike Tomlinson's final report as: "*almost the smartest of the past half-century*". I took some pride in that, believing that I had contributed in small part to the work of the Tomlinson Working Group. However, the article went on to say that Tomlinson was not: "*quite smart enough*", as he did not: "*understand that ministers can never accept a report in full: they must put their own stamp on it lest anybody think they are wimps and pushovers*" (TES, 2004c, p. 19).

That was the top half of the page; the bottom half was an article regretting that student teachers had: "*had little or no opportunity to understand the history of educational organisations and aims, at a time of major and continuing reforms that they are expected to put into practice*" (TES, 2004d, p. 19). There, in one page, was my work, my research, and my ambition.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

At frequent intervals during the research I was tempted to investigate issues, and undertake analyses, which were not directly relevant – but interesting. Reporting those points may give others the opportunity for further study.

I made early decisions that my research would be restricted in a number of ways; I did not look at the experiences of vocational students, or of GCE A level students in general further education colleges, or of students in school sixth forms of less than 150. This means that my research could be replicated with those student groups and institution types I excluded, and the findings compared.

My study was based on a very limited sample. However, many elements of the study are unique, and a repetition of this study, possibly with a larger sample, would have value in either confirming, or challenging, my findings. In particular, it would be relatively simple to repeat the value-added analysis I report in Chapter 8 with different cohorts, to consider whether my findings are repeated, or were simply a feature of Summer 2003.

In July 2005, London won the right to stage the Olympic Games in 2012, and yet no one was able to tell me with any real degree of accuracy what activities young people engaged in outside the classroom, whether in school or college. The FEFC, for colleges, and subsequently the LSC, for school sixth forms and colleges, included in its funding for all full-time 16-18 year olds an element for 'entitlement', meant to cover the costs of those activities which were considered desirable in schools and colleges which were not qualifications, such as tutorials, careers education, sports, music, and drama. Neither the FEFC nor the LSC audited the use of that element of funding, and I was unable to find any robust evidence of how much time was actually being spent on such activities. I believe the time is right for some substantial work in this area, too late to inform the bidding process, and possibly too late to have any impact on the number of gold, silver or bronze medals (the power of three again) achieved by UK performers at the Games, but possibly in time to inform the post-Games inheritance.

With a much larger sample size, there are many other student characteristics against which the questions in my questionnaire could be applied, including: ethnicity; vocational study; and subjects being studied. It would be interesting, in particular, to see whether my results of strong cultural differences between school

sixth forms and the colleges were repeated when considered against those characteristics.

I did not look at "mixed-economy" areas of England, and a repeat of this work might be of interest in those areas. There is some work already which suggests that one of my interviewees, Debbie, is not untypical, and that decisions to stay on are more down to peer pressure than any other factor (Thomas and Webber, 2001).

There might also be value in applying my questionnaire – or a variation on it – to younger students, in Years 10 and 11. In so doing, it would be possible to investigate whether the responses from those young people were similar to those in school sixth forms, or whether the experience is actually different. It might also be interesting to investigate whether there were differences in responses from young people in Years 10 and 11 in schools with sixth forms from those in schools without sixth forms; looking at the question of whether students in Years 10 and 11 in schools without sixth forms are treated differently, as being the senior students in the school.

The questionnaire might also be applied across the sixth form college sector, along with a value-added analysis of those individual sixth form colleges, to test out a question posed in 2003: "*Why are so many of the top-performing sixth-form colleges Roman Catholic?*" (Guardian, 2003b). The contributors to the article suggested that, unlike, or to a greater extent than, non-Catholic schools and colleges, the Roman Catholic sixth form colleges did not treat the young people as customers or commodities, but valued each individual. It would be interesting to see if responses to my questionnaire confirmed that suggestion, just as it would be to apply value-added analysis to determine if the Roman Catholic sixth form colleges <u>were</u> performing better than others.

My research was focused on areas where there was very limited choice of type of institution if a young person decided to stay in education post-16. Whether different results would be found where there was realistic choice would be interesting. I also think it would be interesting to examine further the reasons for the apparent bias in the information given to young people about their options at 16, to discover whether this is solely teachers putting the interests of the school first, or if there are other, deeper reasons. Such a study could be very valuable as the 14-19 reform agenda, with a heavy vocational element, rolls out, since the curriculum opportunities in the future, at 13 and 14 as well as at 16, will be very different to those familiar to most school teachers.

When considering the cultures of the institutions I considered, I did not pursue two of the four broad categorisations suggested by Prosser: differences in culture between nations; or differences in culture between institutions of the same type. Both of these seem to me areas which might be of interest to pursue. There might also be merit in adapting the cultural geography research (section 5 of my questionnaire) for application students under the age of 16, where participation is compulsory, to see whether satisfaction levels are different than for those students I questioned, representing the 40% who had been most successful at age 15.

A further small piece of research which might be of value would be to survey a number of existing or potential teachers and lecturers about how they read the *Times Educational Supplement*, and in particular the extent to which school teachers looked at the articles, and/or jobs, in the FE Focus section. I suspect that many teachers in school sixth forms are not aware that sixth form colleges advertise in FE Focus.

I was unable to find any research looking at the higher education or employment experience of young people from different 16-19 institutions, other than a piece which considered choice of higher education by students at six institutions: two state schools; two colleges; and two independent schools (Reay et al, 2001). The main findings of that research were that: guidance from the institution was considered of limited influence or value; students in independent schools had a narrower vision of their options; and that further education students saw the decision as collective, whereas school students saw it as individual. It might be useful to undertake a larger scale, longitudinal study, looking at how well higher education providers, employers and the young people themselves considered that they were prepared for progression, and looking at whether there was any medium-term impact on achievement in higher education and achievement and retention of employment.

Following the elite interviews, I considered that further work might be undertaken on two issues: the introduction of GCSE as the origin of the perceived more functional nature of 16-18 provision; and the Government statements distinguishing between comprehensive schooling and a comprehensive system. The former, I believe, is still worth further study, but in respect of the latter, I think the previous chapter suggests things have moved on – and continue to move on apace.

In the introduction to this study I noted that, over the last 100 years, the Government Department responsible for education had also had, from time to time, additional responsibilities, which were likely to have impacted on the development of the institutions I have looked at. I did not pursue that, but it might be interesting to compare those Departmental responsibilities with initiatives for change in schools, colleges, work based-learning and higher education. Half the work has already been done, by Aldrich et al, and it would seem relatively straightforward to see if educational changes followed – perhaps with a couple of years time-lag. A good

starting point would seem to be the mid-1960s, which saw the Robbins Report on higher education (Ministry of Education, 1963), the Labour Party in Government after 13 years of Conservative rule, and at which time there were no sixth form colleges or tertiary colleges in England.

If for many young people the 16-18 phase of learning is a purely functional journey which they tolerate as a means to an end, my personal journey over the last five years has certainly been the Trans-Siberian Express. As a direct result of undertaking this research I have learnt an enormous amount about the history of the English post-compulsory education system and met some amazing people. In addition, I believe that my findings are important, and I feel justified in claiming that my research has already influenced the development of educational policy in England.

APPENDIX

PERCEPTION AND ATTAINMENT IN POST-16 EDUCATION

Many thanks for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. This should only take a few minutes to complete.

The questionnaire is part of a four-year long research project investigating differences in the experience of students in the school sixth forms, sixth form college has banned tertiary colleges.

The researcher is employed in the Policy and Development directorate of the Learning and Skills Council -- the body which plans and funds education and training for 16-18 year olds in England. The research will be submitted to the University of Sheffield for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and the costs of the research are being met by the Economic and Social Research Council.

The information you provide in this questionnaire is confidential. An analysis of the responses will be published, but not in a format which would allow identification of individuals or institutions. The original questionnaires will be available only to the researcher and a senior member of staff at the University of Sheffield, who is supervising the research.

Section 1

The first section of the questionnaire seeks personal information about you in order that the responses can be analysed.

Which institution do you attend ?				
Are you	Male		Or female	
Are you in	Year 12		Or Year 13	

Section 2

In this section, I am interested in why you decided to stay in full-time education.

Please tick against any of the following statements you feel applied to you when you decided to stay in full-time education. You can tick more than one statement. The final two lines are left blank so that you can write in any other reasons which affected your decision.

I wanted better qualifications to improve my chances of a job	
I wanted better qualifications so I could go to university	
I needed specific qualifications for the job I want to do	
I didn't think I'd get a job if I left school after Year 11	
My parents/guardians wanted me to stay on	
I needed time to decide what I wanted to do	
My teachers encouraged me to stay on	
I enjoy studying	
There was nothing better to do	
All my friends were staying on	

Section 3

In this section, I am interested in how satisfied you have been with various aspects of your post-16 education.

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not sure	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
1 Getting started					
Pre-enrolment information					
Range of options available					
Help in choosing correct course					
Relevance of the course to future plans					
Induction programme					
Help getting started on the course					
Enrolment procedure					
2 The course					
Friendliness of teachers					
Helpfulness of teachers					
Respect with which treated					
Effect on self-confidence					
Quality of teaching					
Quality of handouts					
Help with coursework					
Opportunities to discuss difficulties					
Advice on how to study					
Personal tutorials					
Size of classes					
Chance of success on the course					
Help in getting to university					
Class discussions					
Friendliness of students					
Opportunities to express own views					
Opportunities to learn new skills					
Opportunities to plan own learning					
Group work					
Opportunities to work at own pace					
Opportunities for self assessment					
Progress on the course					
Work experience placement					
3 Facilities					
General					
Library					
Reception					
Private study					
Bookshop					
Leisure and social					
Refectory/cafeteria					
Computer/sIT					
Location of institution					
Transport to and from institution					
Welfare service					
Financial assistance from institution					
Safety and security					
Comfort of surroundings					

Section 4

In this section, I am asking how far you agree with a number of statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The choice of courses allows me to follow a programme suited to my talents and career aspirations					
The printed information about subjects and courses was clear, accurate, and helpful					
I was given helpful and constructive advice on what I should do					
The school/college helped me to settle in well and to get to work					
I am taught well and challenged to do my best					
I am helped and encouraged to study and research topics independently					
My work is thoroughly assessed so that I can see how to improve it					
I am kept well informed about my progress in relation to the qualifications I hope to get					
Teachers are accessible to help me if I have difficulties with my work					
I am well advised by the school/college and/or careers advisers on what I should do after I leave					
I could rely on strong and sensitive support and help if I had personal problems					
Outside my main subjects, the school/college provides a good range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses					
I feel I am treated as a responsible young adult					
The school/college listens and responds to the views of its students					
I enjoy being here and would advise other students to join					

Section 5

This final section seeks information about the "culture" of the institution you are attending. Each statement provides a range of attitudes: please circle the number which shows how far along that range you feel applied to your institution. For example, in the first statement, if you feel very strongly that you are treated like a child, you would circle 1; if you feel very strongly that you are treated like an adult, you would circle 9; if neither of those apply, you would have to choose a position between those two extremes.

Respect	"We are treated like children"	"It's as if we don't exist"	"We are treated like adults"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Troublemakers	"Trouble makers are thrown out"	"Trouble makers are made to feel unwelcome"	"Teachers seem to enjoy being challenged"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Choosing subjects	"It feels as if I had to fit in with the timetable"	"It feels as if they would change the timetable - but only a little"	"It feels as if the timetable was made to fit what I wanted to do"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Problems	"Keep your problems out of the classroom"	"If you've got problems - go and see your tutor"	"Do you want to talk about it?"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Rules	"Lots of rules - and we have to obey them"	"We're told we're adults, but some petty rules"	"We have a say in making rules - and there are some for staff too"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Flexible timetabling	"The timetable is set at the start of the year - and never changes"	"Can ask for timetable changes - but seems to be only if it suits staff"	"If there is a good reason, and staff and students agree"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Teaching style	"Very traditional - sit in rows, copy down from the board"	"Not so formal - but boring"	"Stimulating - staff really seem to want to get our interest"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9
Prejudices	"Students get away with bullying, sexism, racism"	"There are rules about bullying, sexism, racism"	"We are encouraged to recognise and challenge prejudice"
	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9

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